The Aboriginal Gender Study

FINAL REPORT

A research report prepared by the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia Ltd.

Copies of this report may be obtained from: www.aboriginalgenderstudy.ahcsa.org.au

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Acknowledgements

About the Artist

Anna Dowling was born in Adelaide, South Australia. Anna is a descendant of the Badimia people of the Yamatji region in Western Australia. In her artwork, she reflects on her mixed cultural heritage and draws on traditional symbols and patterns. Anna works to create art that reflects the beauty, diversity and incredible value of Aboriginal culture. She seeks to further her artistic skills and knowledge by learning from artists and community leaders. More information regarding Anna's artwork can be found here: www.annadowling.net

About the Artwork

The artwork draws inspiration from the rainbow lorikeet with its spectrum of bright, shimmering colours. These colours are used to reflect the multidimensional and diverse nature of gender. Freedom is another theme in the artwork and is represented by the lorikeet's inspiring flight. The birds also have a loud and powerful call. This call symbolises strength and expression. Male and female lorikeets are not easy to distinguish from one another because they are equal in appearance, size, social status and share similar social roles. In this way, they demonstrate equality across genders.

Forming a flock, community and family connections are important for these birds. These community and family connections are also particularly significant for Aboriginal people and an important component of understanding gender. Inspired by this beautiful bird, diversity, equality, freedom, expression, strength and connections to family and community are embedded in the artwork. In this way, the artwork reflects the many facets that come with understanding gender for Aboriginal people. **Anna Dowling, 2017**

Key Terms and Acronyms

ACCHS   Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service

AHCSA   Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia

LGBTQ   Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer

NHMRC   National Health and Medical Research Council

PIs   Project Investigators

SAHMRI   South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute

A Note on Language

In this report, the terms 'Western patriarchy' or 'Western patriarchal constructs' have been applied to describe non-Aboriginal constructs that have been imposed on Aboriginal culture post-invasion.

Throughout the report we have used Aboriginal as an inclusive term. We have not referred to participants as Torres Strait Islander as no participants identified as such. Similarly, the findings and quotes presented in this report are reflective of the participants and communities that were involved in the study and may not reflect the views of other Aboriginal people or communities.

When referring to participants, the terms male/man and female/woman have been used interchangeably. In doing so we are referring to an adult male and adult female and are not referring to any specific cultural connotations that may be bound to these terms. We respect all cultural understandings of the terminology but do not have the scope to discuss this in the confines of this report.

We use the term LGBTQ as participants in this study only identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer. We use this term respectfully and with permission from the participants.

Disclaimer

In order to accurately represent the opinions of participants, the quotes presented in this report have not been altered or censored. As a result we wish to advise readers that a range of language is used, and in some cases, quotes refer specifically to experiences of violent threats and behaviour. These quotes are included in the report as they highlight the emotion of the participants and speak to the importance of the topics that are being discussed. It is not the intention of the report to offend but rather to present the raw and real feelings of the participants.

Executive Summary

International and Australian health and social policies recognise that gender equity is a fundamental human right, and essential to improving population health and wellbeing. However, far too often, policy to advance gender equity fails to consider different cultural perspectives, despite acknowledgement that gender relations are socially and culturally defined.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, programs and policies that support respectful relationships, the foundation of gender equity, have the potential to enhance connections to family, community and culture, and therefore improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. However, few studies have examined how gender and specifically, gender equity, are conceptualised and understood in a contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. The Aboriginal Gender Study addresses this gap by examining gender concepts and experiences from Aboriginal points of view, to understand how gender equity could be advanced within a strong cultural framework.

Aim and Research Questions

The Aboriginal Gender Study aimed to explore, from a strengths-based perspective, the diversity of contemporary perspectives of gender, gender roles and gender equity in South Australian Aboriginal communities.

The project addressed three overall questions comprising:

1. What is the current evidence about gender roles and gender equity in the Australian literature and Australian policy documents regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
2. What is the current understanding of gender roles and relationships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
3. What might gender equity/fairness look like for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, adults, families and communities?

Methodology

There were four main components to this research:

- A systematic review and meta-synthesis of existing research that has examined views and understandings of gender roles and responsibilities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

- A critique of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and social policy to explore how gender and gender equity is positioned in these policies.

- Yarning circles with 49 community members across a diverse range of age and gender identities in three sites in South Australia, to explore views and understandings of gender, gender roles, cultural identity and gender equity.

- Four facilitated workshops with community members, to discuss the interpretation of findings and begin to develop recommendations for research and policy.

This project was designed with an Aboriginal research methodology which centralised and valued Aboriginal people as experts in their own lives, and acknowledged the diversity of Aboriginal communities and cultures. This approach provided a safe space for participants to voice their experiences using culturally safe methods and tools, including community engagement and yarning as a communication style.

Findings

Systematic Review

Overall, the review of the literature identified 15 studies where gender was the primary focus of the research. The included studies involved Aboriginal Australian people living in urban, regional and remote areas, across a range of age groups. Only one study sought the perspectives of Torres Strait Islander peoples. The methodological quality of studies was highly variable; few studies were either led by or appropriately engaged Aboriginal researchers or community members.

Among the available studies, the key concepts underpinning descriptions of Aboriginal femininity were strength, independence and nurturing. Conversely, Aboriginal masculinity was defined in terms of responsibility, as providers and protectors, for passing on cultural knowledge, and in terms of demonstrating dignity.

Caregiving was identified as an important aspect of both femininity and masculinity, however, almost all studies indicated that the daily responsibilities associated with parenting in particular were borne unequally by women. Several authors argued that this imbalance reflects the adoption of Western norms that promote women as primary caregivers. Promoting fathers and male Elders as role models was identified as an important strategy to support men to engage in family and cultural responsibilities in several studies.

In the five studies specifically involving young Aboriginal men and young women, understandings of gender roles often reflected rigid Western gender stereotypes, which positioned heterosexual males as dominant. Young women in particular felt they had little agency to challenge expectations around the Western patriarchy. In contrast, studies with older Aboriginal women indicated that their experiences of being female were associated with strength, with agency particularly demonstrated through leadership positions in the community and family.

We did not find any original research studies that specifically examined understandings of gender from the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ) individuals. Further, we did not identify any research that defined gender equity from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander perspective.

Policy Analysis

In our analysis of existing policies, we examined seven national policies across the domains of the Australian Government's Close the Gap campaign including: early childhood and education, schooling, health, economic participation, healthy homes, safe communities,

and governance and leadership. Only three policies included an explicit consideration of gender, however, in these policies, gender was either conflated with sex (e.g. in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework), or gender was discussed in a narrow, specific context such as violence against women, or the gender pay gap. Gender was also described as a binary; all policies failed to acknowledge gender diversity and include any representations of individuals who identify as LGBTQ.

In general, we found existing health and social policies concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not adequately consider gender-specific vulnerabilities and consequences. Further, none were cognisant that the experiences of Aboriginal women and men reflect a unique combination of racialised and gendered interactions.

Results from Yarning Circles

Understandings of Gender and Gender Roles

Understandings of gender were diverse, ranging from purely biological to nuanced understandings of gender as a multifaceted and dynamic concept. Among the LGBTQ groups, gender was particularly framed around power differentials, and the constraints LGBTQ individuals felt forging an identity outside of Western and Aboriginal social norms.

Discussions indicated contemporary understandings of gender in Aboriginal communities reflected both Western patriarchal ideals of masculinity and femininity as well as Aboriginal cultural norms. For example, participants noted that boys and girls shared some aspects of gender that aligned with Aboriginal values (such as, respecting Elders and knowing your place within community) but they were also taught distinctly Western gender expectations regarding sports and clothing (e.g. boys play football and wear pants and girls play netball and wear dresses).
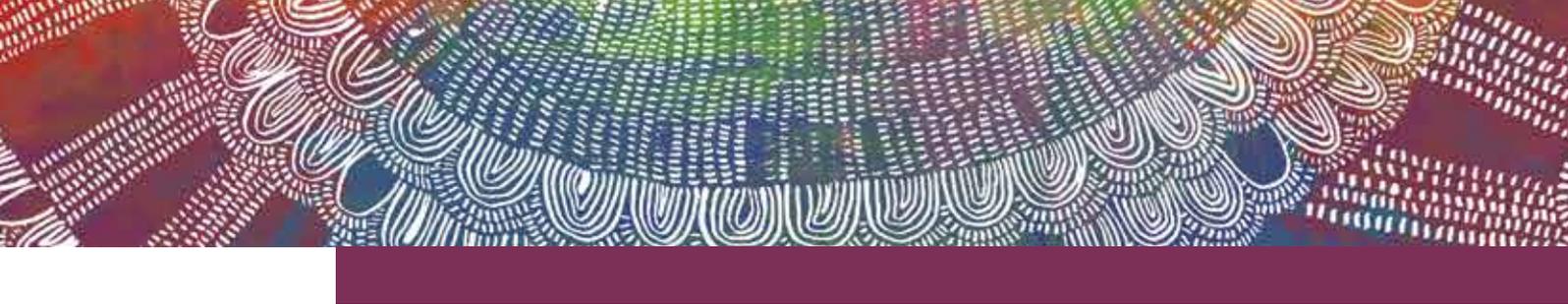
Executive Summary

Almost all participants acknowledged that expressions of emotions are gendered, with distinctions between how and when women and men should express and manage emotions. There were many contradictions articulated about how and when emotions are socially acceptable, but in general, emotional constraint was expected for men, except in a limited number of circumstances (e.g. at funerals, on the football field). This was seen as problematic, as participants (male and female) felt that Aboriginal men often lack the support of peers as well as safe spaces to express emotions.

Men's and women's roles around nurturing children formed a significant component of gendered identity and the ways in which people defined gender roles. Female participants often discussed their mothering as an important aspect of their womanhood, however, nurturing was not always linked to biological parenting, and included responsibilities as Aunties and Uncles in the community.

Work ethic was described as a significant component of both female and male participants' gendered identity, strongly influenced by their parents' work ethic. In most instances this was discussed as the contribution of income to the family, although some groups discussed provisions that are not financial (e.g. role modelling, guidance).

Participants consistently identified that gender was intertwined with culture, the foundation of Aboriginal identity. Across each site, participants expressed that while men and women were both carriers of culture and cultural knowledge, they did so in different domains and practices that, in many ways, were independent and also interdependent, of each other. Having strong role models and connecting with individuals of the same gender, in cultural and other activities, was identified as integral for strengthening cultural identity, and viewed as particularly beneficial for men (but often absent).

Learning about Gender

Parents, community members and peers were reported as having the strongest influence over children and young people when learning about gender roles and norms. However, many noted the increasing influence of African American hip hop and rap music on Aboriginal youth identities, particularly young males, with some noting that this could marginalise young men from both mainstream and Aboriginal value systems. Local community clubs (e.g. sporting) were also cited as important places for learning about gender, although these often reinforced Western gender stereotypes.

Experiences of racism were commonly reported by participants and these were gendered, reflected in stereotypes regarding men and women as well as episodes of transphobia and homophobia within and outside of the community.

Strong Aboriginal Men and Women

For men, strength was described in terms of their knowledge of culture and identity, and their ability to share this knowledge with family and community. Other depictions of strong men included as 'good fathers', 'hard workers', and 'providers'. Of note there was much less recognition of the non-monetary provisions that men make to their family (e.g. nurturing, teaching etc.) which undervalues these important contributions. However, women's contribution to child rearing and family activities was also often overlooked as a 'provision'.

Strong women were portrayed as being connected to culture, and being influential in their families and the community. Older women commonly described themselves as strong and resilient, actively partaking in self-care activities to support this. However, they did not necessarily associate the qualities surrounding resilience with men. Further, men did not use the same language around resilience when talking about themselves or identify with the self-care practices that women reported.

Participants consistently identified a clear link between feeling connected to family, community and culture, and feeling empowered and strong. Being disconnected affected social and emotional wellbeing as it meant that often emotions were not expressed safely or without judgement. While being 'disconnected' affects men and women, it was viewed as particularly problematic for men, as they were less able to access sources of support (whether that be support from male peers, or community esteem as a result of employment) to buffer the effects of loss of connection.

Fairness and Equity

Although we found the terms 'equity' or 'equality' were not often used or understood by participants, the concept was consistent with Aboriginal worldviews and concepts such as reciprocity. This included sharing resources, caring for family and giving back to the community, including in paid employment roles (e.g. for community organisations). Fairness was described as partnerships and shared responsibilities to family and community, however it was acknowledged that the nature of these responsibilities may be different, such as in cultural activities.

Fairness was not discussed in terms of rebalancing power to those without it, instead, it was construed as shared efforts to care for the community, and carry culture forward. This suggests that there are unique, collective, understandings of gender equity among Aboriginal communities and families, which are broader than current Western understandings of the concepts of equity and fairness, which focus on individual rights to access power and resources.

While there was a consistent theme in the aspiration for shared responsibilities to family, culture and community, which could be interpreted as gender equity, both male and female participants acknowledged that in practice the burden of responsibility continues to fall on women. Participants noted that there were many factors that influenced this, with a diversity of opinions across the sites.

Some participants blamed the individual men in their lives, stating that they did not fulfil their parenting responsibilities as they held outdated views about responsibility for child rearing. However, many noted a generational shift, with young fathers generally taking on a greater proportion of parenting responsibilities than in the past.

Others stated that pervasive racist stereotypes of Aboriginal men resulted in limited employment opportunities, unequal custody arrangements and men distancing themselves from certain parenting and community roles. Discussions also centred on the gendered impact of specific laws, for example environmental regulations about fishing catch size which prevented men from fulfilling cultural roles. These findings highlight the need to consider the gendered aspects of community roles and responsibilities in policy development.

Although gendered violence was not explicitly explored in this project, which had a strengths-based focus, experiences of violence featured in many discussions in the LGBTQ groups. LGBTQ women recounted instances where violence they experienced from male family members went unreported to police, as their own family members prioritised the safety of males (e.g. from systematic discrimination and brutality) over their own safety, indicating that they face additional barriers to attaining gender equity.

Recommendations

This exploratory research has provided insight into how gender and gender relations are influential in Aboriginal communities, impacting on how a person is perceived and also their experiences in and out of community. It has provided foundational research to consider an expansion of the concept of gender equity to be inclusive of cultural and collective worldviews. Utilising the data from this study, the following recommendations have been devised.

For Research

A national research project, inclusive of many groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (e.g. Elders, LGBTQ peoples, different language groups etc.) is needed to further examine views about gender roles, gender expression and gender equity, to reflect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences.
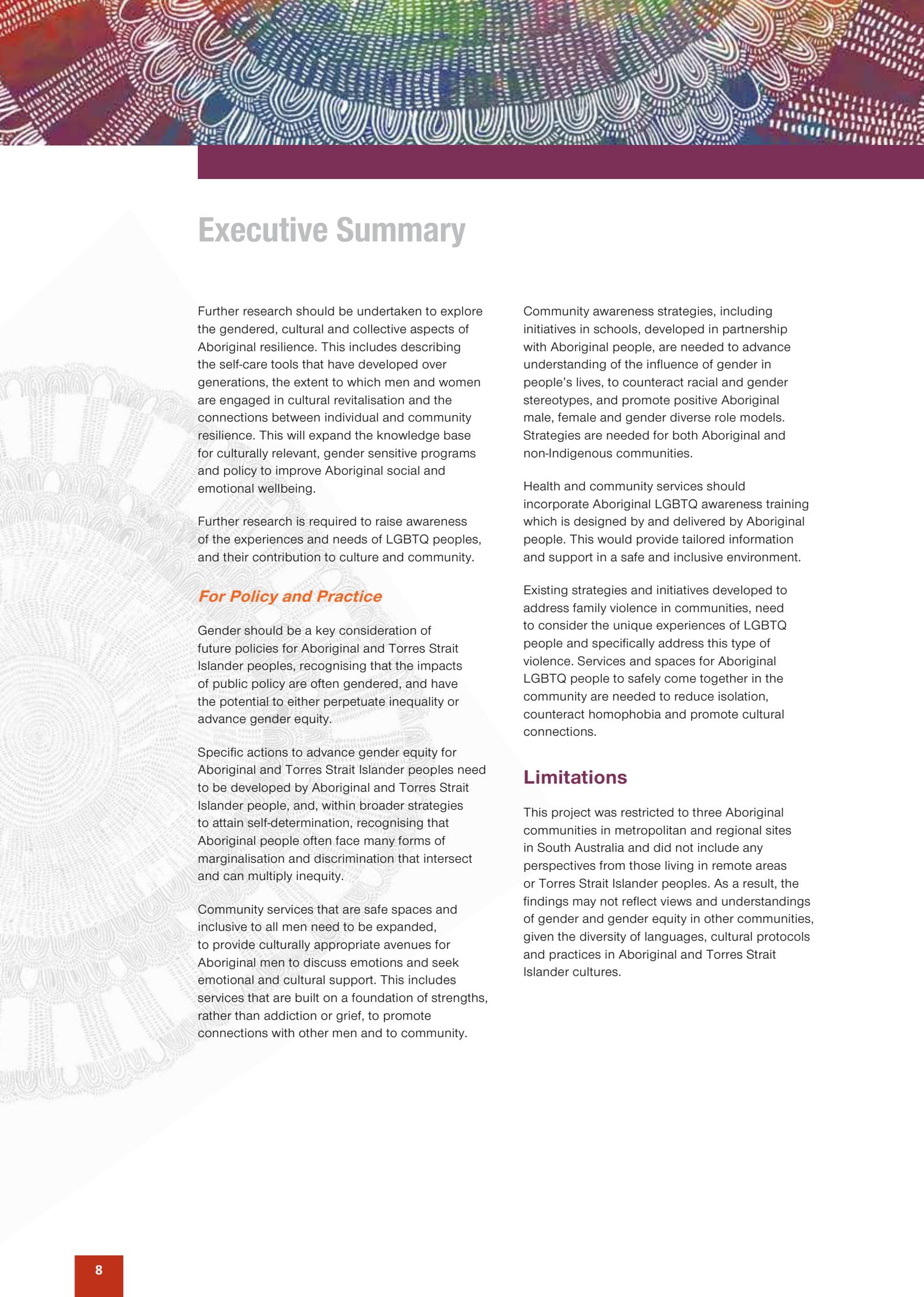
Executive Summary

Further research should be undertaken to explore the gendered, cultural and collective aspects of Aboriginal resilience. This includes describing the self-care tools that have developed over generations, the extent to which men and women are engaged in cultural revitalisation and the connections between individual and community resilience. This will expand the knowledge base for culturally relevant, gender sensitive programs and policy to improve Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing.

Further research is required to raise awareness of the experiences and needs of LGBTQ peoples, and their contribution to culture and community.

For Policy and Practice

Gender should be a key consideration of future policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that the impacts of public policy are often gendered, and have the potential to either perpetuate inequality or advance gender equity.

Specific actions to advance gender equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples need to be developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and, within broader strategies to attain self-determination, recognising that Aboriginal people often face many forms of marginalisation and discrimination that intersect and can multiply inequity.

Community services that are safe spaces and inclusive to all men need to be expanded, to provide culturally appropriate avenues for Aboriginal men to discuss emotions and seek emotional and cultural support. This includes services that are built on a foundation of strengths, rather than addiction or grief, to promote connections with other men and to community.

Community awareness strategies, including initiatives in schools, developed in partnership with Aboriginal people, are needed to advance understanding of the influence of gender in people's lives, to counteract racial and gender stereotypes, and promote positive Aboriginal male, female and gender diverse role models. Strategies are needed for both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous communities.

Health and community services should incorporate Aboriginal LGBTQ awareness training which is designed by and delivered by Aboriginal people. This would provide tailored information and support in a safe and inclusive environment.

Existing strategies and initiatives developed to address family violence in communities, need to consider the unique experiences of LGBTQ people and specifically address this type of violence. Services and spaces for Aboriginal LGBTQ people to safely come together in the community are needed to reduce isolation, counteract homophobia and promote cultural connections.

Limitations

This project was restricted to three Aboriginal communities in metropolitan and regional sites in South Australia and did not include any perspectives from those living in remote areas or Torres Strait Islander peoples. As a result, the findings may not reflect views and understandings of gender and gender equity in other communities, given the diversity of languages, cultural protocols and practices in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Overview

This report presents the findings from the Aboriginal Gender Study, an exploratory study of contemporary views and understandings of gender, gender roles and gender equity in South Australian Aboriginal communities. The study took a strengths-based and life course approach, incorporating a diversity of lived experiences, to gain perspectives on how gender equity could be advanced within a strong cultural identity. As the first study of its kind, the report provides foundational evidence to help define what gender equity looks like in a contemporary Aboriginal context, and facilitate cultural perspectives on gender equity to be embedded in health and social policy making.

Gender is a social construct that encompasses the expectations about masculine and feminine roles and behaviours, and shapes the development and interpretation of an individual's identity (UNESCO, 2014). These norms and values are culturally specific, and closely tied to the current social and political context (Johnson, Greaves, & Repta, 2009). As a result, gender identities and experiences are constantly evolving and interpreted differently across cultures. Gender and gender relations influence health in a number of ways, including through differential access to resources and decision making powers, and in differences in health risks and health seeking behaviours (Johnson, Greaves, & Repta, 2009). Recognition of these differences has resulted in several international policy initiatives that recognise gender equity as a fundamental human right, such as the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015).

Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, health and wellbeing is strongly linked to cultural identity and connectedness to family and community (Australian Government, 2013). Gender relations are an integral part of cultural identity, as they shape how relationships between family and community members are forged and maintained. Despite acknowledgement that there is great diversity in contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identities (ibid), there has been limited exploration of how gender roles and relations are positioned in these identities.

The research described in this report is underpinned by a human rights perspective, including acknowledgement that attaining the right to access, practice and shape culture is essential to the realisation of human rights (UNESCO, 2014). This includes the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, men and gender diverse individuals, to define what gender equity means in contemporary society.

Research Questions and Approach

The key questions informing this research were developed by the Lowitja Institute, as part of the Institute's Community capability and the social determinants of health program. The overarching question was to consider the current understandings of, and aspirations for, gender equity and relationships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and how strong identities are understood through a gender equity lens. More specifically, this study explored the following key questions and sub-questions:

1. What is the current evidence about gender roles and gender equity in the Australian literature and Australian policy documents regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

2. What is the current understanding of gender roles and relationships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

    a. How do Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people consider gender and gender roles, and how do these views relate to equity as a fairness principle?

    b. What are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people being told about their roles according to their gender? What messages are communicated by family, community and the broader society, including media?

    c. What might gender equity/fairness look like for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults, young people, families and communities?

3. How are strong Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander men and women portrayed and how are strong positive gender roles and relationships envisioned?

To address these questions there were four main components:

*   A systematic review and meta-synthesis of existing research that has examined views and understandings of gender roles and responsibilities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;

*   A critique of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and social policy to explore how gender and gender equity is positioned in these policies;

*   Yarning circles with 49 community members across a diverse range of age and gender identities in three sites in South Australia, to explore views and understandings of gender, gender roles, cultural identity and gender equity; and

*   Four facilitated workshops with community members, to discuss the interpretation of findings and begin to develop recommendations for research and policy.

Systematic Review and Meta-Synthesis

This section presents a critical appraisal of existing research which has considered gender and gender roles in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia. The review utilises established tools to critique the ways in which gender has been researched and interpreted, and identify the key concepts underpinning constructions of gender in the current literature.

Background

It is generally accepted that meanings associated with gender are socially and culturally produced and reproduced. For this reason, concepts or constructs of gender are dynamic, and influenced by prevailing social values and beliefs, religious dogma, physical and emotional attributes, reproductive functions, availability of economic resources and many other factors. Gender constructs permeate personal and societal attitudes, expectations about behaviours, social roles and relationships, as well as habits and preferences. Given all these aspects, gender is a diverse and complex social phenomenon.

Gender inequality occurs when societies assign different values on women and men, resulting in uneven distribution of power and resources. Inequality manifests as gendered discrimination, oppression, and violence, unfair income distribution, unequal caring and child rearing responsibilities, and differential access to health and social services. These are issues that affect the lives of girls and women, and boys and men.

To date, the application of a white, colonial, patriarchal lens has been unquestionably applied to interpret the lives of Aboriginal people, evident through the work of early anthropologists, linguists and male dominated areas of scholarship. Merlan (1988) has provided an extensive overview of the ways in which gender was considered in research from 1961 to 1986. She argues that much of this data intended to

reconstruct the traditional over the contemporary elements of Aboriginal culture, with a tendency to characterise men and women through a Western, patriarchal and hierarchical binary. She identifies some of the key themes that arose in this framework: production and the labour process, consumption, social structures and kinships, ritual and ceremony (including sacred sites), and sexuality in relation to reproduction (with little attention to any other aspects of sexuality). Through her overview, Merlan (1998) argues that the introduction of Euro-Western ideals of separation and dualisms (male and female, individual and collective) have been responsible for introducing and enforcing gender disparities in Aboriginal communities. Holcombe (1997) also identifies the application of a gender dichotomy as problematic for Aboriginal communities, arguing that Aboriginal gender relations are instead based on an equivalency rather than a symmetry (see also Bessarab, 2006).

Overall Merlan's critical analysis of historical anthropological ethnographic literature is useful in acknowledging a lack of understanding of the social constructions of gender. Her work highlights a clear gap in contemporary understandings of gender that this research intends to address. In the remainder of this section we systematically analyse how gender has featured in research from 1987[1] onwards in order to present the conceptualisations of gender to date.

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1. This timeframe has been defined due to Merlan's already extensive assessment of gender in research from 1961 to 1986.
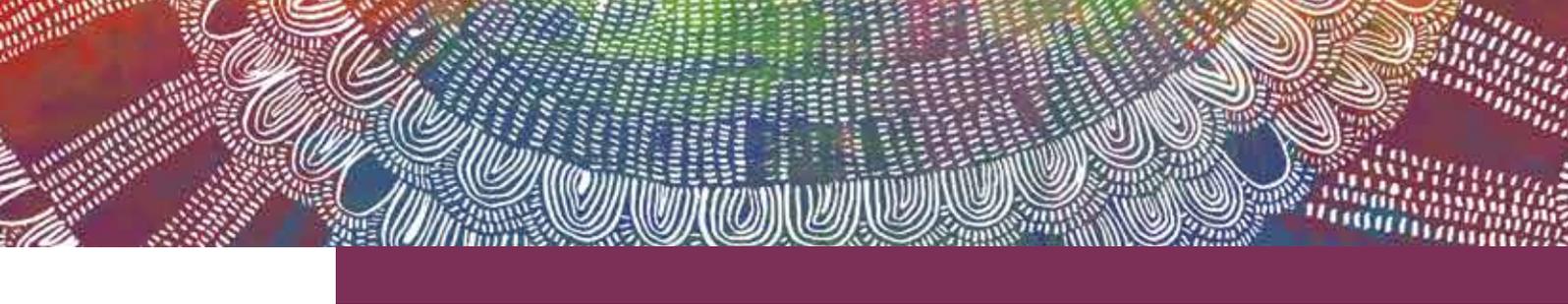
Systematic Review and Meta-Synthesis

Methods

The literature review process began with the identification of key words and search terms and relevant electronic databases. The key words and list of databases and websites searched are available on request. For the purpose of this review we included original research defining gender or describing gender roles among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. This included Aboriginal definitions or understandings of gender and identity, gender roles and responsibilities and gendered relations. Papers where gender was not the main focus or where outcomes, such as health status, were sub-grouped by gender were excluded.

Critical Appraisal

Studies identified as eligible for inclusion were then critically appraised using a combination of two tools: a critical appraisal tool developed by the Centre of Research Excellence in Aboriginal Chronic Disease Knowledge Translation and Exchange (CREATE) and the Qualitative Checklist from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) tool. CASP is a well-respected tool for evaluating the quality of peer-reviewed qualitative research papers (CASP, 2018). CREATE is an appraisal tool which is used to assess the quality of literature from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective (CREATE, 2018). It has been developed by Aboriginal researchers, including several of the investigators on this project, based at the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI). As the CREATE tool is a work in progress and has yet to be published, the project team were encouraged to use the CREATE tool in conjunction with the CASP tool. These tools were applied and cross checked by a number of researchers involved in the project, and a summary has been detailed on page 13.

Translating and Synthesising Studies

As all of the studies we identified were qualitative in nature, we adopted the approach of meta-ethnography to synthesize the data across the studies. This is an established approach to qualitative syntheses that involves systematically translating the findings of studies into each other, by comparing concepts within one study to those in another study (Noblit & Hare, 1998). The aim of this approach is to generate new theoretical understandings drawn from the collective body of research, rather than simply summarising the results of individual qualitative studies.

Included papers were grouped according to the focus (first order constructs such as either masculinity, femininity or both). For each individual study we then extracted data about the study characteristics including the setting and methodology, and key subthemes (second order constructs) reported in the findings. Data about subthemes were illustrated by extracting direct quotes from participants reported in the papers. We then created a table of commonly reported subthemes, to develop key concepts (third order constructs) representing our interpretations and synthesis of the data. Each paper was then re-read to understand how the concept translated across each paper. Where there were inconsistencies in the findings and a concept could not be developed from subthemes, we report a narrative summary of the findings of each study.

Results

After removing duplicates, the search identified 355 papers that were assessed for inclusion. Of these, 15 studies (16 papers) were included in the synthesis. The majority of studies were excluded as gender was not the primary focus of the paper or they were not original research.

The aims, participants and methods of the included studies are shown in Appendix A. Four studies focused predominantly on gender issues for Aboriginal women (Bainbridge, 2011; Dune et al., 2017; Kulhankova, 2011; Senior & Chenhall, 2012), six focused on Aboriginal men (Barlo, 2016; Blanch, 2011; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004; McCoy, 2004; Newman et al., 2016; Reilly & Rees, 2017), and the remaining five considered both male and female perspectives (Bessarab, 2006; Bird & Bird, 2008; Davis, 1992; Fietz, 2005; Herbert, 1995). Initially these groupings were considered separately, however, after detailed assessment, the findings were deemed comparable and were therefore synthesized together. Four studies had an explicit focus on youth (Blanch, 2011; Herbert, 1995; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004; Senior & Chenhall, 2012), the remaining studies included participants across a wide range of ages. Only two studies included perspectives from Torres Strait Islander peoples (Herbert, 1995; Reilly & Rees, 2017).

Study Quality

No papers were excluded on the basis of quality. When assessed against the CREATE criteria for the quality of research from an Aboriginal perspective, just under half (40%) demonstrated that they responded fully or partially to a community need or priority, and five studies (33%) provided evidence of appropriate community consultation and engagement. Seven studies (47%) demonstrated Aboriginal leadership (Bainbridge, 2011; Barlo, 2016; Bessarab, 2006; Blanch, 2011; Herbert, 1995; Newman et al., 2016), a further three included Aboriginal governance arrangements (Dune et al., 2017; McCoy, 2004; Senior & Chenhall,

2012). However, only one study (Barlo, 2016) explicitly discussed intellectual or cultural property rights. Nine studies (60%) were either fully or partially guided by an Aboriginal paradigm (Bainbridge, 2011; Barlo, 2016; Bessarab, 2006; Dune et al., 2017; Herbert, 1995; Kulhankova, 2011; McCoy, 2004; Reilly & Rees, 2017; Senior & Chenhall, 2012) and almost all (14 studies, 93%) had elements of a strengths-based approach. However, very few studies provided sufficient information to demonstrate research translation (five studies, 33%), benefit (three studies, 20%), Aboriginal capacity building (five studies, 33%) or two way learning (three studies, 20%).

When assessed using the CASP checklist, almost all (93%) were rated as having a clear statement of aims, however, in many studies the research design lacked sufficient description and justification. The aspects that were often neglected included the recruitment strategy (described adequately in 27% of studies), appropriate consideration of the relationships between the researcher and participants (demonstrated in 20% of studies), and consideration of ethical issues (demonstrated in 33% of studies). In addition, only five studies (33%) (Dune et al., 2017; Kulhankova, 2011; Newman et al., 2016; Reilly & Rees, 2017; Senior & Chenhall, 2012) were rated as having a rigorous approach to data analysis, for the remainder there was insufficient information provided about the data analysis process. Ratings against the CREATE and CASP criteria for each study are available on request.

Synthesis

The included studies were undertaken in a diverse range of contexts, and often focused on a very specific aspect of gender (e.g. parenting roles). This made comparison of key concepts across the included papers difficult. Nevertheless, several over-arching concepts were developed, based on the most consistent subthemes in the discussions about the features of Aboriginal femininity and masculinity. These are listed in Table 1, together with example quotes to illustrate subthemes and concepts, and the papers in which the subthemes were present.

Systematic Review and Meta-Synthesis

Centrality of Culture

Cultural identity was often described as the foundation of all gendered experiences. For example, Bainbridge (2011) described 'performing Aboriginality', as the anchor to an Aboriginal woman's identity. Culture was often discussed in terms of connections and reciprocity. This was described as relationships with family, community, ancestors and nature, that encompass daily living responsibilities (e.g. care of children, collective hunting) and cultural obligations (e.g. to kin). Many of these interactions were acknowledged as gendered, for example, in the passing on of cultural knowledge (Barlo, 2016; Bessarab, 2006; Bird & Bird, 2008; Fietz, 2005; McCoy, 2004; Reilly & Rees, 2017).

Femininity

Independence and Strength

Among the studies that drew on the experiences of Aboriginal women, femininity was often discussed in terms of strength and independence. Strength was described in a variety of ways, including as a provider for the family (including income earner), and by performing leadership roles in the community. Strong Aboriginal women were also depicted as survivors and resilient. Common features of Aboriginal women's descriptions of survival included personal challenges, self-reflection, connecting with family, ancestors and nature, pursuing cultural authenticity, and exercising agency through family and community roles (Bainbridge, 2011; Dune et al., 2017; Kulhankova, 2011). Although strength was a dominant feature of discussions around Aboriginal femininity, strength was distinct from the capacity for agency. Several studies noted that the degree of agency Aboriginal women could exercise was closely tied to their age, with influence increasing with age (Davis, 1992; Dune et al., 2017; Senior & Chenhall, 2012).

Strength was also described as 'standing your own ground' including verbal and physical confrontation of those displaying threatening behaviour. Bessarab (2006) argues that expression of anger is not discouraged among Aboriginal women (unlike in many Western communities), however, among participants in her study, there were contradictory views about whether fighting is acceptable among women.

Wide-ranging Nurturing Roles

Almost all studies included descriptions of Aboriginal women as nurturers and caregivers, and these were described as important aspects of an Aboriginal woman's identity. This reflected wide-ranging responsibilities for caring for children, family and community members, and as healers and brokers of family and community restoration. Several studies noted that caring for children in particular is normalized from an early age. Further, Davis (1992) argues that women have the dominant influence in family function both within the family unit and in holding community positions that affect family welfare (e.g. on housing boards).

Masculinity

Responsibility

In the studies involving Aboriginal men, responsibility emerged as a key component of masculinity. Description of men's responsibilities included presenting them as providers and protectors, for 'growing up' children, as cultural custodians, and for supporting other men. Being supported and nurtured by other men (fathers, grandfathers, peers) was often discussed as integral to young men's development, but frequently absent or limited in contemporary life. For example, McCoy (2004) asserts that adult male identity is formed by the experience of being 'held' by other men. Failure to experience this nurturing by other men, he argues, denies men an important source of social support, and creates feelings of isolation, frustration and anger. Further, he suggests that Aboriginal men may use football and in some cases, prison experiences, as contemporary sources of male support and to maintain connections to kin.

Dignity

Dignity emerged as an important facet of Aboriginal masculinity. This was commonly discussed as practicing respect (for self and others) and earning respect from the community by displaying culture. Demonstrating pride, in family and cultural roles, was also identified as a key component of Aboriginal men's dignity.

Systematic Review and Meta-Synthesis

Table 1: Qualitative synthesis: key concepts and subthemes within descriptions of Aboriginal femininity and masculinity.

Key Concept	Subtheme	Illustrative Example Quotes	Studies that Include the Subtheme
Culture and Gender			
Cultural identity, founded in relationships and responsibilities, underpins all gendered experiences	Aboriginal identity is forged by connections with family, community, ancestors and nature, and fulfilment of cultural responsibilities	"First and foremost I will always be Aboriginal." (Bainbridge, 2011, p. S28) "Our Country was for sharing and caring, and that was a share and care for the Country. We've cared for the Country, looked after it. We looked after one another because our neighbours were part of our group, [they] were part of our group." (Barlo 2016, p. 83)	(Bainbridge, 2011; Barlo, 2016; Bessarab, 2006; Bird & Bird, 2008; Fietz, 2005; Kulhankova, 2011; McCoy, 2004; Newman et al., 2016)
Femininity			
Independence and strength	Provision of resources including income and food	"We also become the breadwinner as well. We've had to become the breadwinners as well. I think when we think about it it's that time by yourselves. Cause we, I've always worked, you girls have always worked and you had no other choice." (Dune, 2017 p. 78)	(Bessarab, 2006; Bird & Bird, 2008; Dune et al., 2017)
	Leadership and advocacy roles in the community	"When you start working with your community you're their mouthpiece. If you don't speak up for them then they don't get the services. So it's something I learnt in the late '90s, early 2000s, you had to speak up for people. So I think we're speaking out more but it doesn't, for me myself, doesn't change the way I feel inside. Makes me proud that I can stand up for someone…" (Dune, 2017, p. 78)	(Bainbridge, 2011; Davis, 1992; Dune et al., 2017)
	Confrontation	"I think the little things he said like you know um, you don't have to take this from them and you don't have to take that you know, stand up for your rights you are not here, you know to be anyone's punching bag or you are not here for anyone to tell you what to do … he taught us to be strong…. (Bessarab 2006, p. 164)	(Bessarab, 2006; Dune et al., 2017; Senior & Chenhall, 2012)
	Survival and resilience	"I had to change everything around, how I am goin ' to cope with it, what am I goin ' to do, who am I goin ' to come up against?" (Bainbridge 2011, p. 28)	(Bainbridge, 2011; Dune et al., 2017; Kulhankova, 2011)
	Breaking cycles of disadvantage	"I'm the first generation in my family that can say at 20 years of age that I have complete control of my life." (Bainbridge, 2011, p. S28)	(Bainbridge, 2011)
	Ageing is revered, and linked positively to strength and agency	"You gain your experience as you go along. You probably say to yourself, 'do I want to be a doormat' or do you want to spread your wings and have a say within this household." (Dune 2017, p. 80)	(Dune et al., 2017; Senior & Chenhall, 2012)
Wide-ranging nurturing roles that begin in early life	Caring for children and family members as mothers, aunties and grandmothers	"Ok so if the role is pretty much a maternal, caregiving, longitudinal over children, grandchildren and the entire community…" (Dune, 2017, p. 78)	(Bainbridge, 2011; Dune et al., 2017; Kulhankova, 2011; Senior & Chenhall, 2012)

Key Concept	Subtheme	Illustrative Example Quotes	Studies that Include the Subtheme
Femininity (cont)			
	Working to 'heal' the community	"looking after community wellness." (Bainbridge, 2011, p. S28)	(Bainbridge, 2011; Kulhankova, 2011)
	Childrearing is normalised from an early age	"the thing is when I was little, or like just before I had [name] … I was always the motherly type … any babies in our family I'd always be babysitting them and I'd always be dressing and changing a nappy so, so with me having my own daughter really it wasn't a great deal." (Bessarab 2006, p. 134)	(Bessarab, 2006; McCoy, 2004; Senior & Chenhall, 2012)
Masculinity			
Responsibility	Providing and protecting, enacted in many different ways (support, income, hunting)	"Being safe is physically and mentally you're safe and you're looking after – you're carrying out your responsibility for family and community or lands by different clan groups within your tribal area." (Barlo 2016, p. 82) "...look after your family, look after your kids, make sure that you are there, pay bills, give them what they need, mainly just be there for them when they need you." (Bessarab, 2006, p. 171)	(Barlo, 2016; Bessarab, 2006; Bird & Bird, 2008; Davis, 1992; Reilly & Rees, 2017)
	'Growing up' and teaching children	"I taught them really … they took my footstep and everything." (McCoy 2004, p. 123)	(Barlo, 2016; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004; McCoy, 2004; Reilly & Rees, 2017)
	Supporting other men	"you hold him and look after him." (McCoy 2004, p. 125)	(McCoy, 2004; Newman et al., 2016; Reilly & Rees, 2017)
	Passing on cultural knowledge	"So yeah, culture's alive. You see, when they say culture like we were having a natter, [in a] program the year before last … I was teaching the kids there how to make canoes and spears and all that sort of stuff." (Barlo, 2016 p. 80)	(Barlo, 2016; McCoy, 2004; Reilly & Rees, 2017)
Dignity	Earning and practising respect (for self, others, Elders and culture)	"But becoming a man carries a lot of respect and dignity that you have to practice. You don't just talk the talk, you've got to walk the walk." (Barlo 2016, p. 76) "By displaying culture that brings dignity then you'll get respect from the rest of the community." (Barlo 2016, p. 92)	(Barlo, 2016; McCoy, 2004)
	Pride	"Proud warrior, proud provider." (Barlo 2016, p. 76)	(Barlo, 2016; Bessarab, 2006; F. Blanch, 2013; Newman et al., 2016)

Systematic Review and Meta-Synthesis

Influence of Western Gender Norms

Several studies reported views about gender that arguably reflect a strong influence of Western gender norms, particularly in relation to gendered power relations, appropriate behaviours and parenting expectations. For example, in two studies involving young Aboriginal men (F. Blanch, 2013; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004) gender was commonly discussed in terms of dualisms (e.g. boys are 'tougher, bigger', 'girls study') and hierarchical relations, with heteronormative males positioned as dominant. Privileging relationships with male peers (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) and confrontation with other students were some of the common ways young boys performed masculinity. Further, in one study, masculinity was defined by participants as 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004).

In studies involving young Aboriginal women, some participants talked of experiences of feeling controlled by male family members and partners. Senior and Chenhall (2012) reported that young women living in a remote community viewed marriage and childrearing as an unavoidable obligation, and in a negative light as it constrained their opportunities for education as well as participation in certain community activities. However, this was not consistent across all studies. In another study of Aboriginal high school students in rural, remote and urban areas, young women expressed a diversity of views concerning the degree of control they felt over their lives (Herbert, 1995).

These views and experiences of subordinate relationships align with patriarchal values, which some Aboriginal scholars argue were not present in traditional Aboriginal societies (Behrendt, 1993; Bessarab, 2006). Instead, relationships are viewed as interdependent, suggesting that this reflects the influence of Western systems of male dominance.

Another domain where the Western influence may be apparent is the expression of emotion. Several studies reported the expectation that men constrain their emotions. In the context of young men, this was evident in the value they placed on being 'tough', with girls viewed as emotional and 'mushie' (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004).

Further, in a study of men undergoing cancer treatment, participants favoured a pragmatic approach to their treatment, expressed as just 'getting on with it', rather than an emotional response. While vulnerability was tolerated by some men, it was discussed largely in terms of physical limitations on daily activities (e.g. abilities after surgery) rather than acceptance of emotional vulnerability. This was described as a strategy to reduce the burden on family members but also to protect men's cultural roles as the 'protector and provider'. However, Bessarab argues that traditionally Aboriginal men were encouraged to express emotions, particularly in ceremony (Bessarab, 2006), with emotional constraint adopted as the norm following the erosion of cultural practices after colonisation.

Although many studies identified nurturing children as an important part of Aboriginal masculinity, within the literature there was considerable disagreement about the level of involvement of men traditionally in parenting, particularly at different life stages (e.g. early childhood vs. puberty; Bessarab, 2006; McCoy, 2004). Nevertheless several authors argued that in current society, men's involvement in parenting is often limited, reflecting widespread adoption of the now outdated Western expectation that childrearing is principally the responsibility of women (Bessarab, 2006; McCoy, 2004; Reilly & Rees, 2017). In one study some participants viewed male involvement in parenting as highly stigmatized (Reilly & Rees, 2017). Loss of cultural roles and activities, a lack of strong Aboriginal male role models who are fathers, as well as the orientation of existing parenting information and services predominantly to women, were all identified as factors contributing to poorer engagement of men in child rearing responsibilities.

Promoting men's groups were seen as a way forward in this regard, to contribute to building men's confidence to engage in parenting and normalize expectations around family responsibilities. This should not be restricted to parenting groups. For instance, Herbert (1995) reported that young Aboriginal boys wanted to discuss broad ideas around masculinity and gender with men.

Learning and Embodying Gender

Few studies explicitly examined how gender is learned, that is, the processes of gender socialisation. Among the limited literature, several papers identified adolescence as a particularly important time for the development of a gendered identity. This was described as a life stage where young people are supported by older, close kin of the same gender to support the transition to adult life (Bessarab, 2006; Fietz, 2005; McCoy, 2004). This is demonstrated in support for living activities as well as the passing on of cultural knowledge. Fietz (2005) argued that these intergenerational gendered relationships have a stronger influence on identity development than same gender peers, however, this was not consistent across all studies.

While close relationships with family and kin of the same gender were important, Bessarab (2017) also discussed the importance of learning from different gender kin. She noted that while mothers have a strong influence on the development of female identity, male family members also teach women about femininity through stories of their female ancestors.

Another absence in the literature is the examination of the ways in which gender is embodied, or displayed by the body. Senior and Chenhall (2012) reported young women often dressed in long clothing to avoid male gaze, resisting what they described as inevitable marriage. In addition, two studies noted the influence of African American rap culture on the way young Aboriginal men dress. This solidarity with African American culture was described both as means of empowerment for young Aboriginal men lacking cultural connections (Bessarab, 2006) and an act of resistance against the marginalisation Aboriginal boys felt in the school system (Blanch, 2011). These studies demonstrate the very limited literature concerning positive experiences of the embodiment of Aboriginal femininity and masculinity.

Gender Racialised

Across the included studies Aboriginal men's and women's experiences could not be disconnected from race and many reported a gendered impact of being racialised. This was particularly evident in the experiences of Aboriginal school students. For example, Blanch noted that Aboriginal boys felt a sense of constant surveillance in the school environment (by teachers and peers), because of their 'blackness' and maleness (Blanch, 2013). Several studies also suggested that the gendered expectations of students were also racialised, with sport valued for Aboriginal boys (Herbert, 1995; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004). Conversely, educational attainment was valued among girls (Herbert, 1995) while boy's academic success was acknowledged in Aboriginal subjects only (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004). Herbert (1995) also reported that Aboriginal girls felt that boys received more praise for their sporting achievements than girls did for their academic success. These studies indicate a racialised element to the prevailing social hierarchy in the school environment, which continues to position males as dominant.

Gender Equity

We did not find any studies that explicitly examined the concept of gender equity from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander perspective. Nevertheless as the above summary highlights, while not named as such, issues of gender equity (from a Western perspective) were apparent in many discussions. For example, female and male participants across several studies expressed the view that in general, Aboriginal women perform the majority of childrearing activities and household duties (Bessarab, 2006; Reilly & Rees, 2017; Senior & Chenhall, 2012). Aboriginal high school students spoke of navigating a social hierarchy that positioned white, heterosexual males as dominant, and promoted very narrow gendered and racialised expectations of academic success (Blanch, 2011; Herbert, 1995; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004). Finally, Davis argued that women often exert greater influence than men in communities through leadership positions in community organisations (Davis, 1992); but this is rarely seen in national positions of influence on Aboriginal affairs, which are predominately held by men.

Systematic Review and Meta-Synthesis

Summary

Using a meta-ethnographic approach, we have summarised the key features that underpin Aboriginal gender identity, as identified in the literature. Positive depictions of Aboriginal femininity were based on the key concepts of strength, independence and nurturing. Conversely, Aboriginal masculinity was framed around the concepts of responsibility and dignity. Of note, the literature that examined Aboriginal masculinity from a strengths-based perspective was smaller than the corresponding literature on femininity.

There were considerable inconsistencies in the literature surrounding the extent of sharing of parenting responsibilities, and whether current expectations that position women as primary caregivers reflect Western or Aboriginal gender norms. Of concern, the available studies indicated the presence of rigid gendered stereotypes among some young Aboriginal people that are reinforced by the education system. In addition, several studies identified the need to promote strong Aboriginal role models, particularly as a way to encourage Aboriginal fathers to engage more fully with their parenting responsibilities.

Of note, there was a paucity of research about diverse gender identities and roles. We did not identify any original papers that examined the experiences of Aboriginal LGBTQ individuals. In addition, few studies examined the experiences of Torres Strait Islander peoples. None explored the concept of gender equity from an Aboriginal perspective.

Methodologically, a key limitation of existing studies is the lack of Aboriginal leadership, which was apparent in just under half of all studies. In addition, only a third of studies provided sufficient detail about the data collection and analysis processes to demonstrate rigour, which undermines our ability to draw firm conclusions about the research. Collectively, these issues reinforce the need for further research, that is Aboriginal led, that examines a diversity of gender experiences, as well as views about gender equity.

Policy Analysis

For this analysis we adapted an existing policy analysis tool, the Policy Scorecard for Gender Mainstreaming (Keleher, 2012). The original tool was developed to examine the degree to which gender equity is addressed in Australian health policies. This involved rating an individual policy on a scale of 0 (missing) to 5 (exceed minimum standard) based on the degree to which it included gender and sex-disaggregated data, named gender inequities, referenced existing policy and involved consultations with stakeholders. For the purpose of our study, the tool was adapted to involve assessment across eight domains regarding the inclusion of:

a. statistics of gender and/or sex;

b. a definition of gender equity;

c. the level of representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gender roles and responsibilities;

d. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health and health outcomes;

e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's health and health outcomes;

f. authorship by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations;

g. consultation conducted with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities; and

h. reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and policies.

Each domain was scored on a scale of 0 to 5, and averaged over each domain to produce a final grading of either missing (average score ≤1), inadequate (average score 2), needs improvement (average score 3), minimum standard (average score 4) or exceeds minimum standard (average score 5). The adapted tool is listed in Appendix B.

The tool was used to grade and record comments regarding the representation of gender, sex, gender equity, male and female representation, involvement of Aboriginal communities, organisations and people in Australian health and social policy.

We identified seven National policy document that have a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing. The policies were chosen to cover the broad areas of focus in the Close the Gap campaign (Australian Government, 2009). This was undertaken to ensure that both a diverse range of policies were analysed and that our analysis aligned with current national priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Where there was no national policy specifically for Aboriginal families and communities, we analysed relevant policy briefs/discussion papers. The individual policies examined are listed in Table 2.

All policies were searched for key words including gender, sex, equity, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Where these key words appeared, the context of their inclusion in the policy was assessed and a score applied for each domain.

Policy Analysis

Table 2: Policies examined in each key area.

Key Areas	National or Equivalent Policy
Early Childhood	Pathways to Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children (SNAICC, 2015)
Schooling	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015)
Health	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023 + accompanying document Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2017 Report (Australian Government, 2013; Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, 2017)
Economic Participation	Indigenous Business Sector Strategy 2018 – 2028 (Australian Government, 2018b)
Healthy Homes	Remote House Strategy Review (Australian Government, 2017)
Safe Communities	Strong Families, Safe Kids: Family violence response and prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (SNAICC, NFVPLS, & NATSILS, 2017)
Governance and Leadership	National Congress of Australia's First Peoples Limited Constitution (King & Wood Mallesons, 2017)

Findings

The final ratings of each policy are listed in Table 3. Overall, the representation of gender, gendered experiences and gender equity across the policies was very limited; only three policies were rated as meeting a minimum standard regarding the inclusion of gender.

Across all policies, gender was described in binary terms, with statistics represented as either women or men. All reports failed to acknowledge gender diversity; none included any representations of LGBTQ Aboriginal people.

While specific gender roles were described within some of the policies (e.g. mothering) they weren't necessarily labelled as gender roles. Some reports did name gender, but failed to create a distinction between gender and sex. For example, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework* had a dedicated chapter to gender, but this chapter was concerned with biological sex rather than giving any context to why health differentials between men and women exist and are more than simply biological.

While the term gender equity was not used in any policy, the domestic violence and business policies acknowledged some aspects of gender equity. These were constrained to very specific but important areas including violence against women, gendered violence, wage gaps and women being under represented in the business sector. While this is an important step towards including gender in policy, this is perhaps not surprising as these issues have been at the forefront of mainstream gender equity movements.

Considerations of gender were absent from the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*. This is a noticeable absence given the acknowledged gender differences in participation and achievement in areas of study such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects. In addition, gender and gender differences were also absent in the *Pathways to Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, which focuses on strengthening families through trauma informed approaches and culturally safe family support. This is also a surprising omission, as experiences of trauma are gendered and it is highly likely that culturally safe approaches to healing may require different initiatives for men, women and gender diverse individuals.

Overall, Aboriginal involvement and consultation was made clearer in policies that were led by Aboriginal organisations. These reports also had more nuanced representation of gender, likely reflecting that the writers have more insight into Aboriginal lived experiences.

Policy Analysis

Table 3: Overall ratings of each policy using the adapted gender equity scorecard.

Policy	Scoring				
	Missing	Inadequate	Needs Improvement	Minimum Standard	Exceeds Minimum Standard
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework (2017)				X	
Indigenous Business Sector Strategy 2018 – 2028 (2018)				X	
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (2015)	X				
Pathways to Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (2015)	X				
Strong Families, Safe Kids Family Violence Response (2017)				X	
Remote Housing Review (2017)	X				
National Congress of Australia's First Peoples Ltd Constitution (2017)	X				

Summary

We found existing health and social policies concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not adequately consider gender-specific vulnerabilities, opportunities and consequences. Where gender issues were recognized, these were limited to biological differences, or specific areas such as family violence and wage gaps. Gender diversity was not acknowledged in any policies. These findings partly reflect a failure of existing policies to be developed with adequate consultation with Aboriginal communities, especially Aboriginal women and LGBTQ peoples.
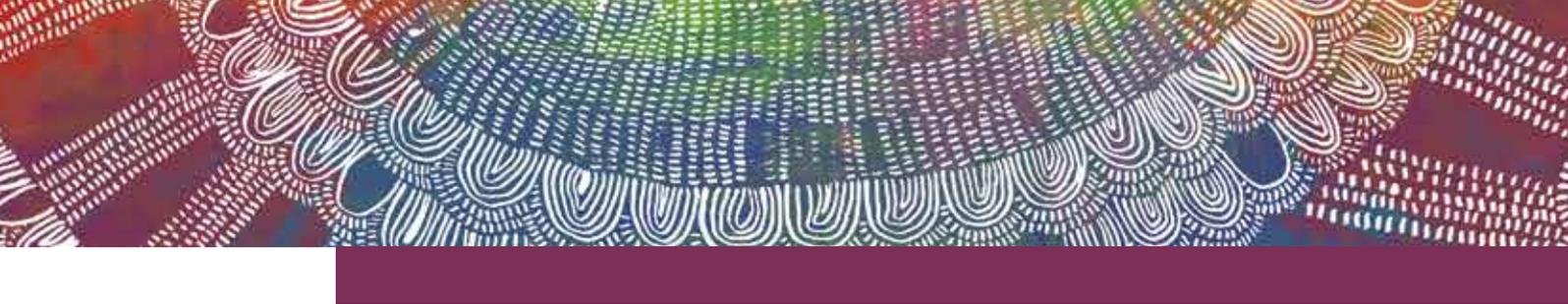
Research Design

The Aboriginal Gender Study was conducted from March 2017 to December 2018. The Lowitja Institute (project funder) identified the significance of understanding contemporary gender roles in an Aboriginal context and established a set of key research questions. Gender was prioritised based on consultations the Lowitja Institute undertook with their board and other key Aboriginal stakeholders. Following a competitive grant process, a partnership was developed between the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia (AHCSA), The University of Adelaide and South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) to address these questions. The study was designed to centralise Aboriginal leadership and decision-making and to situate decolonising research practices at the foundation. The following section will specify some of the key elements of the research design and the approach to decolonising the research team applied.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this project have been guided by the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) guidelines on Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities (NHMRC, 2018). In particular we have taken into consideration the six values that influence the guidelines: spirit and integrity, reciprocity, respect, equity, cultural continuity, and responsibility. More specific to South Australia, the project utilised the South Australian Aboriginal Health Accord principles developed by SAHMRI (2014) to develop a project specific set of values and principles. Developed in collaboration by the research team, the project specific values are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Agreed values underpinning the study design, implementation and feedback .

Safety and Support	Create a safe environment for participants and the research team, that respects cultural, physical, and emotional needs
	Ensure safety is maintained via appropriate support pillars (e.g. distress protocol, Employee Assistance Program and other services, group norms in yarning circles)
Benefit and Reciprocity	Provide opportunities to formally and informally develop skills and knowledge for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal team members and support staff
	Facilitate Aboriginal people to make informed decisions about being part of the research process and the outcomes, as participants, investigators and authors on project outputs
	Build the capacity of non-Aboriginal people to support Aboriginal methodologies, community engagement and feedback processes facilitating two-way exchange
Inclusiveness, Fairness and Equity	Value and respect all Aboriginal voices
	Acknowledge everyone's opinion is important
	Create an environment where everyone feels safe to speak up
Working Partnerships	Foster trust
	Work collaboratively
	Utilise strengths and enhance knowledge and experience gaps
	Promote open communication
	Promote shared decision making
Respect	Professional
	Cultural
	Community priority (space and time)
	Across age and gender
Diversity	Embrace and respect the diversity of Aboriginal communities
	Support diversity within the research team

Research Design

As an element unique to Aboriginal ways of working, this set of guiding principles and values were mutually generated with members of the research team. This process may not typically be done in mainstream research, yet in Aboriginal research it is a precedent that is established (together with group norms) in order for researchers to share ideas respectfully and to be accountable. For further considerations, see Laycock et al. (2011) discussion regarding values that guide Aboriginal research which align with this approach.

Benefit and Reciprocity was an important guiding principle in this project. For instance, in early discussions with the research sites, questions arose regarding what benefit the community might expect from their participation and support of the project.

The project has sought advice regarding specific areas of interest relevant to each community and factored these issues of importance into the research tools (i.e. yarning with young people, yarning about what and how young people are taught about gender).

A large component of this reciprocity is sharing the ownership of findings, by ensuring the community have the opportunity to evaluate and comment on the analysis and interpretation of findings. Additionally, providing findings to community, policy makers and stakeholders has been achieved through a process of knowledge sharing which includes: a website, hard copy publication and distribution of the final report, short community report and a one page evidence summary.

Capacity building was also incorporated into this project to promote the benefit of the research to Aboriginal people. Aboriginal members of the research team (Dominic and Courtney) were mentored to develop skills in critical appraisal of literature, rigorously analyse qualitative information, and synthesize complex information from a variety of sources. Both in turn supported non-Aboriginal team members to build skills in community engagement and develop expertise in yarning as a research tool. In addition, all of the Aboriginal staff and investigators on this project provided expertise in decolonising research

methods, building the capacity of non-Aboriginal investigators to undertake research that privileges an Aboriginal world view.

Respect and **Safety and Support** were also a strong focus of the early consultations regarding this project. Many discussions were had regarding strategies to promote cultural safety as well as considerations of the possible effects the research might have on participants including unintended consequences. This involves a responsibility and accountability to participants. A distress protocol was devised in consultation with community leaders who provided feedback and approval of the process. This protocol included how to detect distress in a participant, how to generate a safe space and the steps to following up with participants after the conclusion of the yarning circle. To reduce the burden on community organisations, participants were offered information regarding outsourced support providers. The distress protocol was updated for each community to ensure appropriateness. The distress protocol flow chart can be found in Appendix C.

In addition, **Safety and Support** was formally achieved by gaining ethics approval for this project, granted by the University of Adelaide Human Research Committee (Project ID #22485).

Methodology

Academic research has been problematised by many Aboriginal scholars as contributing to the ongoing colonisation and oppression of First Nation peoples, by perpetuating discourses of blame and deficit with little tangible benefit to the communities involved. However, as Wilson (2008) has emphasised, research does not have to be oppressive to be Aboriginal-focused. Tuhiwai Smith (2008) argues that research that is Indigenous is a combination of existing methodologies and practices that promote a decolonising agenda.

Further, Rigney (1999) argues that deeply entrenched colonial, oppressive, racially based epistemologies have been embedded into protocols and knowledge construction in research. As a well-respected scholar in this field, he suggests that the argument around ways of knowing and knowledge construction

should be revisited in an anticolonial framework which recognises that Aboriginal people think and interpret their worlds differently based on experiences, histories, cultures and values. In an effort to decolonise, Rigney (1999) suggests a liberation framework be applied to consider how knowledge is constructed and contested, and put Aboriginal people at the centre of Aboriginal research. He outlines three principles that inform Aboriginal research: (1) resistance as the emancipatory imperative (recognition of self-determination), (2) political integrity, and (3) privileging Aboriginal voices (centralising instead). This project was designed and conducted with these decolonising principles at the core.

Importance of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Setting

The engagement of Aboriginal community controlled health organisations has been crucial to the early design, planning and conduct of this project. The project was administered by AHCSA, which is the peak body for member based Aboriginal community controlled health services (ACCHS) in South Australia. AHCSA also has a leadership, 'watchdog', advocacy and sector support role, and a commitment to Aboriginal self-determination. It is the health voice for Aboriginal peoples across South Australia representing the expertise, needs and aspirations of Aboriginal communities at both state and national levels based on a holistic understanding of health. AHCSA is a collective term that includes both the membership and the Secretariat. The role of the Secretariat is to undertake the work that AHCSA directs them to do via its Board, on which all member organisations are represented (for further information see www.ahcsa.org.au/ahcsa-overview/our-organisation/).

The team of Project Investigators (PIs) included Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health professionals and researchers situated across AHCSA, the University of Adelaide and SAHMRI, to ensure engagement and decision making continued to be made by Aboriginal people. Having an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal research team demonstrates the significance of intercultural settings and the interplay between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous values (Brigg &

Curth-Bibb, 2017). According to Tuhiwai Smith (2008) 'bicultural partnerships' allow for culturally appropriate models to be taken on and practiced by non-Indigenous researchers, as well as supporting decolonising research and self-determination.

Community Engagement

The project utilised existing relationships between AHCSA and ACCHSs in South Australia to promote the project and invite involvement. Furthermore, the project remained tethered to community to ensure involvement in decisions around the design, conduct and findings of the project. The strategies through which community involvement in decision making were facilitated included:

- Representatives on the Aboriginal Advisory Group;

- Community input into the design of the questions/topics and safety protocols to be covered in the yarning circles and interviews; and

- The consensus workshops, which gave the opportunity for community representatives to be involved in decisions about the interpretation and dissemination of findings.

The project identified a number of potentially interested communities and engaged in early conversations and consultation. Through a process of extended engagement, which offered transparency in the steps and processes of the project, the research team were able to confirm support through the CEOs of two out of four Aboriginal community controlled health services initially approached, recognising that services may be overburdened with ongoing research or have competing priorities.

In the process of engaging with the community, the research team was cognisant of the need for flexibility and adaptability when working together with community. This included acknowledging the need for flexibility to work around competing priorities, community events and other factors that arose (i.e. Sorry Business, illness etc.). These considerations were factored into our research design and the values of respect, cultural safety and support informed this project as mentioned previously.

Research Design

Aboriginal Advisory Group

The project design also involved the formation of an Aboriginal Advisory Group. The purpose of this group was to provide advice and direction to the research team regarding consultations with community, development of research protocols and tools (including culturally appropriate strategies and language for discussing gender issues), conduct of the research, the interpretation of findings, the presentation and dissemination of findings and the development of a knowledge translation plan.

Members of the group were invited based on their professional and community expertise and diversity of life experiences. The group consisted of 13 members (9 women, 4 men) with backgrounds and expertise in sexual health, education, academia, social and emotional wellbeing, social work, Aboriginal health and human services and others. The group nominated a male and female co-chair to lead the meetings. The terms of reference and governance were outlined and agreed on by the group.

Reflexivity

Acknowledging what the researchers themselves bring to the research is an important element of qualitative research and is an important protocol in research - Aboriginal or not (Aveling, 2013). Known as reflexivity, the idea of understanding what the researchers themselves bring to the research and their influences is important. Contributing to a discussion about reflexivity allows for transparency in the relationship between power and the production of knowledge. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars have contributed widely to the discussion around researcher reflexivity and subjectivity. Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2013) has written about the importance of recognising partiality and subjectivity in the production of knowledge and illustrates how introductions to readers are a starting point to situate ourselves in relation to our cultural, material, historical, political and local positions:

The protocol for introducing one's self to other Indigenous people is to provide information about one's cultural location, so that connections can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established (Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

In acknowledging the significance of reflexivity, we will explain the structure and roles of the people involved in the research. As previously mentioned, the project was a partnership with three organisations and funded by the Lowitja Institute. The PIs were: Amanda Mitchell, Alice Rumbold, Gabriella Zizzo, Dominic Guerrera, Gokhan Ayturk, Odette Pearson, Vivienne Moore, and Karen Glover. The research team consisted of male and female co-researchers, Dominic Guerrera and Gabriella Zizzo. Also providing day to day support to the project was Courtney Hammond in the role of research assistant, and Alice Rumbold as one of the lead researchers. In the following section all share details about what they each bring to the project, to acknowledge that research cannot be viewed as objective and unbiased. Following the protocol used by Martin (2008: p.19) they provide narratives in first person, mimicking a conversational method of introducing ourselves in line with Aboriginal protocols.

Dominic Guerrera was the male researcher.

I am an Ngarrindjeri, Kaurna and Italian man, who was born and raised on Kaurna yerta. I grew up in an inner city suburb of Adelaide in Aboriginal housing, before moving to a semi-rural country town located on the northern outskirts of Adelaide. From an early age I was exposed to Aboriginal activism, women's rights and LGBTQ movements. This exposure has influenced me to think about gender equality, gender equity, LGBTQ rights and Aboriginal sovereignty from a young age and is something that has remained ingrained in my life. I have been working in Aboriginal health since 2004 with a focus on harm minimisation, health promotion and workforce development in the areas of sexual health, drug and alcohol and mental health.

I am currently undertaking a Masters, which I have been working on part-time. I am also a writer of essays, poetry and non-fiction. Human rights of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has always been the fuel for my work, studies and activism.

Gabriella Zizzo fulfilled the role of female researcher.

Also known as Gabbie, I am a non-Aboriginal woman with Italian heritage. I was born and currently reside on Kaurna yerta (metropolitan Adelaide). I grew up north of Adelaide in a farming and agricultural region surrounded by many other migrant families who arrived in Australia during the post-WWII period, living and working in similar circumstances. The influence of Italian culture meant the family I grew up in was intergenerational and closely tied to extended family and peers from the same area of southern Italy. Although Italian culture is typically patriarchal, my family was female dominated meaning I was surrounded by strong women who held the leadership and decision making power in the family. I believe that from an early age, my interactions in this environment formed the foundation of my interest in women and girls rights and eventually led me to complete a PhD in gender studies at the University of Adelaide in 2012. As an early career researcher I have worked on various projects including a large, mixed-methods project about child wellbeing, as well as various gender, health and aged care related projects.

As a cadet research assistant, Courtney Hammond was also involved in a significant component of the data collection and analysis.

I am an Eastern Arrernte/Tanganekald young woman with ties to Country in the lower South East of South Australia and Central Australia. Growing up I have been surrounded by incredible, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who have educated and influenced me in knowing my culture and encouraged me to stand up for Aboriginal rights in my community. I am grateful for the constant support I receive and the opportunities that have been given to me. I am very proud of both my Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage and I am incredibly proud of all the work of my family before me.

I am currently studying a Bachelor of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of Adelaide where I am fortunate enough to work as a research assistant in the Medical School. My contributions to this project have enabled me to develop countless new skills and meet incredible people. My role has also allowed me to experience research first hand where I have been able to visit communities and speak directly with participants. This study has been incredibly enriching and fulfilling to me, and I am grateful to have been a part of it. In the future I hope to continue working within the Aboriginal community, working to benefit people's lives either through the health services or via research.

As the research team, Dominic, Gabbie and Courtney, were responsible for conducting key tasks including: ethics application, tool development, generation of Aboriginal Advisory Group group, literature review, policy analysis, community engagement, data collection, analysis and reporting of findings. All three were supported by Alice Rumbold, who assisted with the implementation of the study, and synthesis of findings.

I am a non-Aboriginal woman, born and raised in Adelaide, and I am now raising my two children on Kaurna yerta. From as early as I can remember, I have had mentoring and support from strong women, beginning with my mother and grandmothers, and continuing throughout my studies and professional life. This combined with a passion for social justice and social determinants of health has led me to a career in research that aims to reorientate health resources, systems and policies around the needs of women at most risk of experiencing poor health. Over the course of my career I have had the opportunity to work with many strong Aboriginal women and men, who have so generously shared their expertise and taught me new ways of researching and communicating. I am still learning. I am currently an Associate Professor within the Robinson Research Institute at the University of Adelaide.

Research Design

Research Tools: Yarning

Yarning as an Aboriginal way of conveying information is often used as a way of teaching and involving both the learning and listening of stories. Yarning relies on certain aspects including relationships, language protocols and an understanding of each contributor's worldview. Yarning is based on the ways in which knowledge is produced and shared, allowing for the story-teller to maintain autonomy and control, whilst the recipient is also being held responsible and accountable (Aveling, 2013; Dean, 2010; Walker, Fredericks, Mills, & Anderson, 2014). Responsibility and respect are an important aspect of yarning, which is characterized by Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) as mutual and reciprocal, key aspects that align with this project's values, as outlined previously.

According to Walker et al. (2014), providing a single and precise definition of yarning is difficult because it is dependent on context; yarning can form the structure of everyday conversation as well as have more specific use as a research method (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). However, as a methodology, yarning should not be regarded as another name for an interview or focus group but as a concept and a culturally appropriate way of communicating (Aveling, 2013).

In a research context, yarning is widely used and written about by Aboriginal scholars, however it is often critiqued by non-Aboriginal scholars as lacking rigor or credibility. However, Walker et al. (2014) argue that is undeniably a culturally appropriate methodology, suggesting that critiques are a way of invalidating and disregarding Aboriginal knowledges and ways of doing and being in the world. They contend that in a research setting, yarning is a strategy to create space to communicate from local terms of reference. In this project, we have engaged yarning as a way of decolonising mainstream research.

One of the key strengths of yarning is the way it can be flexible and adaptable to community and personal contexts. This has been important in this project, in order to capture diversity in the South Australian community. To elaborate, we engaged in different yarning styles for men and women and found that older women engaged in more open yarning that was not episodic but relied on stories that bounced off each other. On the other hand, the younger participants tended to do less storytelling and adopted a more pragmatic approach. This aligns with Dean's (2010) summation, where she argues that yarning is influenced by the experiences and knowledge of participants as well as their relationships.

In this project, the yarning circles began with a process of establishing 'group norms' in order to create a safe and trusting space where participants felt comfortable sharing their stories. An aspect of the establishment of 'group norms' was the reminder that all information and discussions in the yarning circles remained confidential and that all stories would be depersonalised in the reporting of findings. All participants were also asked to sign a consent form indicating that they had been informed of the details of the project and the research processes that their narratives would be involved in. Importantly, a key aspect of establishing group norms was attempting to shift power balances, which was done by locating the expertise with the community and the people in the room, reminding them that we understood that as researchers, we cannot and do not claim to be experts in their lives. Before the yarning began, there was a moment of introductions in which the researchers and all the participants familiarised themselves with each other. The researchers introduced themselves stating their background, family and why they were interested in the research.

A key indicator that trust and rapport had been built with participants and community was allowing the researchers to handle and record their stories. The participants were very generous and provided much insight into their lives during the yarning circles, but the responsibility of caring and truthfully representing their stories was not lost on the researchers. Trust, as Tuhiwai Smith (2008) argues is something that ought to be thought of as 'dynamic and ongoing'. In order to

develop and maintain trust in the community the researchers kept the communities concerns in mind, and managed expectations by ensuring that the things that were offered were fulfilled, particularly not overpromising the benefits of the research, revisiting for consensus and the delivery of a jargon-free report for community members.

Data Collection and Analysis

As advised by the PIs and the Aboriginal Advisory Group, and confirmed by the communities involved in the research, the project team recruited groups of men and women for separate yarning circles. The groups were clustered around an area of similarity: comparable age, occupation, shared status as mothers, grandmothers or as LGBTQ. Participant's ages ranged from 17 to 70+. However, it is worth noting that it is difficult to categorise yarning circles by age groups as there were some cross over of young people in the groups with older people. We have flagged findings where perspectives were obvious across age differences, however in many cases we cannot definitively say that age had a significant impact on findings. Participant excerpts were identified by gendered groups and were flagged if there were differences across regional or metropolitan groups. For the most part, minimal demographic information has been provided to prevent participants being identified.

For the description of participants, see Appendix D.

Yarning groups were conducted in various locations in South Australia, between November 2017 and April 2018. As the table in the Appendix illustrates, 13 yarning groups were conducted which included 28 women and 20 men and one individual interview with a woman, with 49 participants in total. Recruitment was undertaken by utilising the networks of the local Aboriginal community controlled health organisations, including advertising by word of mouth and snowball sampling. Where possible, participants were invited to participate by Dominic and/or Gabbie. All effort was made to recruit equivalent numbers of men and women, but due to the

short project timelines and extended community engagement the project team were not able to balance the numbers by the end of the data collection phase.

The two full-time co-researchers, Dominic and Gabbie, led the facilitation of the male and female yarning circles, respectively. Dependent on availability, other project members were also present and involved in the workshops (as an exercise in skill development for more inexperienced researchers). All yarning groups were audio recorded and transcribed with the consent of the participants. Yarning circles varied from under an hour to up to two hours depending on the size of the group and the dynamic in the room (i.e. if the participants already had existing relationships or not). Participants were reimbursed for their time.

One of the yarning circles held was concluded early, as the facilitator believed there to be misunderstanding by the participants regarding the intention of the meeting. Data collected in this yarning circle were not included in the analysis.

Yarning circles were conducted in spaces that were familiar to the participants including the AHCSA offices, other workplaces, participant's homes, over the phone or in community spaces. The researchers were adaptive and flexible to participants' needs which was an important factor in building trust and maintaining respectful relationships (e.g. participants were not discouraged from bringing their children to the yarning groups). Additionally, due to geographical constraints, one participant was interviewed over the phone.

Whilst yarning circles are a conversational method of data collection, prompts were used to ensure the yarning retained the focus on gender. The prompts used in the yarning circles were developed in collaboration with the research team, the PIs and the Aboriginal Advisory Group. These questions were pilot tested with a group of Aboriginal male and female employees at AHCSA.

Research Design

Data analysis was a deductive process guided by an a priori framework developed around the specific research questions. The process of analysis involved a step-by-step process as guided by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) and Braun and Clarke (2006). The process began immediately following yarning circles as researchers recorded field notes of initial thoughts and highlights of the session. After audio recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service, the research team (principally Dominic, Gabbie and Courtney) began a process of immersion and familiarisation that involved active and repeated reading of the transcripts, and the subsequent development of initial codes. The codes were then organised into the common themes as guided by the research questions. At this point the solo exercise became collaborative and the research team came together to review and test codes. Unintentionally, this process of reviewing and testing codes involved a process of extended and directed yarning, culminating in the agreement of our codes and interpretation through a process of collective analysis. This collaborative 'yarning' style of analysis offered us a method to test and re-test our themes and interpretations, allowing for detailed and rich analysis as the Aboriginal voice was centralised as part of the process.

Consensus workshops were also conducted in the three research sites. This offered the research team opportunities to confirm or further explore certain research findings, interpretations and language. The research team conducted four feedback sessions in June 2018, with the input of 23 people (17 women and 6 men).

Cultural and Geographical Context

The research was conducted in three sites across South Australia. To ensure diversity among participants these locations included metropolitan, river and coastal areas.

Site 1: Adelaide (Metropolitan)

Adelaide is the fifth largest city within Australia and the capital city of the state of South Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The metropolitan sprawl stretches from the northern suburb of Gawler to Aldinga in the south, while nestled between the Adelaide hills and Spencer Gulf and is home to a population of over 1.3 million people. It largely sits within the traditional lands of the Kaurna people, while also spilling over into neighbouring nations. Like most Aboriginal groups across Australia, Kaurna people were subject to mass killings, dispossession, and loss of culture. Through strength and determination, Kaurna language and culture has been rejuvenated through language lessons, performing dance and song groups and the returning of sites back to Kaurna language names.

Adelaide is home to a large portion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population within South Australia and is made up of a variety of different Aboriginal groups from across the continent. The community is serviced by several Aboriginal organisations including Nunkuwarrin Yunti, Aboriginal Sobriety Group, AHCSA, Tauondi College and Muna Paiendi. Adelaide has a rich history of Aboriginal civil rights movements, including being the first place to fly the Aboriginal flag in an official capacity at Tarndanyangga.

AHCSA offices are located on Kaurna yerta which has been the site for the planning and design of the research.

Site 2: Port Lincoln (Coastal)

Port Lincoln is a seaside town situated on the Eyre Peninsula, the traditional lands of the Barngarla people. The town's economy is built on farming and fishing and is also a popular tourist spot. Port Lincoln has a prominent Aboriginal community, made up of local family groups, as well as having

ties to surrounding areas like Koonibba, Ceduna and parts of Western Australia. At the 2016 Census, the Aboriginal population was reported to be just over 720, making up approximately 5% of the total community population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016a).

Port Lincoln is a well-resourced community and the Aboriginal community is serviced by Aboriginal organisations, including the Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Service (PLAHS) and the Port Lincoln Aboriginal Community Council Inc. (PLACC) and is home to the well-known Mallee Park Football Club which has a rich history of Aboriginal football success.

Site 3: Murray Bridge (River)

Murray Bridge is a regional town located along the banks of the Murray River, 76 kilometres from Adelaide. The town sits on the land of the traditional owners of Ngarrindjeri nation who refer to the area as Pomberuk. The town's population is just over 14,500 people, with 800 people (5.5%) identifying as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016b). Its economy is mostly made up of farming and tourism, the river being a big draw card for city people to come and holiday and enjoy.

The local Aboriginal community is mostly made up of Ngarrindjeri descendants and family groups, as well as non-Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal people residing in the area. Moorundi is the newly opened ACCHS that provides primary health care to Murray Bridge and also surrounding areas such as Tailem Bend, Meningie, Raukkan, Victor Harbor, Goolwa, Kangaroo Island and the Riverland region. Other Aboriginal services include Ninkowar Inc. and Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority - Empowered Communities, amongst others.

Moorundi has a vibrant community engagement and social and emotional wellbeing team where they are working at linking health with culture by invigorating language.

Findings

The following section will provide descriptive detail of the key themes arising in the yarning circles. The key themes include: understanding gender, culture and gender, learning gender, gender roles and expectations, gendered experiences of connections and resilience and gender equity. This includes a focus on how Aboriginal and Western influences provide ways for gender roles to be collectively defined, how gender is expressed, how gender informs social norms, obligations and expected behaviours and how these factors are managed by individuals and groups.

Understanding Gender

Discussions in the yarning circles revealed that what is considered traditional Aboriginal roles and Western, patriarchal roles, have fused, with both influences informing contemporary understandings of gender in Aboriginal communities.

Participants provided personal and broad definitions of gender. This was important as it presented preliminary ideas around how gender has impacted the participants' lives and gave insight into whether they understood gender to be socially and culturally defined. Within the yarning groups there was a variety of sex-based understandings of gender as well as an understanding of the complexity of gender as a social construct. Sex or biological based understandings of gender were mentioned as "*Different bodies, different parts*" (Participant 41: Men's Group), and typically explained as a binary e.g. "*Female, male; boy, girl; opposites*" (Participant 16: Women's Group) or in the context of mind/body dualisms:

PARTICIPANT 42: MEN'S GROUP
And males like to be dominant with their physique, they like to project that they're more dominant, whereas girls use the head to be more dominant when they try to use their words and be a bit more articulate with their dominance, where males just like to project it with their presence and the way they look.

Whilst gender was often described as a binary, there were some participants who indicated that they had an awareness of the way gender can be dynamic. Knowledge and language around gender

as socially constructed (and therefore fluid) often arose in discussions around transgendered people known to the community. For instance, the Tiwi Island Sistergirls were often cited as examples of the diversity of gender identities. In general, older women spoke about gender in relation to the way individuals dress and speak, that is, the embodiment of gender. Whereas younger women often spoke of gender and its link to identity, the internal sense of self as masculine or feminine. The exchange below exemplifies some of the younger participant's understandings of gender fluidity:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 47
If you want to be feminine, if you want to be masculine, whatever you want to be, even if you were born female or male. That's nothing […] You know, it doesn't necessarily match your mind and your – doesn't necessarily match what you're born as.

PARTICIPANT 48
I don't really – I grew up in a little like small country town and haven't had much exposure to, yeah, broader thinking.

PARTICIPANT 47
But, still, you know, if you're not opposed to it, your mind [is] more open than what you would already…

PARTICIPANT 48
Yeah, like I don't disagree, but like, I'm not educated deeply on the subject.

PARTICIPANT 46
I'm not either.

FACILITATOR
Like, if you've never had to think about it…

PARTICIPANT 47
Yeah, or never had to feel like you're trapped in someone else's body, whatever […] But I think, in the Aboriginal communities, there's lots of, like…

PARTICIPANT 46
Mixed views.

PARTICIPANT 47
Yeah, yeah. There's lots of Sistergirls, now, like men who want to change to women. There's a lot. I don't know how much support there is out there for them, but…

FACILITATOR
Well, like in Tiwi.

PARTICIPANT 47
Yeah, Tiwi, there were heaps, hey?

As this excerpt indicates, although these younger women did not explicitly state that gender is socially constructed, they did have a clear understanding of how gender as a concept is not necessary associated with physical attributes. Moreover, this excerpt also suggests that there may be less nuanced understandings in locations where there is a lack of diversity or visibility of transgender or non-binary people.

In the LGBTQ groups, the complexity of gender as a social construct was defined by power differentials in relation to identity. For example, one male participant explained that, "*[Gender is] the balance between power, in regards to males and females,*" (Participant 44: LGBTQ Men's Group). For some participants, power was associated with the ways they defined gender due to the impact that gender (and gender inequality) has had on their lives. Those who reported experiences of being restricted and constrained by their gender were able to problematise ideas of gender as fixed or a binary, reflecting deeper understandings of gender. Complexities were particularly prevalent in the discussions with LGBTQ women, as this excerpt highlights one participant reflected on the ways binary categories impacted her gender expression growing up:

LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

FACILITATOR
[…] What words come to your mind when you think about the word gender?

PARTICIPANT 37
Constraint. Categorisation.

PARTICIPANT 38
Restrictions. Sometimes impression, however male or female. Categories. Meant to be. Profile.

PARTICIPANT 39
Yes, entitlement. Less than. What you're expected and your responsibilities, in general man/woman.

PARTICIPANT 38
Yes and girl/boy as well so age.

FACILITATOR
So you said girl/boy. What do you mean by in terms of age and girl and boy? Do you think that gender only applies to young people or is it something that's across all age groups?

PARTICIPANT 38
It's across all age groups. It's the journey of girl versus boy. I'm just being very commercial or

goonya [white fella] when I say that. So there's sometimes, from memory and the pressure was always polarised of what boys can do and what girls can do and why can't girls ride skateboards and all that kind of stuff. I'm starting to think about what gender stuff and when I was a little kid. I was very skilled at being physical like sport and all that kind of stuff. But that restricted me because I was a girl.

Experiences such as these illustrate how there is a diversity of views around gender as a concept, with female participants generally demonstrating more language or awareness around the complexities of gender as a social construct. Whether the diversity of views is present in other communities is unclear and suggests that further research should be considered to provide a more definitive outline of how gender is understood across age groups and communities.

Culture and Gender

Culture was a consistent theme throughout all discussions around gender, emphasising how it is integral to the experiences and lives of Aboriginal peoples. Culture is the major thread that holds communities together and connected to land and is the foundation of Aboriginal identity. Men and women are equally seen as carriers of culture and cultural knowledge, but they often did so in different domains and practices. For example, the women in one community discussed their activities to foster language revival and use, but the men engaged in other things like teaching younger boys how to connect with the land through camps and other activities.

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 1
Well, yeah, it would depend, like I still have the culture, like I'll teach the language and stuff, but I'm thinking more of the man things like artefacts and things like that, yeah.

FACILITATOR
So the material culture.

PARTICIPANT 1
Hunting and stuff.

PARTICIPANT 6
Yeah, like didgeridoo, all of the things women can't do, well, in that way.

PARTICIPANT 1
In the cultural way.

Findings

These discussions indicate how Aboriginal men and women draw strength from various, gendered cultural activities. In particular, men were cited as benefiting from cultural activities that connect them with the land and with other men:

PARTICIPANT 41: MEN'S GROUP

Yeah playing footy, but it's just trying to do these things that are culturally appropriate as well you know what I mean. Men would be taking their kids down camping and that and telling them stories, you know we used to come here when we were kids. You know what I mean, they're expressing a lot of emotion and feeling and bringing back memories and that, which is one thing I've probably noticed more is that's sort of how I put Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women, the way they express it.

Participants also spoke of the importance of teaching the culture to the younger generations and using traditional practices to strengthen themselves. This young man explains the importance of sharing cultural knowledge and how the older generations are involved in that:

PARTICIPANT 7: MEN'S GROUP

Just can ask [Elders] anything or get help from them. But also we expect a lot from them I guess. Keep passing on the culture and stories from what was before us and just carrying that legacy of what it means to be who we are I guess back in their days to now. Telling your kids and reminding them how important it is to keep that kind of culture alive. Us as Aboriginal men and women see that kind of as a role of the older people like teachers. They're our teachers I guess. Getting deep. But yes, I just see them as our teachers I guess.

This was reiterated by female participants who acknowledged the importance of young people partaking in cultural activities:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 32

And our young fellas here, some of our young fellas still go out hunting. Come back with kangaroos and wombats, and that's what makes them strong.

PARTICIPANT 33

And holding onto that culture, and that traditions and stuff. Still practicing all of that stuff.

PARTICIPANT 33

[...] because they have the opportunity to go back out bush. They find themselves. They do the cultural stuff.

Female participants spoke of taking up cultural responsibilities, not just to fulfil cultural obligations for themselves but also for the benefit of their families. In the quote below, a participant speaks of her commitment to a cultural ceremony to help her brother, despite threats of being 'promised' in an arranged marriage:

PARTICIPANT 39: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

At the time yes I was [in my twenties]. I was considered the single sister so my brother asked me. Yes I did - this time I was living [location] so I went out and did the camp stuff, did women's stuff but I was single and I was promised, promised off to the older man. But I became friends with him but because the acceptance of my sexuality from - I came out [in my twenties].

As these discussions exemplify, knowing your culture, knowing your place in culture, and taking up your responsibility to carry that knowledge forward is an important aspect of Aboriginal identity in both gendered and non-gendered ways.

Gendered Identities

In an attempt to understand how gender roles are apparent in the community, as well as how gender impacts the portrayal of a person, participants were asked about the strengths of men and women in the community. Specifically participants were asked what makes an Aboriginal man and an Aboriginal woman strong, independently of each other.

An Aboriginal man was presented to be the carrier of culture, both by the men and the women. The strengths of the men lay in their knowledge of their culture and their identity, as well as the ability to share this knowledge with the other people in the community. The quote below presents the importance of knowing one's culture and keeping the culture alive.

PARTICIPANT 42: MEN'S GROUP

[A strong Aboriginal man is] probably a leader, you know what I mean? Someone that's what [name] was saying, proud of their culture, but not only that, when they have a family, teach them the right ways, teaching their culture, keep that culture and heritage stronger than your blood line. Some of the ways to keep that close to their heart, something that they

cherish and treasure. Like black fellas our culture, they try to take it away. It's only very little now you see Elders or Elders that are still living that kind of pass it on.

Whilst the quote portrays that in some communities men are seen as the leaders, in other participant groups, women were seen as the overarching leaders in the community. Strong men were also portrayed as a good father and a hard worker. They were the provider for the family, "*not only financially, but that support as well being able to give it and take sometimes the woman's burden as well.*" (Participant 6: Women's Group).

Males described strengths in their upbringing of children, not only their own but all the children in the community, and both males and females reiterated the importance of sharing their knowledge. The importance of sharing and supporting other people through teaching was important not only for the children but also in a peer setting between men. This is articulated in the quote below:

MEN'S GROUP

FACILITATOR
What are the qualities that you would see in a man that you would consider strong?

PARTICIPANT 29
Confidence.

FACILITATOR
What would he have confidence in?

PARTICIPANT 28
Education, everything, himself, just [inaudible]

PARTICIPANT 31
Good work ethic.

PARTICIPANT 28
Someone there for their kids too, you know, like you'd see out in the community, you know. A father there for their partner and kids and stuff. You see it and then you don't see it [inaudible] out there. As a role model, you're after someone that's not so much older, it's just the knowledge that he knows and he's got a [inaudible] and willing to stand up for his people, you know. Everybody [inaudible] doesn't just sit there. A role model I see needs to be – they'll take you in and teach you as well and show you the ropes and stuff.

Much like the discussions surrounding strong Aboriginal men, participants expressed that it was important for an Aboriginal woman to know her own identity, with another female saying that, "*[a strong Aboriginal woman] would know who she is, that strong black woman,*" (Participant 39; LGBTQ Women's Group). It is also her being, "*Her voice, her warmth,*" (Participant 38: LGBTQ Women's Group). She is a part of her family and her community. A woman was also identified as strong when she was an influential member of her family, as discussed here:

PARTICIPANT 2: WOMEN'S GROUP
Really family based. Everyone I know that's a strong Aboriginal woman is really family based.

A strong Aboriginal woman was cited as an activist in the community who encourages and supports others to do the same. The below quote demonstrates that women often draw strength by doing this:

WOMEN'S GROUP

FACILITATOR
How do you empower yourself?

PARTICIPANT 3
Through my experience it's advocating, not only for myself but for people, for families, to make a change, to make it a positive change so you're leaving something behind. Like you were talking about the pathways. Easier for the next person that steps in the role. It's there. Like we work on the school community partnerships agreement. It seems so old now because there's so many new things that we're doing, but it's by listening, by talking and having those conversations of how we can improve our lives, and especially our kids' lives for the future.

Many of the female participants were self-reflective in their answers and referred to their own individual struggles throughout their life. Through this it was identified that a strong woman will "*Get up every day and does it again despite the adversity and that could be the violence and the mental trips that people give that person on an everyday basis*" (Participant 38: LGBTQ Women's Group). This suggests resilience is a significant component of women's strengths (and is discussed in further depth in the section titled, gendered experiences of connections and resilience on page 49).

Findings

Having a role model to look up to was recognised as important across all age groups. It was also apparent that role models were generally gendered, with young women naming older women and young men naming older men, as mentioned above. Whilst not all cultural responsibilities are gendered, some are and this is reflected in the choice of role models. This male participant acknowledges the importance of early role models:

PARTICIPANT 25: MEN'S GROUP

You've got to have that one or two rocks in your life that you can look up to as a younger fella. It programs you early.

Role models are pillars of strength within the community, playing a vital role of keeping cultural knowledge alive whilst also enacting reciprocity by passing knowledge onto younger generations.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity was discussed broadly in all groups as an important aspect of the strength of Aboriginal communities. For Aboriginal men and women, reciprocity was about sharing what you have, your resources, knowledge and receiving this from others. The way LGBTQ participants spoke about reciprocity was particularly powerful because it was something they engaged with, even when they encountered isolation and exclusion from community at times:

PARTICIPANT 39: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

I was always threatened to actually be married off. I reckon if that did happen I'd probably be sitting down with 10 kids now and that's reality. But you kind of fight back. I've had that many battles. But yes, that played a big thing, acceptance of my relationships. Then I did the good thing and got my brother through lore and then to be threatened with – so yes that's really interesting.

Offering care to your network was one specific way that participants talked about the cultural responsibilities of reciprocity. All participants spoke about taking on roles as carers for other community members: particularly for children and Elders which came about through their professional and personal connections:

PARTICIPANT 45: LGBTQ MEN'S GROUP

To be honest I really feel like Aunty [name] she was the oldest [local Aboriginal] [language word] left; [language word] meaning woman. You know, she's doing it now because she's [80+] years old and even that in itself is a huge achievement. She still catches the bus. She's up with the birds in the morning, catches the bus to town every day. She walks around, you know, every day, you know, just about every day we're together. I love her as a grandmother just about, you know. I just have this utmost respect for her and, you know, I regard her, yeah, kind of like a grandmother now. I take care of her. I make sure she's safe. I make sure she's all right. But even just having her with me almost day by day, you know, it's doing something to me inside. I feel like, you know, her strength is sort of transferring over to me, especially with everything that I've been through...

Participants also discussed the importance of reciprocity in the community, divulging that strong Aboriginal people are those who respect their duty to give back to the community and do something that will contribute to the lives of other Aboriginal people. It became apparent through numerous yarning circles that working in a community health service is highly respected.

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 28

I just wanted a clean job and I've been in the building industry for about 15, 14 years and I just wanted a clean job. Once I got my break here [at the health service], it just opened up other doors in what I want to do and this is the kind of life and role that I want to grow up as, a health worker or something to do with community anyway. I might move away from here but go into another role somewhere else in the same sort of area.

FACILITATOR

So are there any influences or role models you have in this career or in this industry?

PARTICIPANT 28

Not really. I just want to know everything just to better myself, community and everybody else that needs it, you know, that support.

Reciprocity in the community also came in the form of teaching and guiding, many of the male participants looked up to their football coaches and the males in their life that took the time to teach them.

Findings from this study suggest that working for community organisations that enabled people to 'give back' was a commitment that both Aboriginal men and women reflected on as important. Working in Aboriginal health and human services meant that individuals were working with and for their own people, an important component of their work and cultural obligations of reciprocity, exemplified by this female participant:

PARTICIPANT 32: WOMEN'S GROUP

And I lived up in the [area], Western Australia, for about 20-odd years; then, yeah, all the jobs around there, working as a health worker. I always said in my interviews that one day I want to come back and work in my community, for my people. And I am. Back now for [number of] years, and I'm working in my Aboriginal organisation, health, and working for my local people.

The concept of reciprocity and ways of giving back to community was also explained through the way Aboriginal people commit to roles on boards, committees and advisory groups in an effort to contribute to their communities. However, the take up of these positions is gendered, reflecting both gendered stereotypes and power differentials, which will be explored further in later sections of this report.

Learning Gender

Parents, community members and peers were reported as having the strongest influence over children and young people when learning about gender roles and norms. Mostly, the gender roles that were reinforced revolved around Western patriarchal ideals of masculinity and femininity, but were also informed by traditional Aboriginal cultural norms. To elaborate, participants noted that boys and girls shared some aspects of gender that aligned with Aboriginal values, around cultural values regarding how a person acts in the community and around Elders, whilst also experiencing Western expectations in terms of clothing and hobbies. As this LGBTQ participant explained, the policing of gender by parents and community was an important way in which gender norms were reinforced for her:

PARTICIPANT 40: LGBTQ WOMAN

From parents and community members as a whole. If they see someone wearing clothing of the opposite gender then they'll step up and think they're going to say something. I remember me, growing up in community, I used to run around the playground with high heels and any community members, not necessarily your mother or father, it would be just the community members saying "that's girls clothes or shoes, what are you wearing that for. Take it off now". And just that being said to you, I'm just thinking for me, it does really take you back into your shell and then you just I guess really withdraw from people because like me, growing up I'm thinking all these mob telling me that it's wrong so it must be wrong. So I've got to, I guess be proper for society.

As this narrative demonstrates, gendered expectations were often policed through punishment (shame job) and pressure to conform. Policing of gender norms became evident when participants reported cases where people stepped outside of gender norms or rejected them. Controlling the way young people align with gender norms was illustrated through the ways that young men were pressured to play sports:

PARTICIPANT 40: LGBTQ WOMAN

Well, I'll go back to when I - because I never used to play football. My dad used to annoy me to play football all the time. I've only ever played it once and it was really uncomfortable and really awkward for me to do it and so he was always - because of always being part of a football team and being part of something bigger you'd always get - I guess they'd team up on you, picking on kids that are not I guess involved in that or not connected with their team. In saying that, I guess the majority of the whole town, everyone's into football here. You have very rarely mob that are not.

For the participant above, the blurring or disruption of gender roles resulted in being pressured to conform, or risk facing isolation. This link between conforming and acceptance meant that failure to meet community standards threatened to disrupt social connections. This has important implications for the way connections are fostered in Aboriginal communities, which will be discussed in the following section.

Findings

African American hip hop and rap music culture were often cited as having a significant influence on Aboriginal youth. Participants spoke about young people connecting with African American hip hop/rap and 'gangster' identities. The gender roles in hip hop and rap were also played out amongst Aboriginal youth, as a female participant points out in the quote below:

PARTICIPANT 40: LGBTQ WOMAN

Definitely. The music industry is probably one of the biggest influences on young people with these gangsters, everyone wants to be gangster rap men and the girls want to dress like the pop ladies and stuff like that. Of course, I'd say they're a big influence too.

In identifying with and emulating the African American hip hop and gangster cultures, young people are forming networks of solidarity and shared experiences. However, as some of the older women identified, this allegiance with hip hop and gangster culture could further marginalise young men:

PARTICIPANT 15: WOMEN'S GROUP

So I kind of, like, I always used to get wild when I was - especially when I was working with young people; "What do you want to be black American for? You're Aboriginal. You know, you fellas are warriors," and, you know, I did try and empower them like that. But if that's all they're seeing on the media and successful black people well, that's what they're going to want to be, you know. So it's a national problem also…. that these Aboriginal kids feel more comfortable to express themselves as an African American rather than to express themselves and be accepted to be an Aboriginal kid. So - and this is something that our community can't fix because it's a national – it's at a government level…

Participants also felt the gendered expectations and restrictions placed on them during extracurricular activities. Participating in the local sporting clubs was acknowledged as an important part of being a member of the community and feeling accepted, however it is deeply embedded with gender stereotypes as the quote below explores:

PARTICIPANT 40: LGBTQ WOMAN

In my community right now it would be sporting clubs and football clubs and netball clubs. They would be I guess the main influences on gender roles and gender things. Netball is for girls, football is for boys. So I guess that and the church would be probably another one that would be a big influence. There's the gender roles and stuff like that between that's for men and this is for women. The church and sporting clubs.

As the participant informs, children are also subject to gender roles from an early age in the church. Whilst both boys and girls are encouraged to participate in the church's duties, it is expected that a male is always leading and permitting the women to participate. In addition, as the participant below explores, there is also a gendered restriction on clothing, disregarding the fact that there are other influences such as poverty affecting the children simultaneously:

PARTICIPANT 37: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

So my mum became a leader in the church. I was a youth leader at [name of church] for a while when I was a teenager. But even then it was still just the male like the patriarchal societies inside churches and communities where - yes I'm trying to think. Even down to being told how to dress and stuff in church as well. I think somebody wore leggings as pants one day and she got told to put on different pants because she was wearing leggings. I was just hell poor when I was young so it's just the fact - sorry I'm diverting but even down to poverty that really affects how I think as women - we're seen because obviously I've been, what if she couldn't afford actual pants? Do you know what I mean? They would never ask a guy to cover up his legs when he's wearing shorts.

The realities of living in poverty were also cited as an important influence on expression of gender:

PARTICIPANT 37: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

[…] We grew up so poor and I was the youngest of [the family]. I'm still the youngest of [the family]. We always, my sister and I always wore our brothers clothes. Always. We always wore bicycle shorts and t-shirts and that's just because we didn't have money…

These quotes illustrate that these key sources of influence can have both an enabling and constraining impact on the lives of children and young people, particularly because they often produce contradictory notions of acceptable gender norms and expectations.

Gendered Roles and Expectations

Parenting/Nurturing

Men's and women's roles around nurturing children formed a significant component of gendered identity and the ways in which people articulated gender roles. Women often discussed their mothering as an important aspect of their womanhood, however, nurturing or the 'growing up of kids' was not always linked to biological parenting. For most women, mothering often extended beyond their own children to the children of their wider kinship group including the children of their siblings, grandchildren or other children in the community. There was an important and valued place for people (women in particular) who did not directly have their own children to fulfil the role of nurturer. For example, women talked about their responsibilities for their nieces and nephews in what can be best described as mother-aunty roles:

PARTICIPANT 39: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP
With that I keep telling - I get my nieces and nephews - they all want to come to my fucking house because I always [inaudible] and they come. In school holidays we had eight. We're talking about 20 year olds down to fucking 13 year olds. I'm [inaudible] the kids take over. So when they're in my space they're allowed to have that… […] They're comfortable. They're allowed to talk […] so they get everything when they come […] But what I get - and I make sure is, I tell them I love them every time I see them and I love them when I leave, love them when they're gone and that they're always here and they're always safe at my house. They forever – we've got one that's booked our spare room and has said "I'll be here on the weekend." He's at [place name] but on the weekend he's coming to do his room up. […] That's how I live. My kids - my partner's children. It's open to kids.

This narrative emphasises how the role of mother is available to this female participant regardless of whether she had her own biological children. The role of father-uncle was also a role available and valued in men who did not have their own children, for example:

PARTICIPANT 35: WOMEN'S GROUP
My dad, he had a little brother but we lost him from cancer, not long ago. When my dad left, he [uncle] still stayed with us […] he was practically like my best friend and I was so close with him. He was like another dad to me. […] He used to smoke a lot, and drink a lot, but he had no children of his own, so he kind of looked down on us, like [my sister] and I. We were really close with him. I think we lost him in [year], from cancer. So, yeah, I don't know, I'm still getting through it, you know?

As this quote illustrates, the ways that men nurtured emphasised their responsibilities to teach and guide their children and other young people they were connected to. Men's roles as nurturers also included a protector and provider element.

Work Ethic and Provider Role

Men and women described their work ethic as a significant component of their gendered identity, often connected to the legacy their parents bestowed, particularly their same-gender parent. Some female participants talked about how their mother's work ethic has influenced their attitudes to work:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 34
[…] Our mothers worked. They told us that. You had to work.

PARTICIPANT 33
Yeah, my mum always told me that.

PARTICIPANT 34
We're not looking after your kids, unless you're working. If you have any kids, that's your responsibility." All those kind of things that their parents would have passed on to them.

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Similarly, male participants also reflected on these influences from their fathers:

PARTICIPANT 41: MEN'S GROUP
I remember at a young age, he [my father] would just always get up early and go to work and as I was going to school, he was always leaving for work, getting us up early. Someone has got to get up at school time. Then as we got older, he was always still going to work and it was like, "Mate, you're older now. It's time to chill out." But then we went through high school and he was still getting up early and going to work and it was like, oh, I want to be like that. I remember him saying, "If you want stuff…" because we had Foxtel and then we cut it off. "Well, why did you do that?" "Well, if you want Foxtel, you've got to work for the money to get it." Fair enough. Then after that, I started working a bit at school and after school I started working with the younger [inaudible], like when I finished school I went back as a teacher…

The ideals associated with work ethic were closely connected to the commitment people had to fulfilling their role of providing financial contributions to the home. Paid work contributed heavily to the identity of the provider (i.e. breadwinner) for the family, and was often associated with depictions of men's roles in a Western patriarchal context. For example, broad discussions within yarning circles about gendered aspects of reciprocity and carrying culture (described earlier) reveal that men fulfil the role of provider to the family and community in a variety of ways (caring responsibilities, role-modelling, teaching and guidance and advocacy). However, when directly questioned about men as providers, the responses among female and male participants were often constrained to discussions of monetary provisions. On the other hand, women's unpaid labour inside the home was not named by any participants as a contribution that is valued in the same way that an income is. The limited recognition of the many ways individuals contribute to the family reflects the disadvantages traditional, patriarchal Western gender roles have for men and women.

In general, findings indicate that having a strong work ethic and paid employment allows for significant esteem in the community, "*I think they [the community] look at you a lot differently when you walk around with a uniform or work clothing*"

(Participant 9: Men's Group). Being recognised as a worker also had the additional effect of shifting negative stereotypes, which will be discussed later.

Expression of Emotions

Most participants reported that they considered the expression of emotions as gendered, with distinctions between how and when men and women expressed and managed emotions. Discussions highlighted how emotions are viewed as both healthy to engage in but also problematic as there were many contradictions in what participants' viewed as acceptable expressions of emotions for both men and women.

Some men reported that they often had limited places and times where emotions are acceptable, for example at funerals, regarding racism, on the football field or as they age. The stigma around emotions was tied to the Westernised ideas around men's stoicness:

PARTICIPANT 43: MEN'S GROUP
We can express a lot of emotions; I think a lot of the time it's anger. Just only simply because of everything that builds up. Every Aboriginal person we're strong minded people and a lot of us are stubborn, so we're not always ones that sit there and open up to our brother boys or you know open up to a woman or anything like that. We kind of tend to take things in, just cop it on the chin, but then it builds up. By the time it builds up it just turns into a lot of anger and then you want to get it out. So it's kind of hard to express it.

Aboriginal men's reflections of their experiences around expressing emotions suggests an alignment with Western patriarchal influences, as they felt particularly scrutinised and stigmatised around emotions that could be perceived as weaknesses such as sadness, crying and grief. Many female participants discussed how the limitations men experienced around emotional expression resulted in the 'bottling up' of their emotions which participants named as unhealthy and contributed to poor social and emotional wellbeing of men, as confirmed by the quote above. It was thought that men who reserved their emotions were more susceptible to problematic outbursts of emotions, resulting in anger and sometimes violence.

Participants named alcohol and other drugs being used as aids to process emotions and contributing to outbursts which was often viewed as a relief, as is shown in the quote below:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 4
But what I've noticed is alcohol.

FACILITATOR
They get more emotional.

PARTICIPANT 4
If they've consumed, then they do become really emotional, and they let it all out, whether you want to hear it or not. They'll let it out, but that they benefit from really.

Discussions with men indicated that verbalising emotions was not the only way that emotions could be acknowledged or expressed. Some men spoke of using body language and their presentation of clothing as a way expressing and reading emotion in each other:

PARTICIPANT 26: MEN'S GROUP
You can tell if someone's had a really good day or they're about to go do something really important just by their body language and how they're dressed as well. You just see the - say someone was really worried about something the other day and you see them a few days later and they're just looking real bright and happy and you can tell that they're having a good few days and things have started looking up.

Football and being involved in contact sports was also often viewed a way that men could safely release emotions without being stigmatised or shamed, as this participant discussed:

MEN'S GROUP

FACILITATOR
What emotions do you work through when you're doing your martial arts?

PARTICIPANT 11
A bit of everything.

FACILITATOR
How do you feel afterwards?

PARTICIPANT 11
Relief. Light.

The previous quote shows how some young men would use physical techniques as a way to process their emotions but also highlights the limitations of being restricted to those spaces. Importantly, some young men's comments on expressing emotions contradicted the finding that men had difficulties with expressing emotions. As this quote demonstrates, there were often clear distinctions between what was acceptable and what not. Whilst some men felt uncomfortable crying, other young men saw it as a positive and even aligning it with their masculinity.

MEN'S GROUP

FACILITATOR
So do you feel that it's okay for you as young Aboriginal men to express your emotions or are there certain emotions that you wouldn't express so freely?

PARTICIPANT 7
*Probably cry in front of everyone.
I think that makes you more of a man.*

PARTICIPANT 10
I'd cry.

PARTICIPANT 9
I'm not going to do that in front of [community name] mob.

PARTICIPANT 10
I think it makes you more of a man though.

The judgements and values around men's emotions, as discussed by women, illustrated the complexities and contradictions that men's emotions are viewed with. The contradictions were evident in the discussions with mothers with young children, who spoke to the ways in which they taught their children about emotional expression. As an example, this participant talked about the ways she encouraged emotions in her son:

PARTICIPANT 19: WOMEN'S GROUP
There's an expectation I think, too, put on - that men can put on other men or not just that on little boys to be, like, "You've got to be strong now". Because from when he was a baby he was an emotional baby, like, always wanted to be in my arms. If he was, like, two years old and he'd cry some of the men on his father's side would say,

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"Oh, he's a sook". I'd say, "He's not a sook. He's two. What; do you want him to be a man already?" So I argued and I'd say, "Don't call my son a sook. He's not." Because I don't want them to put that into his head so that he thinks that what I am [...] I'm not going to let them think - put into his head that he's got to be a man now and he's not allowed to cry and he's not allowed to...

The above quote also emphasises the pressure and restrictions placed on boys and men from a very young age regarding their emotions.

Although women were often depicted as having more freedom to express emotions, yarning circles also revealed complexities and contradictions around women's emotional expression. Women were often positioned by male participants as being too emotional, for example being depicted as crazy, irrational, menstrual and so on, which resulted in dismissal or the need to protect women's emotions. We saw this in yarning groups with young men, where women were framed as overly emotional when confronted with issues surrounding their children, as some younger male participants reported it was their preference to speak to their fathers or other men about dilemmas to avoid the reactions and actions they would receive from their mothers:

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 7
Both. But dad's a bit more relaxed whereas mum would want to probably kill someone - not kill someone but if I didn't want her to be "who, what, where" - dad's more relaxed where I can just talk to him. I didn't want maybe action for mum to go look after me. Probably just tell dad.

PARTICIPANT 8
That's like I don't like telling my mum stuff because she'll either freak out or she'll just get too worried and she'll be stressing right out.

As this discussion illustrates, there was a concern from some younger men about over-burdening their mothers with additional stresses and emotive responses. However, the descriptions of women's responses could also reveal another gender dynamic: that mothers feel frustrated at not being taken seriously by their children or partners.

Some participants made important linkages between emotions in the context of race, and how emotions are particularly complex around issues of anger, and the perception that anger is portrayed as 'dangerous' when Aboriginal men express it. As this discussion in a younger women's group illustrates:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 47
Yeah, I think there's more stereotypes around men and more, like, criminalised views, whereas women, it's like, oh, you know, maybe they're stealing or maybe they're a bit scary or psycho, you know, you know what I mean. You didn't get said hello to, why not? Maybe you were having a bad day and you were about to tear her head off because that's all black women do, they scream and yell and swear, you know? There's that...

PARTICIPANT 47
That's what my mum – my mum drills that into me, like, don't be the one that screams, because that's what they're waiting for. Yeah, so the stereotype of angry black woman, yeah.

PARTICIPANT 47
The criminal man and the crazy, loud, psycho black woman.

PARTICIPANT 46
It's easy to be that person, to get so wild, and who would be able to contain themselves, anyway, if they've...

FACILITATOR
You've got stuff to be angry about, that's the problem.

PARTICIPANT 46
So, it takes a lot to not be what they want to see, or what they think you are.

PARTICIPANT 49
It takes a lot to walk away or control yourself.

As these participants report, for Aboriginal people, emotions are tied up with negative stereotypes, and often the way emotions are expressed exacerbate these stereotypes with no way of managing them except to walk away, bottle up and conceal them. For men in particular, this was important in relation to anger.

In the discussion of gendered expectations surrounding expression of emotions, women identified many ways in which they sought out emotional support from other women. This was discussed as a protective factor, which they suggested their male counterparts either do not have access too or do not engage in:

PARTICIPANT 17

…in regards to that with other people who were closely related to me and they don't want to have the conversation either, you know. So it's, yeah, I think, you know, women are from my - from my experience in life, you know, when you've got, you know, strong groups of women, like, friends and stuff like that you talk about real stuff. I really don't know what the fuck men talk about. But they always seem to want to be together. So whether that's just, "Get me out of here I don't want to deal with reality. I'm going to hang out with my mates where we just live in our own world."

They don't have to face the reality… being a dad or being or being a, you know. That's how I feel. That's how I feel.

PARTICIPANT 18

And when the pressure gets too much…

PARTICIPANT 17

Whereas women we'll come together and maybe sit around and have a chat, but they'll talk about the real things that's going on, you know. If I want to go escape from anything that's real in my life I'll go sit with my brothers and drink because they don't talk about real life. It's just all shits and giggles, you know. So that - that's kind of, like – that's the hardest thing for me as a woman to understand still in this day and age why men find it easier to just block out the real and put all that pressure on the woman to deal with…

As the women in this yarning group suggest, there was a perception that men often used other options as a way to legitimise and release emotions, or to mask them. This notion of masking emotions or using alcohol as a conduit was also confirmed by male participants, this older man shared his personal experience:

PARTICIPANT 26: MEN'S GROUP

I think a lot of people hit the grog these days because of what's going on around us. Everything is getting harder. Everything is getting harder whether we like it or not. I think a lot of people are just hitting the grog just to get some sort of release away from it. I don't know. I suppose on a personal note that's what the reality of it is for me.

In all three communities, creating spaces for men to gather together was named as a potential solution to helping men connect with each other and their emotions.

Life Stages and Legacies

Reaching certain milestones was reported as an important aspect of the ways in which transitions and life stages influence gender roles. Transitions were often identified around achievements and the recognition of changing responsibilities. Becoming a parent and grandparent was commonly identified for both men and women, however there was some acknowledgement that these transitions may be forced due to circumstances (unplanned pregnancy or becoming a guardian for a family member). Other non-gendered transitions that revolved around milestones included: educational accomplishments, gaining significant employment and moving out of home. Achieving milestones for men, regardless of what they were, was identified as poignant and regarded highly due the high early mortality rate of Aboriginal men:

PARTICIPANT 26: MEN'S GROUP

When you realise you're a survivor and you're a bit of an Elder, to teach as you get older. Well your grandkids. That's what I'm waiting on. I hope I make it that far. I don't know. Yes, that's something special. I wear my grey hair with pride these days. It's cool.

Other milestones that men reported were often associated with sporting achievements (winning premierships). For women, changing family responsibilities were identified as an important milestone, particularly around becoming a grandmother which they felt removed the level of scrutiny they received as mothers.

Also identified as an important transition is the time where upholding or maintaining a legacy becomes a responsibility. Some men framed this as carrying on the football achievements of their fathers and uncles, whereas women often spoke of carrying on traditions from their grandmothers.

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Managing Gender Norms

Although many participants acknowledged the constraints of Western patriarchal gender roles, there was still a push to support and sustain these gender roles from some people in the community. Female participants in particular reflected on how they often did little to challenge gender expectations, acknowledging their acceptance with no or little resistance:

LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 39
Yes, as you can see we've done all the food, us women. We've prepared everything. Doing the shopping. They're [men] all just sat down on their arses and waited for the meat [inaudible]. That's how it works in my house. Hey we're all dumb asses too. We follow that process. That's Christmas. That's every gathering...

PARTICIPANT 38
Yes, just organise absolutely everything.

PARTICIPANT 39
While they sit down and they got the [inaudible] and the jokes...

PARTICIPANT 38
You got the hose and sprayed the veranda nice and clean and then the next day you're cleaning up the bottles and all that kind of stuff too, emptying ashtrays.

PARTICIPANT 39
We're doing the dishes and doing - while they sit there and get fat and drink.

PARTICIPANT 38
Or another scenario - I'm just thinking - where there are men in my life which is where my mum lives in [place] and my nephew's father. [...] Comes home, "I'm too tired, I'm too tired", just looking at Facebook while my mum in the [...] cooking for the three men in her life. Too tired.

As this quote illustrates, although women are often able to identify and problematise gender expectations, these expectations often went unchallenged. For LGBTQ women in particular, accepting 'gender norms' (i.e. heterosexuality) which they recognised as constraining or not, was sometimes undertaken to maintain community and cultural inclusion, as this female participant reflected:

PARTICIPANT 38: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP
Lining me up. So it was always an internal battle and a hypervigilance. I was always hypervigilant when I'd go out to community because I was getting lined up and I knew that I was - I was seeing women and that was my [city] thing. But I had to protect myself and I had like you said violent - totally respect culture and my long line of my nanas and the paternal side as well. My poison skin. So going out to community I was always hypervigilant of - and that sometimes was really, really hard and I developed lots of anxiety about myself even though I wanted to be on Country. I wanted to know about my mother's family and language and the spots that you get shown and all those kinds of things. I used to wear a [inaudible] wedding ring sometimes and I got more than - especially even out in communities in my 20s and my 30s I'd just go yes I'm - and people would go "who are you married to" and I was say "I'm married to life." So I'd steer people off because you get the hetero norm questions.

As this participant indicated, wearing a wedding ring and pretending to have a husband when returning to Country was a tool she used to prevent community members from promising her to men or forcing unwanted relationships on her. As she points out, wanting to have contact with her culture and Country meant she had to prepare herself to be in the space by aligning with heteronormative expectations.

However, other participants reflected on ways they actively managed and disrupted what community considers to be gendered norms (as influenced by Western mainstream ideals, Aboriginal cultures and other influences). For instance, in the LGBTQ women's group, participants frequently discussed the ways they used clothing and behaviour to challenge expectations about women. Although this may not be Aboriginal specific, it's important to name that this is happening in Aboriginal communities:

PARTICIPANT 39: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP
It's a battle. Forever. When I was living in [location] I had my mate from [location] and he pretended to be my boyfriend to keep them away from me and my hair was – before I cut it, it was down to my knees and I had a big bun. I took it off up there and came back here and I shaved my head and I've kept it short since because I keep travelling that way and since I've had short hair I don't have problems.

For some participants, rejecting community norms around gender had negative consequences. These were particularly problematic for women, especially LGBTQ women and single mothers, who reflected that living outside of gendered expectations resulted in greater scrutiny and in some cases threats to safety:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 39
Yes, I always got in my community fucking [inaudible], come on you little dyke, come on, take me on because I was always a bigger girl. I was always solid growing up. But I always had long hair until about 25.

FACILITATOR
So they saw…

PARTICIPANT 39
They saw me as a challenge pretty much so if I was to go get intoxicated guaranteed I was in a fight with a male.

Because of their insecurities.

In some cases, female participants reported making concessions to reinforce and protect elements of heterosexual, dominant masculinity that were seen as threatened in the process, for example:

LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 39
But then I noticed as a kid I got the same presents as my brother. They just accepted I was just a tomboy so I got my skateboards and bikes. Rollerblades.

Yes. But when it came to footy it wasn't good if I beat him.

FACILITATOR
Did you beat him?

PARTICIPANT 39
Yes.

PARTICIPANT 37
Course she did.

On the other hand, participants who experienced negative consequences often then actively sought to create safe spaces, physically and by providing emotional support, for others to experiment with and express gender:

PARTICIPANT 37: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP
At my house I've got a little, tiny room for a house in a studio but I'm blessed to have it. I don't let anyone else in either unless they are queer, black people…I've got a young, queer person sleeping on my couch right now, staying with me for the last two months. So it needs to be a safe space for people and myself.

One LGBTQ participant acknowledged the isolation she felt growing up and is working to ensure other young people don't feel the same:

PARTICIPANT 40: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP
[There was] no one locally that okay, this person knows about gender or whatever although I'm training myself and learning myself so I can be that person one day for the next lot.

Participants felt that their experiences challenging gender norms were important in paving the way for children in the community to be themselves, explore and express gender without being labelled and sexualised by adults. Other positive outcomes arising from these experiences included promoting greater acceptance of sexuality as an LGBTQ individual and being able to influence or change people's values and beliefs about fairness.

Participants also noted that new culture is being forged, demonstrating that communities can be flexible to shift gender norms and expectations, particularly Western views about masculinity and femininity. For instance, in discussions about the ways that families gather, some female participants indicated that they did not align with the expected position for women, preparing food and looking out for children. Instead they took an assertive place cooking the meat, describing the ways in which they opened up spaces for themselves that they might typically be excluded from:

PARTICIPANT 38: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP
It's just a little bit tiring. However, yes I do, do barbecues and I love doing it and I will transfer that gender bullshit over to me because I want a bit of the barbecue action and, I want to – I'm not a salad maker.

Findings

While sports, described by some as the centre of community life, have traditionally been a space where rigid views on gender are reinforced (as described earlier), participants reported that male dominated sports (e.g. footy) are now more available to women in the community:

PARTICIPANT 39: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

Then you have a lot of young kids, girls, are sitting down watching the men sport and going boring, I wish we can have a go.

Some participants hinted that new spaces for men are also emerging. In the example below, this participant shared his story about his HIV diagnosis and how the associated grief enabled him and his father to build a new relationship. Nevertheless this could also be construed as further evidence that emotions and vulnerability are still acceptable within the context of illness only:

PARTICIPANT 44: LGBTQ MEN'S GROUP

In regards to my case, I've only – I've seen my dad cry definitely, but the only time I've seen him cry in the context of me was when he found out about my HIV status. Because when I was, you know, was given my status I was given six months to live; that's what the doctors said. So, you know, so I had to - I chickened, I couldn't tell them face to face so I wrote to them. He got the letter and read the letter before my mum saw it. So when I went up there he - and it's the only time in - face to face where he bawled. Because he was tough, you know, men don't cry. I was brought up men don't cry. I saw an actual different side of, you know, side of him. Ironically now we have a completely different relation - I say to him, "I love you". We – it's not that man to man thing. It's dad to son thing and so we've taken away – it's not because we're gender, like, males; it's because he's my dad, I'm his son.

Older female participants also reported taking on new leadership roles within the community that were previously unavailable to them:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 34

So although there's 54 to 48, huge gap in when we grew up. At that time, society was changing, but that gap doesn't seem to be relevant anymore.

See, for me, I had to wait until [name]'s age group done everything. They had the right to say everything, [inaudible] because I was down the bottom rung. Now, things have changed to the point where it's like, [in my thirties], I was given an honour… and I still hold it as an honour, and [name]'s brother was one of them. They allowed me – and this is how I say it – they allowed me to have a voice, [in my thirties], as an Aboriginal woman. That does not happen. Did not happen. No way. Today it might; back then, 20-odd years ago, no. I should have technically waited until I was about 40 to have a voice, but they allowed to have a voice. I appreciate that, because I'm where I am because of that, in the community [...] That little bit broke it, a little bit, and that's where I think our generation males made that change, because they knew that the change was coming, so they allowed that to continue, and the women to have more voice, and to be able to go to the public meetings, and have a say. We were able to actually literally then talk out loud to government officials, visitors, non-Aboriginal people, about how we felt. About five years, 10 years before that, we just sat.

PARTICIPANT 32

We'd sit there, and all the men would speak, yeah. Now it's equal, now. We can go and talk.

Representation of community not only changed for older women, but also for LGBTQ people. In the quote below, one participant shared his story:

PARTICIPANT 44: LGBTQ MEN'S GROUP

I've been involved heavily in [Aboriginal Governing Group] and talking with all - a number of Aboriginal Elders, my Elders, family and extended family [from location], you know, and I got voted to be, you know, nominated and unanimously the whole community voted me for my name to be, you know, the named applicant. They know about my sexuality and they know that. But it was - what was really interesting was it was, you know, that wasn't taken into - they support that in that context for me. But I think that comes around because I've earnt that.

This narrative is illustrative of the positive ways in which community can be adaptive to changes, by choosing a gay Aboriginal man to represent the community with no discrimination towards his sexuality.

Gendered Experiences of Connections and Resilience

Connections

Relationships and kinship connections were often identified as the foundations for gender roles to play out and formed an important element of the way people talked about and situated their gender roles. In the section below we discuss the importance of connections and the gendered impact of limited connections in terms of resilience and empowerment.

Networks were identified as spaces for people to learn and practice gender. Networks were situated in many different domains including families, communities, workplaces, sporting clubs and social media where people built and maintained connections to each other. Having a network with a variety of connections spread across genders seemed to be an important protective factor as it offered culturally safe support to both men and women. A balance of connections with same gender and opposite gender contributed to gendered identity. The significance of having separate men's and women's spaces was also acknowledged, as emphasised in this discussion with men:

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 42
I think more times than not you see - yeah more times than not the women will sit around with the girls and have a yarn around the table with the kids over and all that, playing together and that's probably their way of catching up, having a yarn, playing cards, expressing themselves. Whereas the men would be doing something a bit more different. You know what I mean the men will go camping or something like that.

PARTICIPANT 41
Playing footy.

PARTICIPANT 42
Yeah playing footy, but it's just trying to do these things that are culturally appropriate as well you know what I mean. Men would be taking their kids down camping and that and telling them stories, you know we used to come here when we were kids. You know what I mean, they're expressing a lot of

emotion and feeling and bringing back memories and that, which is one thing I've probably noticed more is that's sort of how I put Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women, the way they express it.

In the yarning circles, male and female participants made a clear link between feeling connected and being empowered and strong. The connections participants described included relationships with family and community, as well as a spiritual relationship with land and ancestors, which enrich their sense of belonging to culture, as this male participant articulates:

PARTICIPANT 45: LGBTQ MEN'S GROUP
Our spiritual beliefs, you know, cultural, you know, cultural - our spirituality when it comes to culture as well. Our loved ones that are passed, you know, believing and knowing and feeling that they're still around; they're watching over us and they, you know, for as long as we need, you know, they're still there. Yeah, guiding, protecting, yeah, you know, taking care of us in that way. Yeah, and knowing, knowing who you are in culture as well, you know, yeah, knowing your place and, yeah, feeling invited as well. Being here from [State], you know, [name] made me feel very welcome.

Feedback sessions provided further articulation of the idea that connections are protective against loneliness, which can be detrimental to social and emotional wellbeing:

PARTICIPANT 18: WOMEN'S GROUP
I think they need groups like we have, like, there's not a lot of – like you said about equality; there isn't a lot of stuff – there's heaps of stuff for us to do as women, like, these groups and stuff, you know. But there isn't a lot of men's group and stuff that they can go to and they can express how they feel and have a chat and have a feed, you know. People like yourself that's asking them, like, straight out, "What's the problem? What's the barriers? What's, you know, holding you back?"

When support was available for men it was usually framed around addressing deficit or problems, such as addiction or rehabilitation. There was acknowledgement that sports and cultural activities did offer some men safe spaces to connect with one another, however these were also constrained to particular times (e.g. seasonal sports) and were not inclusive of all men.
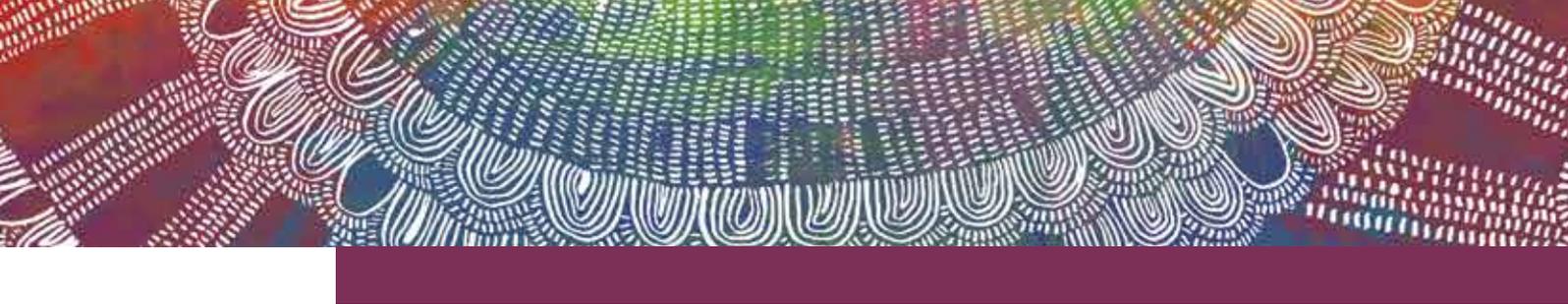
Findings

Alternatively, for women support networks were often more constant and consistent but also spontaneous. As was outlined in the previous section on emotions, the ways in which Aboriginal women support each other was demonstrated during yarning circles, through the ways they came together, their communication styles and the language they had access to (including English and local languages).

The benefits of connections was also evident in this excerpt which highlights how male colleagues in a regional town worked at supporting each other:

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 29
[...] The old man was probably off the rails when he was a bit younger and it was coming out a bit in me. But yeah, he could have just probably not been in my life but he chose to and that's probably what's made me better, I guess.

PARTICIPANT 30
Yeah, pretty much just like, yeah, these fellas [indicating the other men in the room]. They've helped since I've been here, changed me.

FACILITATOR
So your peers.

PARTICIPANT 30
I've changed myself as well.

This example illustrates how workplaces were often viewed as spaces for connections to develop and be maintained. Particularly in the smaller communities or within Aboriginal staff teams where workplaces felt more like homes and meeting places. As observed by the research team in these workplaces, connections were fostered through the coming together over weekly shared meals (e.g. gathering in the kitchen for morning teas), which help to generate occupational communities that offered another source of connection (of note, many of the participants who worked together were also related or connected outside of work). These findings indicate that being unemployed, or having employment outside of Aboriginal organisations has a considerable influence on access to the protective factor associated with workplace networks.

Both men and women identified that there needed to be more opportunities for Aboriginal people to feel they have a purpose, opening up opportunities for men to care for other men and enhancing opportunities to connect outside the home. In particular, participants identified that men needed safe spaces where they could gather, that did not exist around sport or the things they were not doing, enabling greater agency and control over one's own life:

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 31
It's something we're trying to get going, I reckon. It's there – just the brothers, they talk to other. Do you know what I mean? And we all chat and let each other know. But we don't know what's going in the wider community, you know, how they struggle. We can see that they are but there's not that much [inaudible].

PARTICIPANT 28
That's why we're trying to bring the men's shed, to make a safe place for them to do that stuff, you know, talk about what's on their mind. That's why we're trying to bring that men's shed out, all that kind of stuff now.

PARTICIPANT 29
The community – get them in one spot to talk because there's not really many times during the year when there will be all the community people all in one spot.

PARTICIPANT 30
Again, because it's like – I don't know if it's like that in Adelaide but you've got certain little groups like, you know, you'll have the people that smoke marijuana there and the people that love drinking over there and you've got the sports freaks over there and then you've got the people that don't like [inaudible] there only because your dad didn't like his dad or something. So you've all got those little groups, you know. You might have [inaudible] sit back and like, "Me and my girlfriend had an argument last night. I didn't hit her or anything" or whatever. You've got those groups that will do that but the other one just blames away. I wouldn't know because I don't associate with drugs and stuff.

PARTICIPANT 31
Apparently those kind of groups are fairly close groups too.

Connections with non-Aboriginal allies was also an important protective factor particularly in the smaller regional communities where people identified places they could go to that would not perpetuate racist stereotypes:

FACILITATOR
Are there places that you would go to more where you won't face that type of prejudice [racial discrimination]?

PARTICIPANT 30
Yeah. I'd go straight to [a shop in town]. Just down there. I think everybody goes to that place. He's good.

PARTICIPANT 29
More the Aboriginal people because he's good with a lot of the Aboriginal fellas and everyone goes with their sons and stuff. The vibe is pretty good with him.

PARTICIPANT 31
Yeah. I took my uncle in there and my dad and the guy came around the counter and gave them a big hug. I've never seen that before. That's because they knew each other…

A number of other participants also cited the ways that non-Aboriginal teachers at school were particularly important in shaping their relationship to educational environments where racism frequently played out. In addition, older women did stress that there was also a need for Aboriginal teachers and school personnel, particularly men, for young people to role model positive behaviour.

Survival and Resilience

Survival was often framed as an important component of women's strength and what is known in a Western context as 'empowerment'. In discussions, some women used sophisticated language and examples to explain their experiences of survival, managing adversity and resilience. Their discussions of trauma and hardships were often situations they persevered through, and they often framed their responses as choices, for example:

PARTICIPANT 5
Yeah, I mean, I'm [in my 70s] this year, next month, but you know, life goes on. You either get on with life or you sit in a heap and I'm not sitting in a heap. Too much going on to be involved with. So I don't know. I have family members who have things that have affected them and they still can't get over that. They're caught in this, you know, [inaudible] or whatever. I don't know. I think you have to accept what happens and make a decision where you're going to go.

PARTICIPANT 4
Make those choices and say, "I don't want to be like that. I want to see where I'm going and what I can do".

Another female participant shared her experiences of losing her father at a young age and having to make a choice about the way she was going to cope, she told us:

PARTICIPANT 3: WOMEN'S GROUP
Well, I think like you were saying, you were exposed and part of that family made a difference, you know. Reflecting on that in my childhood, I had to be independent, you know. The death of my father made me, the eldest to look after my younger sister, and that was it; I was a young mum. You'd push through. That's what life - is the cards and you could complain and curl up in a ball or you get up and make the best of it. I think the hardest thing is not getting stuck in that black zone, that I think we can easily do because the pressures of society and pressures around us, you know.

Shifting away from a place where you feel powerless was an important aspect some women discussed in terms of overcoming hardships, as this participant emphasised:

PARTICIPANT 33: WOMEN'S GROUP
Yeah, see I… Yeah, I don't know. Because I refused to have my empowerment taken away as well. But I had the strength to fight that. [inaudible][…] [I] couldn't afford not to be strong though, in any era. In any era, you had to be strong, and that's what's passed down, I guess, when you see what your mother's like.

Findings

This point demonstrates women are doing more than just managing and overcoming hardships or being resilient, they are discussing a concept more akin to their survival. Women's discussions also suggested that survival (arguably an Aboriginal form of resilience) is the result of a process of self-reflection, accountability and shifting away from the persistent impacts of trauma:

PARTICIPANT 18: WOMEN'S GROUP
Some people have really good parents that gave them everything and, like, tried to teach them right. But then I guess they get to a certain age and you just rebel and then some people don't take a step back and realise that they're doing the wrong thing. They just think, like, "I can take on the world and the world's against me" sort of thing. I was like that for a long time, like, my mum gave me up so I was angry at the world forever. I hated it. I was angry. I was nasty. But then you get to a certain age, and it wasn't until I had [my first child] that I was, like, you know, I don't want my child to be nasty and angry at the world because this didn't work out, that didn't work out. You have to realise that things go wrong but you can't always blame everyone else, like, it comes from yourself and a lot of the choices that you make, you know.

Another aspect of women's resilience discussed in the groups is that it is positioned as both a benefit to themselves personally, as well as the people around them, indicating that resilience exists at both an individual and collective level:

PARTICIPANT 4: WOMEN'S GROUP
I'm listening to everyone else. I'm just thinking gosh there's heaps, lots and lots of things. My Mum died when I was quite young, so you learn at a very young age to help look after each other, like in the family and even like when you're going to school, you've got each other's back, so it's the survival thing. Yeah, just so much, and if you do make a mistake out there you learn quick, I'm not going to make that mistake again because I know what would happen. So you're filled in as you're going through, and I think as you're going through life, you recall lots of things that may have happened in the past, and that does make you stronger and you say, "I can do this. I'm strong." So you're telling yourself, you know, you're going to make it. So you try to make your children stronger as well and everybody around you in the community, you know. "Oh, you're no good. You might as well get lost." You encourage them to come in and share. So that's what I've always tried to do with everybody.

When men spoke of the ways that they empowered themselves, they spoke of connecting with their children, engaging in physical activities or other outlets such as music or art, and keeping a positive frame of mind. Other men spoke more pessimistically, for example:

PARTICIPANT 23: MEN'S GROUP
I just like reminding myself that whether you think about stuff, whether you're worried about it or not, you're not going to change it so just might as well not give a shit really. If you can change it then that's cool but it's just something that's playing on you it's no point thinking about it.

The important finding here is the absence of men talking about and using language of survival and resilience in a similar way that the women did. The quote below presents some women's perspectives on men's resilience:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 48
Yeah, I was just about to say that women are more resilient, like, but is that because we all have our own traumas that we go through and see ourselves as so resilient and then we hear so many, like, they say unspoken stories of women for so long and then we think, oh wow, you're so resilient, too. Maybe it's because men don't speak up about the traumas that they've been through, so we don't see them as resilient.

PARTICIPANT 46
Because we don't know…

PARTICIPANT 47
And if women are so vocal, and then encouraged to be vocal, and then it, you know…

FACILITATOR
And being vocal, they get support from each other, yeah.
Yeah, that could be, actually.

PARTICIPANT 47
It's like the suicide rate for Aboriginal men, would it be less if they felt more encouraged to speak out, if they felt like they weren't being weak?

PARTICIPANT 46
Maybe it's like the bystander effect thing, where they don't see men talking out about their traumas, so why would they?

As the quote reflects, female participants linked men's resilience to the gendered expectation of silence around emotion and coping with trauma. Data analysis with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers and further discussions at feedback sessions did not provide any further insight into the language or concepts associated with men's resilience; this should be a focus of further research.

Tools for Survival

As outlined above, resilience could be framed as a tool for survival. Female participants also spoke of the other ways in which they engaged in practices of survival including hypervigilance and methods of self-protection. The women spoke of establishing a series of 'rules to live by' that they applied to their households:

PARTICIPANT 5: WOMEN'S GROUP
I live on my own, so I wouldn't need to be able to make sure - I don't know about anybody else. I'm pretty independent and I have rules and this is acceptable and that's not. No alcohol, no drugs. Go and do it somewhere else. But I don't know, I had it in my head how I wanted to live, because of not having that as living with my aunty or sister or whatever, but I knew how I wanted to live. I wanted to have a, not a house, a home. Unfortunately it didn't work out in the earlier days, three, you know, divorces and stuff like that. Boys wanting to live with their father, but I still lived that way in my own way, and so when they came; 'this is my house, this is how I live. You're welcome, but…' you know. And that's it. "If you want to live an alternative lifestyle well then, there's the door". I don't live that way. That's not my way that I live. I live my life and you're welcome to be part of it, but don't try and change me, that respect that they could walk in with booze or stuff like that. They can't do that.

Although these 'rules to live by' helped maintain safety for women, it often had the effect of shutting men out, displacing and disconnecting them from their safety net. On the other hand, some women shared the ways in which they brought their men in and generated safe spaces for their sons and community to keep them outside of public spaces, where they were more vulnerable to police and public scrutiny and abuse. One participant explained how she had regular weekly dinners for her son's friends, and also provided a shed out

the back for them to gather and drink with her permission and under her protection.

Women also spoke about understanding their limits, and knowing when too much was being asked of them, as this quote illustrates:

PARTICIPANT 3: WOMEN'S GROUP
Doesn't mean that you can't, you know, I had those days where [over talk] too much, it's too much, you know, and you've got to be able to take some time out and look around and you think, all right, my plate's too full, I've got to clear a bit now to be able to go through, but there's definitely those days of…

Being able to recognise a heavy load was another self-care tool women had access to, so that they were not over-burdened emotionally, physically and in other ways. Similarly to the way women discussed resilience, men did not have the same language to explain the ways in which they engaged in actions that promoted their safety, and tools for self-care and empowerment. As this dialogue illustrates, empowerment was not a term recognised by male participants:

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 23
What was the word again? Empower?

FACILITATOR
Yes. So how do you empower yourself?

PARTICIPANT 23
I can't think of…

PARTICIPANT 24
That's a hard one that one.

In feedback workshops, community members linked the absences of men's resilience (or a lack of language to describe it) and limited tools for self-care to men's constraints surrounding expression of emotions. This is a significant connection, but not one that can be supported by evidence in this research as we did not specifically question men about the concept of resilience. In general, we can argue that this research provides linkages between resilience and survival with gender, gender identity and equity. However, as mentioned above, further research is required to explore the gendered and cultural aspects of resilience and survival.

Findings

Gender Equity

This section specifically draws attention to the ways in which Aboriginal people understand, practice and envision fairness and equity in their communities. We will also highlight some of the key areas identified by participants where fairness is not present, as well as views regarding the obstacles in daily life that limit or prevent gender equity from being achieved.

Understandings of Gender Equity

In discussing the concept of equity, most people understood the basic principles as the equal opportunities and access to resources for men and women. However, discussions often revealed that there was a limited understanding of the terms equality, equity and 'gender equity':

LGBTQ WOMAN

FACILITATOR
So I'm going to ask another question and this is also a definitions question. What words come to mind when you hear the term gender equity?

PARTICIPANT 40
To be honest my mind just went what. Gender equity. I'm like, what. That's the first time I've heard that to be honest so I couldn't really define that because I was just like as soon as you asked me, what was that.

FACILITATOR
So nothing comes to mind.

PARTICIPANT 40
Nothing at all comes to mind. I can't even - I'm trying to think. Gender equity. I know what gender is and equity but then what do they mean together. That's just confusing to me.

While participants may not have recognised some of the Western, feminist, terms associated with equity, when explored further, fairness for women and men was understood and expressed in terms of shared responsibilities to family and community. When older women discussed the idea of Aboriginal gender equity they called for, "partnerships, now!" and identified that this was being played out in some young families:

PARTICIPANT 33: WOMEN'S GROUP
I can really say, under my generation, I see equality in the young people, as far as when I look at… They have equal ownership in homes. They have equal ownership in raising their children. I see the men taking more of a nurturing… And I'm looking at [person's] sons, as well, putting them into the picture, because it is that age group. They have more of an active role in the family life, work life, and it's… both of them are doing it. There's no one identified key breadwinner, homemaker in the family structure.

Younger men validated these ideas about gender equity and fairness involving shared and supportive roles, saying:

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 29
I reckon with partners as well, like same with the women, you might have a male partner that works and the woman doesn't and they'll rely heavily on that partner, you know, so they'll rely on them and the same with the men. They might have the woman that works and the man doesn't. That's sort of like a…

PARTICIPANT 28
A fifty-fifty thing. They just…

PARTICIPANT 29
Back each other up.

These quotes illustrate a clear aspiration for gender equity, while not explicitly expressed using the term 'equity'. The following sections will discuss the key domains where inequalities are experienced and the contributing factors to imbalances between women and men, illustrating opportunities for change within the family, community and broader society.

Experiences of Inequality

Parenting and Caregiving

The yarning circles revealed many inconsistencies in the way parenting responsibilities were discussed by participants. While nurturing children formed an important component of gendered identity, and there was a desire for shared roles (described above), participants often critiqued the double standards that men and women

experienced around caring responsibilities. Female participants often noted that daily responsibilities surrounding parenting more often fell on them, with different expectations for their male counterparts. Older women indicated that this had been ingrained at a very early age:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 2
With me, I've had to be like a mother figure since I was young, looking after, you know, nieces and nephews when they got taken away from their parents. So I've always had to be a mother in some form.

FACILITATOR
[asking another participant] That's what you said too?

PARTICIPANT 3
Yeah, it's your responsibility.

FACILITATOR
So having a baby doesn't actually change your roles that much?

PARTICIPANT 2
No. It was just more easy I think becoming a mother myself because I had that experience of looking after the younger ones.

Young female participants who are mothers also commented on the increased scrutiny their parenting activities attract over that of men, attributing this to outdated views held by some men and the wider community:

PARTICIPANT 16: WOMEN'S GROUP
And, like, they sort of can just get up and go whenever they want but it's, like, if we got up and go, like, especially being a woman we get looked on, like, "Oh, you're such a horrible mother." But it's all right for him to go off and do whatever he wants whenever he wants, like, "Mm. Okay."

However, there was an indication that generational differences now meant that younger men were generally more involved in daily parenting and child-rearing responsibilities than older men have been in the past (this was often discussed around the idea of men changing nappies). For example this older women said:

PARTICIPANT 32: WOMEN'S GROUP
When I sit back, and I watch all these young people in this office, who works in here, they're all equal, you know? The fathers will take off and pick the kids up, and drop them home, or drop them down at our local [name] club, we call it. Kids' after school program. So they do go to the school, and sit down with their children. So it is an equal situation. Like [other participant] said, in the old days, it was just a… but no, it's equal.

Younger male participants also spoke about the blending of home roles and responsibilities in their lives, acknowledging that, "*at my home we just mix and do everything together.*" (Participant 28: Men's Group).

On the other hand, male participants referred to double standards when discussing custody arrangements and family court matters, stating that their roles as fathers are viewed as secondary to women's in these situations. Older men in particular expressed the view that women often have more credibility in separation or divorce situations, where men are excluded from child rearing and custody arrangements because the care of the children are prioritised as women's responsibilities. Some women also acknowledged these biases when discussing equal contributions to parenting, stating that the mother is automatically seen as the full time carer, and, "*the father has to fight for their blood. It should be equal ground*". (Participant 47: Women's Group).

Connections and Support Networks

The integral role of connection to culture as part of a strong gendered identity was consistently identified by participants. However, when this was not in place, participants felt this was particularly detrimental to men. Indeed, there was collective concern among male and female participants about the current status of Aboriginal men within their communities. This was described as the extent of fractured relationships between men, their families and kin, manifesting in the failure of some men to fulfil the full extent of their family and cultural responsibilities.

Findings

Some female participants discussed issues associated with men, in a very general sense, as a loss of connection or disconnection. Male participants did not use the same language; some used terms such as getting 'on the wrong track', or talked broadly about isolation and loneliness. When these findings were explored in feedback sessions, the groups could not reach agreement on the precise language to describe this in an Aboriginal framework. Western terms such as 'displacement', 'disempowerment', 'disconnection', 'disenfranchised' and 'disenchanted' were discussed in these groups, but it was agreed that this language was not sufficient. The common theme of these discussions was that men collectively have fewer emotional and cultural supports to draw on in order to sustain or rebuild a strong sense of identity. This was reinforced by the absence of language around survival and the concept of resilience in the men's groups, in contrast to the women's groups were many participants named resilience building and self-care activities they actively engaged in (as described earlier).

Discrimination and Racism

Experiencing racism and discrimination was seen as an equaliser between Aboriginal men and women, with racism identified and discussed in almost all yarning circles:

LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

FACILITATOR
So how are men and women equal in your families and in your communities?

PARTICIPANT 38
I'm going to say equal in language and equal in law about having that responsibility of that and carrying that through with the Aboriginal way no matter who your mob are. I'm also going to say we're equal when we always walk out the door and we have to face bullshit. So that's where I love seeing that solidarity when that's at its force. Watching [Elder] with the - he was on my interview panel years and years ago but that softness. So there's just that - yes when people are open as when you're genuine about the plight and about what we've all got to fucking put up with or whatever, Aboriginal way. That's when I see equality and I love that.

Daily activities were often marked with encounters of racism, experienced when moving within the wider community, accessing support and services and as police harassment. Participants described racism in the form of gendered stereotypes. For Aboriginal women this included being labelled as promiscuous, abusive and a neglectful mother. Aboriginal men were stereotyped as aggressive, alcoholics, vacant fathers, criminals, rapists and paedophiles.

Being profiled by security as thieves and vandals was a common experience, particularly among male participants. An example of this is in one community where the basketball nets were taken down in the summertime to prohibit young Aboriginal people from socialising in the area:

PARTICIPANT 31: MEN'S GROUP
Well, what I think is that happened because all the Aboriginal people used to go there and just play basketball and just chill there for the day and because security saw a lot of Aboriginal people at the school playing basketball, they must have thought, "Oh well, stuff that. We're taking this down. Why are you at the school? You shouldn't be at the school." Wouldn't you prefer them to be at basketball running amok on the basketball court than down the street, smashing windows, stealing, all that sort of stuff?

The impact of these encounters made participants feel angry, frustrated and hypervigilant. Many participants described it as being, 'painted with the same brush', regardless of their own values and experiences, a daily battle to prove one's worth:

PARTICIPANT 45: LGBTQ MEN'S GROUP
That really pisses me off because it's like, you know, firstly you don't even know me. You don't even - you haven't seen my police record, you know, my DCSI, police record, anything of that sort, you know. It's all clean. Probably cleaner than yours so who the hell do you, you know, who the hell do you think you are, you know.

In one regional community, participants reported that Aboriginal men avoided certain parenting roles (changing nappies, being too emotional with children) or even seeking employment with young children (kindergarten worker, youth worker or working in schools) to avoid being labelled as a paedophile or opportunist. This provoked a sad

response, particularly from some older women who expressed the importance of Aboriginal children having male role models during their younger years and these decisions having an impact on the community as a whole (as described earlier). In other sites however, this was not reported as a specific concern.

Many participants agreed that the media plays a large part in the propagation of negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people:

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 7
They like to highlight the bad thing...

PARTICIPANT 8
There is some positive on there but then there's always some group there arguing to try and turn it into a negative I guess like some things Adam Goodes and that did. It's always those ones that - all the keyboard warriors and all that.

These quotes show how the media, inclusive of social media, can be detrimental in the creation and spreading of racist sentiment. These racist remarks cause emotional harm and can be incredibly disheartening for people, as illustrated in discussions in the yarning circles. Though through these struggles, both men and women share strength and power.

PARTICIPANT 7: MEN'S GROUP
[It makes you feel] angry and upset but you've got to I think afterwards try and think about myself being a good person and not getting caught up in retaliating or something, just try and be good and respectful myself and give respect to those who earn it - not earn it but are respectful back. There's always going to be people out there that are going to try and bring you down I guess. I just surround myself with good people.

Whilst the media can be a platform for racism and harassment, it can also aid in solitude and allow connections between people who otherwise couldn't communicate. This was important for one LGBTQ participant who used social media to talk to people who could relate to her feelings and support her, "*These groups on social media] have kept me I guess intact and feeling a part of that, I didn't feel so alone.*" (Participant 40: LGBTQ Woman).

Homophobia and Transphobia

All participants who identified as LGBTQ spoke of experiences of transphobia and homophobia, from within the Aboriginal community and outside of the community. Verbal abuse, physical violence, isolation from community and silencing of their trauma were ways in which homophobia and transphobia manifested.

LGBTQ women participants reported experiencing physical violence from male family members. This violence was labelled as homophobic by participants because it was a result of them being same sex attracted:

LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 37
[..] I recently got bashed by my brother last week after coming out to him while I was in [another country]. Yes, it's something that's crazy. Thank you. I never thought that that would happen. But it did happen. [crying] Sorry. [addressing the group.] It's literally what it is and then it's like the silence thing afterwards like nothing ever happened, he was drunk, whatever. But it comes out in those moments when they're either intoxicated or on drugs or something and you can't tell anybody because of the discourse around Aboriginal people are violent and...

PARTICIPANT 39
The pressure of your family to tell you... don't do that to your brother...

Or you don't do that to your family. You'll ruin your family.

PARTICIPANT 37
It's just not acceptable to hit...

PARTICIPANT 39
I can't believe it's still happening.

As this quote dramatically illustrates, women were often discouraged from reporting violence they experienced from male family members to police, to protect the perpetrator from police brutality and racism within the justice system. As a result, no justice ensued, leaving women silenced, without resolution and isolated from family and community. In doing so, these actions also reinforced and prioritised harmful notions of masculinity.

Findings

Experiences of homophobia and transphobia created hypervigilance for LGBTQ people, this was particularly evident when participants spoke about engaging with family and community or attending cultural events. Nevertheless, LGBTQ participants felt a strong need to remain connected to culture and family, for example LGBTQ women reported taking on aunty-mother roles with their nieces and nephews (described earlier).

To avoid discrimination some would put into place protective measures (e.g. wearing a fake wedding ring), found compromises, while others created safe spaces within their own homes, giving them control over who could enter their spaces.

Homophobia and transphobia in the form of violence or confrontational behaviour towards Aboriginal LGBTQ family members were used to police gender norms in the community. This often occurred in the form of mis-gendering of LGBTQ people:

PARTICIPANT 39: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP
I went to [name's] funeral last week, there's my dumb arse uncle I'll say. Arsehole. But he goes, "Hello my nephew." I said, "Don't fucking touch me. You fucking apologise before you talk to me again." I made him wait all funeral till he come out and he apologised. "I shouldn't have said that." I said, "Yes." Because I'll easily wipe you from my life, I don't give a fuck anymore. You're at the point where you don't give a fuck who they are because you've dealt with so much shit because you're short haired or whatever. I don't plan to be transgender. I love my transgender sisters and brothers. But I am a woman and I'm proud to be a woman. So when that happened that's a kick in the guts. You just want to – fucking. How old? I'm [in my 30s] now. Too old to be dealing with your – and he's in his 60s. Pastor – minister sorry.

As this quote clearly illustrates, community events can be a source of significant stress and used by family members to shame Aboriginal LGBTQ people, contributing to feelings of isolation.

Criminal Histories

Female participants identified the requirement for criminal history checks as a significant factor contributing to imbalances between men and women in fulfilling family responsibilities. Women in all locations said that minor, petty crimes (e.g. unpaid fines, vandalism), likely committed during the teenage or early twenties years, had limited opportunities for men as adults to work in industries that revolved around caring or contact with the community (e.g. as health workers). These positions were not only a source of pride in the community but also often the main source of employment, particularly in small communities. Participants expressed the view that men were often more targeted by the police and legal system and this had a domino effect which shut down men's opportunities to engage in the workforce/community in the same way women did. In discussing people who were respected in one community, women explained:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 34
But then you stop and think, "Oh, shit, he got picked up for drink driving, and it's on his record, now. He's not suited."

FACILITATOR
Okay. So this is a big barrier, and I think some women that we spoke to in one of the other communities talked about the barriers that criminal records put on men, because they are targeted, they are unfairly treated. The judicial system isn't just, and it limits…

PARTICIPANT 34
Absolutely. Absolutely.

FACILITATOR
And so do you think that contributes partly to this dynamic of the women becoming empowered, and the men not? Because they don't have those same restrictions?

PARTICIPANT 34
Correct, because when we were home all the time looking after the children, we didn't go out and have alcohol and then go drink driving, and then have that forever on our record to tarnish our job opportunities. So then that was just the reversal of role, just immediately, "Off you go, off to work you go."

These findings were adamantly agreed on by men and women in consensus workshops as a real barrier for men (and some women) to successfully secure employment. As employment is often directly linked to the ways in which the provider role is defined, issues associated with criminal history are problematic.

Participants suggested that petty crimes should be struck from records after a period of time (which included no reoffending) so that men were available to explore more opportunities for employment.

Gendered Occupations and Educational Opportunities

As discussed previously, having a work ethic and paid employment was an important part of gendered identity, contributing to the ways men and women provide for their families and communities. In addition, workplaces were also identified as a source of connections and support for workers. At the same time, participants also described significant gender disparities associated with paid work. This included discussion of the history of gendered occupations since invasion (for example, the division of women as domestic slaves and men as stockmen), as well as Western, outdated expectations surrounding men's and women's work, which limit opportunities for all. For instance:

PARTICIPANT 1: WOMEN'S GROUP
[...] like in my family I can speak to like my nephews and that. They think that for a job they're going to be at the mines. It doesn't even cross their minds to even think about education or health or anything like that. It's the mines is the be all and end all. [...] But then when you start talking to them, "Well, why don't you think about this? You could stay in town if you do this" and they start talking like, "Oh yeah," because there's that expectation that that's what fellas do.

Similarly, as these next quotes illustrate, women are often more prominent in community and caring based industries, particularly in regional locations:

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 28
I think it's sort of the same. I reckon more so with the women they, not own but run more of the organisations or the Aboriginal organisations around town, like [name of local organisation] for example, just all women work there. I don't think there's any males. The same with the [inaudible] program, it's all women that work there, no males.

PARTICIPANT 29
And childcare.

PARTICIPANT 30
The same with the childcare that the kids go to, there's all women there, one male. So it's basically women outweigh the men.

PARTICIPANT 28
In all of the primary schools, they're all females except probably in the high school they've got about two males there. The rest are females on the Aboriginal side of it. Do you know what I mean?

Health, education and care based industries are a key source of employment, particularly in rural and regional locations. As a result, participants noted that this often meant that women had greater access to ongoing education and training, leadership roles, sustained employment and thus greater monetary contribution to families. Female participants in this research constantly highlighted that the absences of men in these occupations is problematic, and emphasised that more needed to be done to bring men into these spaces, particularly as leaders in schools or as male health workers. One community suggested that a stereotyping of Aboriginal males as predators (described earlier) was a key deterrent for men to work in these spaces. In another community however, this was not expressed as a concern.

Despite some clear articulations of norms surrounding men's and women's employment, there was some recognition by participants that fixed ideas associated with occupational norms are shifting. Some male participants suggested that women were more easily able to enter traditionally male dominated occupations than men were able to enter female dominated,

Findings

however, as this discussion explains, this reflected rigid views about masculinity:

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 43
I think before there was definitely certain roles where males did male things, female did female things, but now down the line in today's day and age, females are now starting to do men's roles and males are starting to do the female's role like stay home with the kids. And females are starting to do trade work, which some people don't think they're cut up for it, but some of them still do a good job and they're still out there.

PARTICIPANT 42
Even like what [was said above] with work, a lot of girls doing trade and stuff.

PARTICIPANT 43
And not many boys want to do what the girls are doing, because it's seen as girls can step up and do what a man does, but not many men want to step down as like a perceived way of thinking. They would be seen maybe as more feminine or something, whereas when the girls step up and do something, like playing footy or working, it' not really seen as derogatory as when a man does it.

Moreover, evidence suggests that men are also aware of the real life pay disparities that exist in the labour market. For instance, this regional men's group identified a pay gap between men and women emphasising their awareness and ability to name these inequalities:

MEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 22
An example of that equality thing you said that back in the day with the women's wages and stuff and back in our days it feels like not very much has changed. They've stepped up a bit but still not very much has changed because last year when my ex-missus and I were doing the same position at two different workplaces and yet I was still earning at least a good $4 clear of her.

FACILITATOR
Per hour?

PARTICIPANT 22
Per hour. It made no sense. Doing the same job and she'd even been working at the position longer than I had and yet I started off on a higher base wage

and managed to have my pay increased in the time where none of [her] pay went up. So you kind of wonder why this is happening and why doesn't it happen to you sort of thing.

These important discussions about gender difference in the workforce offer some insight into the understandings and insights that Aboriginal people have into gender inequality, which is detrimental to women and men.

Government Policy

There was some awareness of political rhetoric and government policies surrounding gender equity, particularly around issues such as domestic violence and paid parenting leave. Female participants felt that this had little impact in their lives, producing no significant change to the inequalities they experience. This female participant voiced her that government policies are out of touch with reality:

PARTICIPANT 18: WOMEN'S GROUP
These days it's all about equality and all this shit but it's just the [inaudible] government to make some money. That's all it is. You barely hear, like, people [inaudible] that's all, like, on black and white, like, paper and stuff, like, yeah. We're all going to be these [inaudible] and you get there and it's, like, not really.

Discussions in the yarning circles also revealed that contemporary government policies and laws that are situated in Western worldviews, are not cognisant of the gendered aspects of Aboriginal communities and actively obstruct men and women from fulfilling cultural roles. Policies around hunting and cultural camps, fishing and environmental policy, unemployment policies, criminal records and justice (nunga court) were cited as examples of the way that policies impact gender equity for Aboriginal people, as discussed by one group:

WOMEN'S GROUP

PARTICIPANT 12
Men's roles have changed, and society because of the system

FACILITATOR
Let's unpack that, tell me why...

PARTICIPANT 14

They feel useless. They couldn't, they can't do what they used to do. They wouldn't be able to, they wouldn't know how to feed their children.

PARTICIPANT 15

You know, you go back to [place] now, families can't go and fish in the river, they can't go shooting, because they don't have permits, they can't do these things […]

PARTICIPANT 13

You look at, I know someone who's going through that court with the fisheries. You know, you used to be able to go and get, you know fish and whatever, and they knew what to take from the river, or from the seas. You know, what they take and don't take - there were rules. So now it's like, someone was having a party, so they went and got - you know, over time - filled their freezer. But then the fisheries people are going "you can't have that much stuff, we'll take that away from you". You're not allowed to have it in large amounts if you're feeding a family, but you can't just take that anymore because they're watching you, what you do.

This scenario demonstrates how environmental policies regarding overfishing affect the ability of Aboriginal men to fulfil their obligations to be providers and contributors to the family and community. Another community also discussed how rules and policy influenced men's roles as teachers and guidance for young people with regard to learning about the Country around the town they lived in:

PARTICIPANT 34: WOMEN'S GROUP

Back in the day, we had the capacity to have our men, who had vast experience in hunting and gathering. They went and took our young people out bush. They didn't need a police clearance. They didn't need 20 other adults with them because there was 40 students and the ratio that that brings. There wasn't all of that, that prevented that cultural… And that meant that he, the male, had so much to give. That was him in his entirety. That was the Aboriginal man teaching the Aboriginal children what was to be passed on.

These comments regarding the impact of policies illustrate the importance of having gender factored into the construction of policy and programs, and why an Aboriginal view of gender must inform how policies are generated.

Visions for Gender Equity: Standing Together and Sharing Responsibilities

As indicated earlier, participants expressed an aspiration for women and men to have and fulfil complementary roles within the family but also the wider community. Many of the discussions focused on parenting responsibilities, this was seen as both a source of inequality but also a place to anchor efforts to advance gender equity:

PARTICIPANT 42: MEN'S GROUP

I could go on from that. As soon as you've got kids, you become equal, it takes two, mum and dad, so as soon as you have a kid together that's when they become equal. You're not just one mum, you're not just one dad, you're parents, so it's both on an equal playing field as soon as you have a kid and then when you go from there is where the equality either separates or you go through having that same equality of being a parent kind of thing.

Although generational shifts suggest that younger men are taking up responsibilities in the household there are still shortfalls. Female participants expressed the view that women have been burdened with the responsibilities of holding the community together, nurturing and raising children, and supporting men. Discussions with female participants and within the feedback workshops focused on getting men to step up, heal, gather, take responsibility and fulfil their roles alongside Aboriginal women to improve the situation for the whole community. Female participants described this as wanting Aboriginal men to be walking beside them; they used language such as "*I want men to stand by my side*" (Participant 38: LGBTQ Woman) and take up important positions in the community e.g. in relation to working in the schools "*We want them. It's finding fellas that want to work in that area and fit and gel with our kids too.*" (Participant 37: LGBTQ Woman). As this participant explained, standing together also contained a spiritual element:

PARTICIPANT 38: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP

I was 17 when I left high school and I went to [name] College down [name] Street and the first man that walked in that door was [name]. He was my friend and he taught me about identity again

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and what I really love about strong black men and men in general is being platonic and walking spiritually together. So then it just unfolded. There was [several male individuals named]..... and then some. I'm just naming off the top of my head who are always by my side. I didn't have to see them all the time. They didn't have to be present politically. They were just gregarious. Then I've got my grandfather who's a law man up in [place] so he gives me my name and guides me through Country. He died in a parking lot in [city]. So there's so many different things about a strong black man. When I see men I just kind of envy what power they have and how they could share it a bit more, stop being so self-centred. So yes, I love [inaudible]. They always greet me with a smile and a hug and just this gentleness. That's what I believe in strong black men that see past my sexuality, don't see me as an object, see me as [me].

Participants expressed the importance of sharing responsibility for passing on Aboriginal knowledge, this included separate domains of culture that are distinct to women and men, as this quote illustrates:

PARTICIPANT 40: LGBTQ WOMEN'S GROUP
Then they'll sort of take on that sort of same role throughout until they get really old, passing on stories and traditions and passing it onto younger generations. So their roles sort of get more similar. So men will pass on certain knowledge that only men are allowed to pass on and women will pass on certain knowledge to girls that only women are allowed to pass on.

An important distinction in these discussions is that the notion of equity was framed around caring responsibilities, for families, communities and culture, rather than redressing unequal power relationships. This included acknowledgement that responsibilities are situated in shared spaces as well as in distinct gendered spaces (i.e. men's only and women's only), and this is an important component of Aboriginal cultural life. It was often explained that these spaces were principally organised around age systems (older people held more knowledge).

These insights suggest that Aboriginal concepts of gender equity are broader than current Western understandings which focus on individual rights to access power and resources, and included gendered, reciprocal relationships, and collective responsibilities.

Discussions and Recommendations

Among participants in this study, understandings of gender were diverse, and reflected both the influence of Western patriarchal ideals of masculinity and femininity (across family and employment domains) as well as traditional Aboriginal cultural norms (e.g. expectations for caring for Elders).

Knowledge of culture and connection to culture were central to the depictions of strong Aboriginal women and men. This encompassed knowing the roles and responsibilities each held within the community, and was strongly linked to the notion of reciprocity, including sharing of resources, caring for family and working for the community.

The responsibilities participants' spoke of were often gendered. For example, gender roles were commonly defined around nurturing; female participants discussed caring as an important aspect of their womanhood; this included parenting, as well as responsibilities as aunties and to care for other community members. This aligns strongly with previous research (e.g. Bessarab, 2006; Dune et al., 2017; Kulhankova, 2011). Caring was also identified as an important part of Aboriginal male identity, but was described in different ways, including responsibilities to guide and protect children and to pass on cultural knowledge. This is also consistent with previous research with Aboriginal men, such as the work of McCoy (2004), who identified the importance of men both nurturing and being nurtured across their life course.

Having a strong work ethic was another important facet of Aboriginal identity, however there were gendered expectations surrounding the ways in which this was fulfilled. For men in particular, having a work ethic was linked to a provider role, with a focus on the contribution of income. Participants noted that employment status was a source of pride and esteem in the community, whereas non-monetary contributions (e.g. household duties, advocacy roles, guidance) were often not valued or perceived as invisible. These findings illustrate the influence of Western patriarchal ideals about gender roles, that constrain and devalue the range of contributions Aboriginal women and men make to their families and communities.

Gender featured heavily in the discussions regarding expression of emotions, with some contradictory findings emerging about how and when women and men should manage emotions. The contradictions were apparent between participants of the same yarning circles (for example, the disagreement among young male participants about emotions as a sign of strength) as well as between male and female groups. Furthermore, some participants reported disagreements within their own families surrounding acceptable expression of emotions. In general, emotional constraint was expected of men, except in a limited number of circumstances such as funerals or associated with physical illness. The stigma around men's emotions is consistent with Westernised ideas around men's stoicness and the ways in which they are often valorised for being 'in control' of their emotions (Lim, 2016; Newman et al., 2016).

For women, participants described common stereotypes of Aboriginal women as overly emotional, and some young male participants spoke of not wanting to burden their mothers with stress for fear of emotional reactions. These findings are problematic as they reinforce the historical portrayal of Aboriginal women as hysterical, undermining their legitimacy and agency.

The discussions in the yarning circles confirmed that contradictory messages regarding emotional expression are promoted from a very young age. These and other gender norms are often promoted unconsciously, with little awareness from parents, peers and community, who were reported as having the strongest influence over the socialisation of children. Of note, participants also identified local community clubs as an important site for learning, which often reinforced Western gendered expectations of behaviours surrounding sport and dress. Some participants also identified a growing influence of African American hip hop and rap music on Aboriginal

Discussions and Recommendations

youth identities, which has been reported in previous studies (Bessarab, 2006; Blanch, 2011). Morgan (2015) argues that this alignment with African American identities may offer an alternative source of connection for young men seeking to understand their experiences of marginalisation, possibly due to the similar narratives of oppression and resistance. However, this can also lead to isolation from one's own community, as discussed in some of the women's yarning circles.

While some participants spoke of difficulties in challenging traditional gender norms, there were numerous examples of ways in which individuals did so. Discussions with young men revealed many were open and embracing of diverse gender roles and expressions, particularly in relation to parenting and domestic activities.

Acts of resistance towards gendered expectations were most apparent in the discussions with LGBTQ participants, and were described in terms of the way they expressed themselves, and the ways they created safe spaces for children and peers to express themselves. However, some of these participants also spoke of times when they did not actively challenge gender norms in order to maintain involvement in community activities. These findings demonstrate that Aboriginal LGBTQ people are connected to culture, and actively carving out new spaces in their communities, often in the face of considerable difficulties, including experiences of homophobia within and outside of their community. As our literature review did not identify any original research examining the unique experiences of Aboriginal transgender and gender diverse peoples, we suggest that this is a priority for further research. Future projects should draw attention to the specific needs of Aboriginal LGBTQ, and identify ways to support them to further participate in and shape culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

A national research project, inclusive of many groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (e.g. Elders, LGBTQ peoples, different language groups etc.) is needed to further examine views about gender roles, gender expression and gender equity, to reflect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experiences.

Further research is required to raise awareness of the experiences and needs of LGBTQ peoples, and their contribution to culture and community.

RECOMMENDATION FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Health and community services should incorporate Aboriginal LGBTQ awareness training which is designed by and delivered by Aboriginal people. This would provide tailored information and support in a safe and inclusive environment.

Participants in this study conceptualized gender equity differently to current Western definitions, using different terminology. For example, the World Health Organisation refers to gender equity as the process of achieving equal opportunities for groups of women and men "to access and control social, economic and political resources," recognizing that this may require differential treatment of women and men (WHO, 2017). In our study, participants were often not familiar with the term 'gender equity', and when discussing fairness they spoke of equal partnerships between women and men and sharing and fulfilling responsibilities to family and community.

The responsibilities participants spoke of were often gendered, and this was described as an important part of Aboriginal culture. However, an important distinction here is that the responsibilities and relationships they entail are not subordinate. This reflects views expressed by Aboriginal scholars regarding the gendered roles and responsibilities in traditional Aboriginal societies (e.g. Barlo, 2016; Behrendt, 1993;

Bessarab, 2006; Huggins, 1998) which are described as interdependent and complementary.

Participants in this study understood gender equity as founded in equal responsibility, with the ability to control gendered spaces, as well as the collective responsibility for carrying culture forward. Their depictions reinforce the strong role that reciprocity plays in many Aboriginal cultures and value systems, and the importance of instilling responsibility from an early age (Lohoar, Butera, & Kennedy, 2014). Whether this broader view of gender equity, that includes promoting both individual and collective strength, is shared in communities outside of those participating in this research is unclear and requires further exploration.

While there was a strong aspiration for equal partnerships, described as men and women walking side by side, female and male participants identified many factors in their daily lives which impeded progress in this regard. Further, there was an apparent disconnect between what some female and male participants perceived 'partnership' to mean. Women often expressed that they undertook the 'lion's share' of parenting and domestic activities, and this reflected outdated Westernised and patriarchal views that such responsibilities are the domain of women. This appears to be normalized at a very early age, as reported in other research (Bessarab, 2006). Younger female participants also commented that the expectations that caring is 'women's work' extended to increased scrutiny and social judgment surrounding parenting abilities. However, men reflected that the view of women as primary caregivers was often detrimental in family court matters, resulting in unequal child custody arrangements. Increasing the visibility of Aboriginal fathers as role models is a vital step forward to counteract these expectations (Adams, 2006; Reilly & Rees, 2017).

In discussing impediments to realising this vision of gender equity, participants spoke of broken cultural connections and belonging rather than a struggle for power between men and women. Disrupted connections encompassed family and community relationships as well as spiritual links to ancestors and land. There was a general view among male and female participants, that fracturing of these relationships was particularly problematic for Aboriginal men, as many felt that support networks (formal and informal) were less available to men. Participants drew particular attention to the lack of opportunities for men to connect with other men for emotional, cultural and social support. Some viewed this as a major impediment to men fulfilling their family, community and cultural roles.

The gendered impact of broken support networks was also apparent in the ways female participants described empowering themselves. This included accessing emotional support from other women, practicing self-care, as well as caring for others in the community. Women spoke of their empowerment and strengths as tools for survival, and depictions of strong Aboriginal women were often phrased around maintaining their responsibilities and role in the community regardless of their own personal struggles. Other research with Aboriginal women has also identified survival as a key facet of women's strength and an Aboriginal form of resilience (Bainbridge, 2011; Dune et al., 2017). Indeed the stories of female participants suggest that survival and resilience are intertwined and may be both a choice and a reflex. They described an ongoing balance between acknowledging a painful past and moving forward to a stronger future. The connections between past and future are similar to author Anita Heiss's (2018: p.2) articulation of resilience as the ways in which Aboriginal people 'survive and thrive' against the odds.

Comparatively, survival and resilience were not prominent in the descriptions of strong Aboriginal men. In addition, some male participants had difficulty expressing the ways in which they empowered themselves. We were not able to determine whether the absence of the language surrounding these concepts meant that male participants did not identify with resilience as a concept, or their experiences of resilience were entirely different. In the feedback sessions, there was some indication that the resilience for men is often framed in terms of recovery and rehabilitation, and this is problematic, however, this requires further exploration.

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Discussion and Recommendations

While there is increasing recognition that building resilience in Aboriginal families requires privileging Aboriginal frameworks for healing (Lohoar et al., 2014; Poroch et al., 2009), our findings reinforce the need to understand how these frameworks are gendered. Doing so will contribute to advancing partnerships and thus Aboriginal constructs of gender equity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Further research should be undertaken to explore the gendered, cultural and collective aspects of Aboriginal resilience. This includes describing the self-care tools that have developed over generations, the extent to which men and women are engaged in cultural revitalisation and the connections between individual and community resilience. This will expand the knowledge base for culturally relevant, gender sensitive programs and policy to improve Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing.

The prioritising of shared responsibility to family and culture over equal opportunities as the foundation of gender equity, echoes a prominent discourse in Aboriginal men's health literature, which calls for Aboriginal men to step up to responsibilities and 'reclaim their rightful place' in families and communities (Adams, 1998, 2006; Barlo, 2016; McCoy, 2004; Tsey, Patterson, Whiteside, Baird & Baird, 2002). Mick Adams, a key leader in this field, asserts that Aboriginal men are displaced in contemporary society, a legacy of colonisation that has seen men's traditional roles as nurturers, providers, teachers and law makers eroded, and constrained their opportunities to access education and employment in Western institutions (Adams, 1998). This sense of displacement has also been described as a loss of men's dignity (Barlo, 2016), as disempowerment (Adams, 2006; Lechleitner, Nathan, Silver, & Rosewarne, 2018; Reilly & Rees, 2017), as men's denial of responsibility (Davis, 1992) and a consequence of disrupted journeys to 'manhood' (McCoy, 2004). These

scholars argue that reconnecting with culture and taking responsibility are key to the restoration of Aboriginal men's identity, a view that has been formed over many years. Indeed, in 1999 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men came together and articulated a vision for taking greater responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and that of their family (Briscoe, 2000). Almost 20 years later, this sentiment was reiterated at the 2018 National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Ochre Day Men's health conference, which brought together over 250 Aboriginal men, many of whom spoke of healing through reclaiming culture and cultural values (Pearce, 2018).

Many grass-roots initiatives led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have formed in response to the call for men to more fully participate in contemporary society. These include men's support groups, parenting programs, men's health clinics and training, cultural camps, and the establishment of *Mibbinbah Spirit Healing*, the national Indigenous men's health promotion organisation. Evidence about the positive impact of these activities is growing (McCalman et al., 2010; Tsey et al., 2014). However, these activities are often location specific and dependent on a few key individuals; participants in our study clearly identified a need for more men's spaces and programs. A lack of sustained, long-term funding (beyond election cycles) remains a major impediment to scale up of current men's initiatives (McCalman, Bainbridge, Brown, Tsey, & Clarke, 2018).

In addition to funding, ongoing evaluation that incorporates Indigenous methodologies, is also required to continue to build the evidence base for Aboriginal men's programs, led by Aboriginal men, and raise awareness of the ways in which men are re-engaging with cultural and family responsibilities. We await the findings of two other current studies funded by the Lowitja Institute examining the impact of ceremony in the construction of urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander masculinities, and separately, understanding ways to promote and support strong fathers.

While the initiatives previously mentioned demonstrate a commitment to addressing Aboriginal gender issues, they are constrained to the spaces that Aboriginal people control. Our findings also highlight that gender equity cannot be achieved without confronting the human rights issues affecting all Aboriginal peoples that contribute to persistent social disadvantage. Male, female and LGBTQ participants discussed racism as a common and unifying experience, which was often in the form of racialised gender stereotypes, homophobia and harassment. Racist encounters had wide-ranging ramifications in their daily life, such as restrictions on accessing certain services, including the justice system, aspirations and opportunities for employment, participation in family activities, as well as threats to personal safety. Participants also described ways in which government policy undermined their ability to fulfil gendered, cultural responsibilities (e.g. fishing restrictions), which was also identified in previous research exploring the importance of dignity for Aboriginal men's identity (Barlo, 2016).

Therefore, advancing gender equity for Aboriginal peoples must be considered within a broader agenda to address the structures that perpetuate systemic racism. Foremost, responses must be developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to realise the right to self-determination. We argue that self-determination is the foundation to empower Aboriginal women, men and gender diverse individuals to fulfil their cultural and family obligations. This aligns with the approach to gender equity promoted by international bodies such as the United Nationals Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) which views achievement of cultural rights, within an international human rights framework, as an essential for the empowerment of women (UNESCO, 2014). We further argue that gender equity requires advancement of both individual and collective cultural rights.

Without supporting self-determination, the current political movement for gender equality in Australia, which has a major focus on women's economic security, including pay differentials between women and men (e.g. Australian Government, 2018a), will do little to restore power to Aboriginal women or men. For example, participants in our study identified that women in their communities often had greater access to sustained employment (reflecting the predominance of caring-related jobs in communities). This has also been noted by Aboriginal scholars such as Larissa Behrendt (1993) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000), who have long argued that the focus of the Western feminist movement on paid work issues, without addressing the arguably more prominent effects of race, class and sexuality, has directly contributed to the marginalisation of Aboriginal women in contemporary society. Furthermore, Behrendt (ibid) argues that mainstream feminist theory has ignored the importance of preservation of culture and instead promoted the notion of a universal experience of women. This is evident in immense efforts to advance (white) women's rights in Australia over the last two centuries of which Aboriginal women have received diminished benefits from (exemplified in the lengthy delay in Aboriginal women attaining the right to vote).
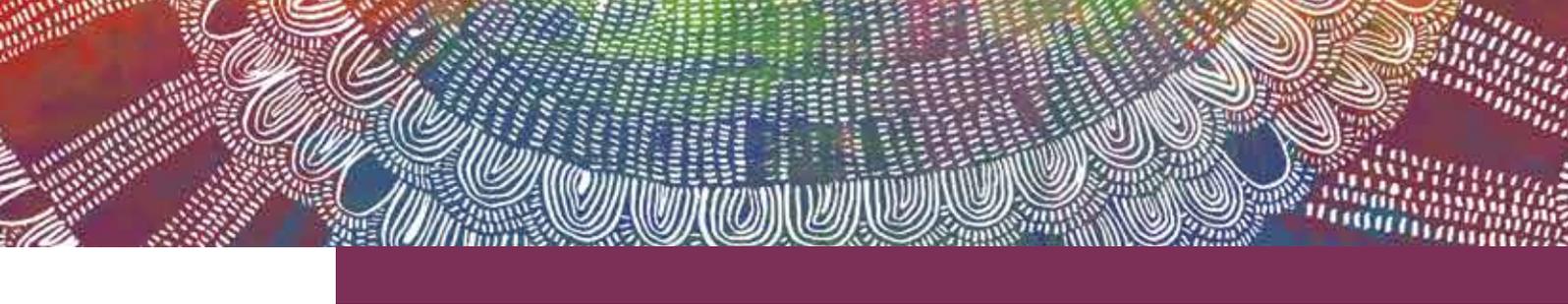
Discussion and Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Gender should be a key consideration of future policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that the impacts of public policy are often gendered, and have the potential to either perpetuate inequality or advance gender equity.

Specific actions to advance gender equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples need to be developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and, within broader strategies to attain self-determination, recognising that Aboriginal people often face many forms of marginalisation and discrimination that intersect and multiply inequity.

Community services that are safe spaces and inclusive to all men need to be expanded, to provide culturally appropriate avenues for Aboriginal men to discuss emotions and seek emotional and cultural support. This includes services that are built on a foundation of strengths, rather than addiction or grief, to promote connections with other men and to community.

Community awareness strategies, including initiatives in schools, developed in partnership with Aboriginal people, are needed to advance understanding of the influence of gender in people's lives, to counteract racial and gender stereotypes, and promote positive Aboriginal male, female and gender diverse role models. Strategies are needed for both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous communities.

In addition to paid work issues, gender equality initiatives in Australia are also framed in the context of ending violence against women (e.g. VicHealth, 2017). In our study we did not explicitly explore gendered forms of violence, as we chose to focus on a strengths-based understanding of gender rather than problematising Aboriginal masculinities. In doing so we do not imply that gendered violence is not a significant issue for many Aboriginal communities. However, we reject the discourse that essentialises violence within Aboriginal culture. Of note, in our yarning circles with both men and women, experiences of violence were not a key feature of discussions and stories about gender. The exception was the LGBTQ groups, where discussions of violence did occur, in the context of homophobia, misgendering and harassment at community events, and in the pressure to avoid reporting male family members that use violence to police, privileging the safety of male family members over their own. While Aboriginal LGBTQ activists have often spoken out about experiences of gendered violence (Brown, 2004), there is a paucity of research specifically examining this issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Existing strategies and initiatives developed to address family violence in communities need to consider the unique experiences of LGBTQ people and specifically address this type of violence.

Services and spaces for Aboriginal LGBTQ people to safely come together in the community are needed to reduce isolation, counteract homophobia and promote cultural connections.

Limitations

This project was restricted to three Aboriginal communities in metropolitan and regional sites in South Australia and did not include any perspectives from those living in remote areas or Torres Strait Islander peoples. As a result, the findings may not reflect views and understandings of gender and gender equity in other communities, given the diversity of languages, cultural protocols and practices in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

In addition, although we sought to include a diversity of experiences by gender and life stage in this research, we acknowledge that we have not captured all relevant experiences. This includes the views of children and those who live with a disability, who may have specific insights into the way gender is learned, as well as the impact of gender and gender inequality on their lives.

Qualitative research, such as this study, is often judged on the degree to which 'data saturation' is reached, which occurs when the concepts described by participants are being repeated and no new information is arising from subsequent data collection (Seale, 2004). In a study of this size, which was exploratory in nature, and included three research sites with diverse local contexts, this is difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, the research team employed a number of strategies to increase the rigour of the findings, including independent coding by three team members (two of whom were Aboriginal), cross-checking of interpretations during community workshops in each site, and feedback and revision of recommendations with Aboriginal investigators and Aboriginal Advisory Group members. For this reason, we argue that we have obtained the most salient themes from our data collection; an approach that is increasingly viewed as a more useful definition of data saturation (Weller et al., 2018).

Conclusions

In this exploratory study, strong Aboriginal women were portrayed as being connected to culture, and being influential in their families and the community. Women, particularly older women, self-identified as resilient and survivors. Strong Aboriginal men were described in terms of their knowledge of culture and identity, and their ability to share this knowledge with family and community. Nurturing and responsibility for raising children were named as important aspects of Aboriginal femininity and masculinity.

Gender fairness was discussed as partnerships between women and men, as sharing of responsibilities to family and community, and it was acknowledged that the nature of these responsibilities may be different. We argue that this aspiration for gender equity, as women and men walking together to fulfil their cultural and family obligations, can only be fully achieved when Aboriginal peoples can realise the right to self-determination, which requires fundamental changes to our political system.

In addition to structural change, attitudinal change is required. Continued strategies to counteract racial and gender stereotypes, and promote positive role models will support this change, and need to be targeted at both non-Aboriginal society and Aboriginal communities.

Our findings that feelings of displacement and disconnection disproportionately affected men need confirmation and further exploration to understand ways to counteract this. It is vital to build on existing community activities and expertise to support men to reconnect with other men and their families. This includes safe male spaces but also supporting men and women to come together to have conversations about sharing responsibilities, to start reflecting on their roles within the home and community.

The experiences of LGBTQ people in our study showed that they worked hard to stay connected to culture, but often felt silenced. Much more needs to be done to understand and raise awareness of the experiences and needs of LGBTQ peoples, and their contribution to culture and community.
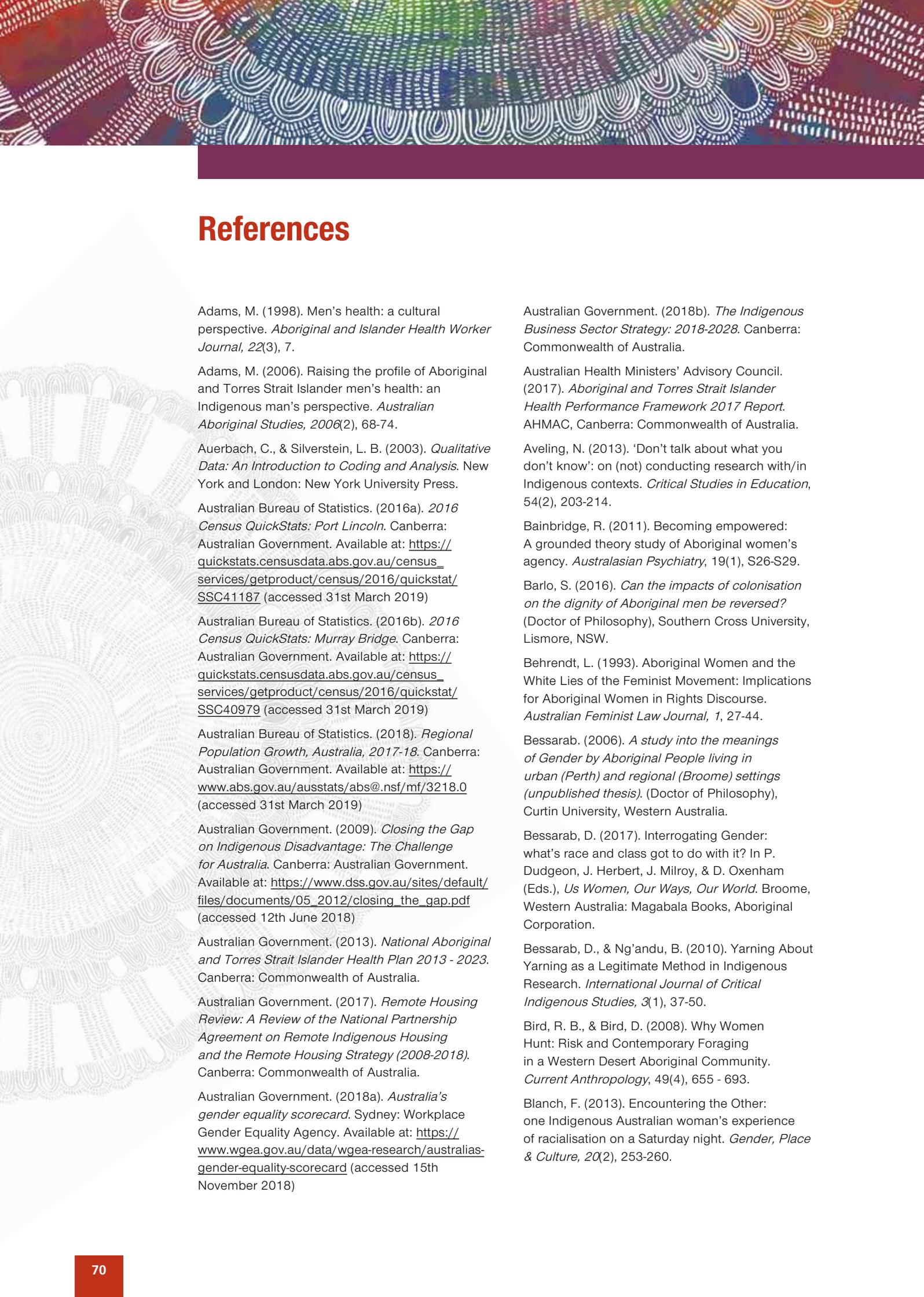
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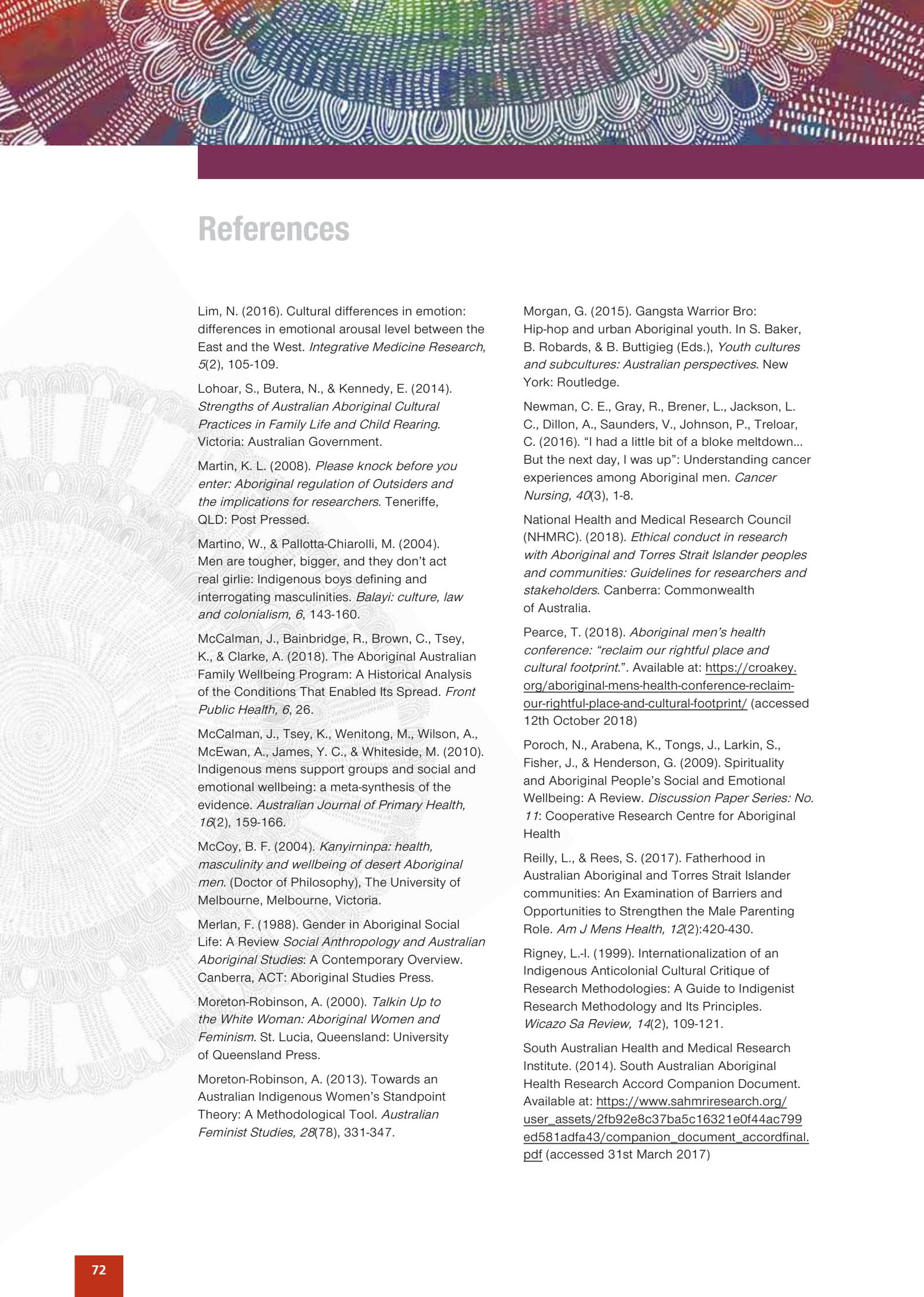
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Appendices

Appendix A Table 1: Description of included studies

Lead Author, Year Published	Timeframe	Methods	Setting	Participant details	Aim
Davis, 1992	1984-1992	Ethnographic interviews (individual and group) and participant observation.	Three towns in rural/regional NSW with significant Aboriginal populations.	>350 interviews with Aboriginal community members and groups (gender, age not specified).	To examine the dominance of women in social and political life and decision making in Aboriginal society.
Herbert, 1995	Unclear	Consultations and group discussions (no other details provided).	10 school communities in rural, remote and urban areas of QLD, NSW, NT and WA.	300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary and secondary school students and parents.	To explore gender issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and boys attending school.
Martino, 2004	Unclear	Semi-structured interviews, analyses informed by post-colonial and Foucaldian theoretical frameworks.	Schools in rural, regional and urban Australia (no other details provided).	Subgroup of Indigenous boys (number not specified) participating in a larger study of 150 boys and young men aged 11 to 24 years.	To explore social practices of masculinity among Indigenous boys and young men.
McCoy, 2004	2001-2003	Individual and group interviews, participant observation, and the provision of paintings by men, with analyses informed by ethnography and grounded theory approaches and post-colonial theory.	The Kutjungka region in the south-east Kimberley of WA (remote).	>50 Aboriginal men, "from teenagers to the very old", sometimes interviewed more than once; and 7 Aboriginal women, 7 non-Aboriginal women, 7 non-Aboriginal men from the region.	To explore the concept of Kanyirninpa or holding and its role in shaping male adulthood in contemporary life.
Fietz, 2005	Unclear	Ethnographic field research.	Docker River community, NT (remote).	Unclear.	To explore the development of identity among young Pitjantjatjara people.
Bessarab, 2006 (see also Bessarab 2017)	2002-2003	Yarning circles and interviews.	Broome (regional) and Perth (urban).	17 Aboriginal women and 21 Aboriginal men aged 19-77 years in Broome and Perth, WA.	To explore the meanings of gender for Aboriginal women and men living in Perth and Broome.
Bird, 2008	2000-2005	Ethnographic interviews and participant observation, including recording of hunting and foraging practices.	Martu people in region surrounding Parnngurr community, WA (remote).	24 men and women, ages unclear.	To explore gender differences in contemporary hunting and foraging practices.
Bainbridge, 2011	Unclear	Life-history narrative interviews, analysed using a grounded theory approach.	Women from 14 Aboriginal language group across Australia.	20 Aboriginal women aged ≥18 years.	To identify the process and dimensions underlying Aboriginal women's performance of agency.
Blanch, 2011	Unclear	Focus groups/talking circle discussions.	Secondary school in Western suburbs of Adelaide, SA.	Aboriginal young men attending high school (no further details provided).	To explore how Foucault's concept of the panopticon, power and knowledge impacts on the identity of young Aboriginal males in secondary school.

Lead Author, Year Published	Timeframe	Methods	Setting	Participant Details	Aim
Kulhankova, 2011	2006	Ethnographic interviews and participant observation.	Aboriginal child care centre in Brisbane, QLD.	5 middle aged Aboriginal women working for the child care centre.	To study contemporary care giving roles and practices among Aboriginal women working in an Aboriginal child care centre.
Senior, 2012	2002-2004	Questionnaire, group interviews and participant observation developed within a participatory action framework.	Remote Aboriginal community in the NT.	59 young women aged 13–23 years.	To explore the aspirations and expectations of a groups of young women living in a remote community.
Barlo, 2016	2012-2013	Yarning circles and the development of original art works, analyses informed by grounded theory, participatory action research and narrative research.	Aboriginal Elders from the Yuin, Gumbaynggirr and Bundjalung nations in NSW, and from First Nations peoples in Canada.	Three Aboriginal male Elders aged 75-81 years from Australia, and two male and one female First Nations Elders aged 67-71 years from Canada.	To explore the impact of colonisation on the dignity of Aboriginal men, and the importance of Aboriginal culture to the restoration and maintenance of that dignity.
Newman, 2016	2008-2011	Semi-structured interviews.	Men and their carers living in NSW.	6 Aboriginal men diagnosed with cancer, 12 carers and 5 clinicians of varying ages (30 to 60+ years).	To explore the experiences of Aboriginal men engaging in cancer diagnosis and treatment.
Dune, 2017	2014	Focus groups with yarning approach.	Women from a range of Aboriginal language groups living on the Sunshine Coast, QLD.	11 Aboriginal women aged between 42-73 years.	To explore how ageing Aboriginal women talk about their own agency and gender role performance.
Reilly, 2017	2011	Yarning sessions.	Three remote Aboriginal communities in QLD.	25 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women and 6 non-Aboriginal stakeholders.	To explore the challenges faced by Aboriginal fathers and the factors that enable men to engage in parenting roles.

Appendices

Appendix B. Policy Analysis Tools

Adapted from (Keleher, 2012)

Step one: Policy rating

Score on a scale of 0 (missing) to 5 (exceeds minimum standard) on the degree to which it includes specific gendered data.

1. Rate and comment on the inclusion of definition of gender and sex

2. Rate and comment on the inclusion of statistics of gender and sex

3. Rate and comment on the inclusion of any definition of gender equity

4. Rate and comment on the level of representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gender roles and responsibilities

5. Rate and comment on the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health and health outcomes

6. Rate and comment on the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's health and health outcomes

7. Rate and comment the inclusion of authorship by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations

8. Rate and comment on the consultation conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities

9. Rate reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and policies

Provide your thoughts and comments on the policy and how it rates to the questions.

Also include:

– Additional evidence or comments

– Quotes

Policy Analysis – Policy Rating

Policy Name

Author

Publication Year

1. Rate and comment on the inclusion of definition of gender and sex

0	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

Policy Analysis – Policy Rating (cont)

2. Rate and comment on the inclusion of statistics of gender and sex

0	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

3. Rate and comment on the inclusion of any definition of gender equity

0	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

4. Rate and comment on the level of representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gender roles and responsibilities

0	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

5. Rate and comment on the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health and health outcomes

0	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

Appendices

Policy Analysis – Policy Rating (cont)

6. **Rate and comment on the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's health and health outcomes**

0	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

7. **Rate and comment the inclusion of authorship by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations**

0	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

8. **Rate and comment on the consultation conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities**

0	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

9. **Rate reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and policies**

0	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

Appendix C. Distress Protocol

Step 1: Building Values and Ongoing Conversation with Community
• The project acknowledges the potential for distress or emotion when asking Aboriginal people about their lives BUT understands the importance of not viewing emotion as negative or something to be shut down or avoided
• The project understands that establishing ways of keeping people safe needs to happen very early on and is ongoing
• Setting up (and maintaining) a safe environment relies on continuing community consultation, e.g. understanding community context, family tensions and disputes etc.
• Establish clear idea of professional and other resources available (and steps to access) in the community in the event that people become distressed
• Acknowledge that there is not an exhaustive approach to participant safety and working with distress, and it is dependent across individuals, age groups and gender

Step 2: Establishing Group Norms
• Established as a group at the beginning of any yarning circles
• Asking participants to commit to keeping each other safe, e.g. don't shut down or judge emotions
• Outline strengths based approach; that emotional stories may arise but that this is positive
• Allowing participants space to 'get it out'
• Acknowledge that sharing strengths and weakness is important to yarning and storytelling
• Allowing phones to be at arm's reach (but on silent)
• Remind people that they are free to get up for a rest break whenever they need to
• Possibility for distress outlined on the Information sheet/Consent forms
• Explain mandatory reporting of any illegal activity or injustice, under <key community representatives> guidance

Step 3: Recognising Signs of Distress
Acknowledging that these signs may differ across age groups and gender; key signs to look out for in general:
• Frustrated and angry (potentially with facilitators and other participants)
• Leaving the room unexpectedly (this may or may not be disguised as a 'smoke break')
• Crying and lowering head
• Withdrawing from participation
• Disengaging by using or reaching for phone (particularly for younger participants)
• A change in emotions or demeanour
• Silence and turning away from group and/ or facilitators

Appendix C. Distress Protocol

Step 4: Engaging with Distress or Emotion
• Don't shut down or attempt to pass over the person experiencing emotion
• Encourage emotion to play out without making the person feel rushed or overlooked
• Engage with the group to provide positive support and encouragement
• Offer to pause for a rest break
• Check in on emotions 'off the record' (i.e. in a separate space outside of the room)
• Assess the participant's emotional and mental state
• Suggest for them to have a private chat with facilitator or someone they trust, while the rest of the group reconvenes with the other facilitator
• Continue assessing participants emotional state, ask if they would like to continue/withdraw

| Step 5a: Decide to Continue	Step 5b: Decide to Withdraw
• If the participants agrees to continue they will re-join the yarning group	• Invite participant to make decision about what their intended next step will be (i.e. identify whether they want to go home or elsewhere, how they might get there safely)
• At the end of the yarning session follow up with details of support available	• Offer age and gender appropriate professional support which has been previously negotiated (male and female counsellors who can easily be reached)
• The researcher will also ask the participant if there is anyone the researcher should inform	

Step 6: Reporting
If participants share information that may relate to criminal activity or injustice, the participant will be asked:
• Have they understood what they are sharing with us
• Whether they would like to talk with someone else about the issue or concern that has been raised (appropriate support person) to deal with the issue, and;
• Whether there is anyone they want us to directly inform
Engage in steps outlined by community which includes contact with <key community contact> in the first instance.

Appendix D. Description of Participants

	Code	Gender of Participants	Number of Participants	Age Range	Notes
	LOCATION 1				
1.	L1 YC01 1511	Female	6	2 younger women under 30 4 women in middle age	
2.	L1 YC02 1711	Male	5	Young men all between 18-25	
3	L1 YC03 2602	Female	4	Aged 30 and older mothers	
4.	L1 YC04 0503	Female	4	Mothers with younger children (present)	
5.	L1 YC05 1704	Male	6	Mid-30s to late 50s	
	LOCATION 2				
6.	L2 YC01 3101_1	Female	3	Mothers and grandmothers aged between 40 and 55	
7.	L2 YC02 3101_2	Male	4	Men between 25 and 35	
8.	L2 YC03 2001_1	Female	2	Middle aged women	No Audio
9.	L2 YC04 2003_2	Female	2	Young teenage women	
	LOCATION 3				
10.	L3 YC01 0802	Female	3	Women aged between 25 – 45	LGBTQ
11.	L3 YC02 1502	Female	1	Not available	LGBTQ
12.	L3 YC03 1902	Male	3	Young men aged late 20s	
13.	L3 YC04 2102	Male	2	20s and 40s	LGBTQ
14.	L3 YC05 2603	Female	4	Young women in teens and 20s	
	Total Female		**29**		
	Total Male		**20**		
	Total Overall		**49**		
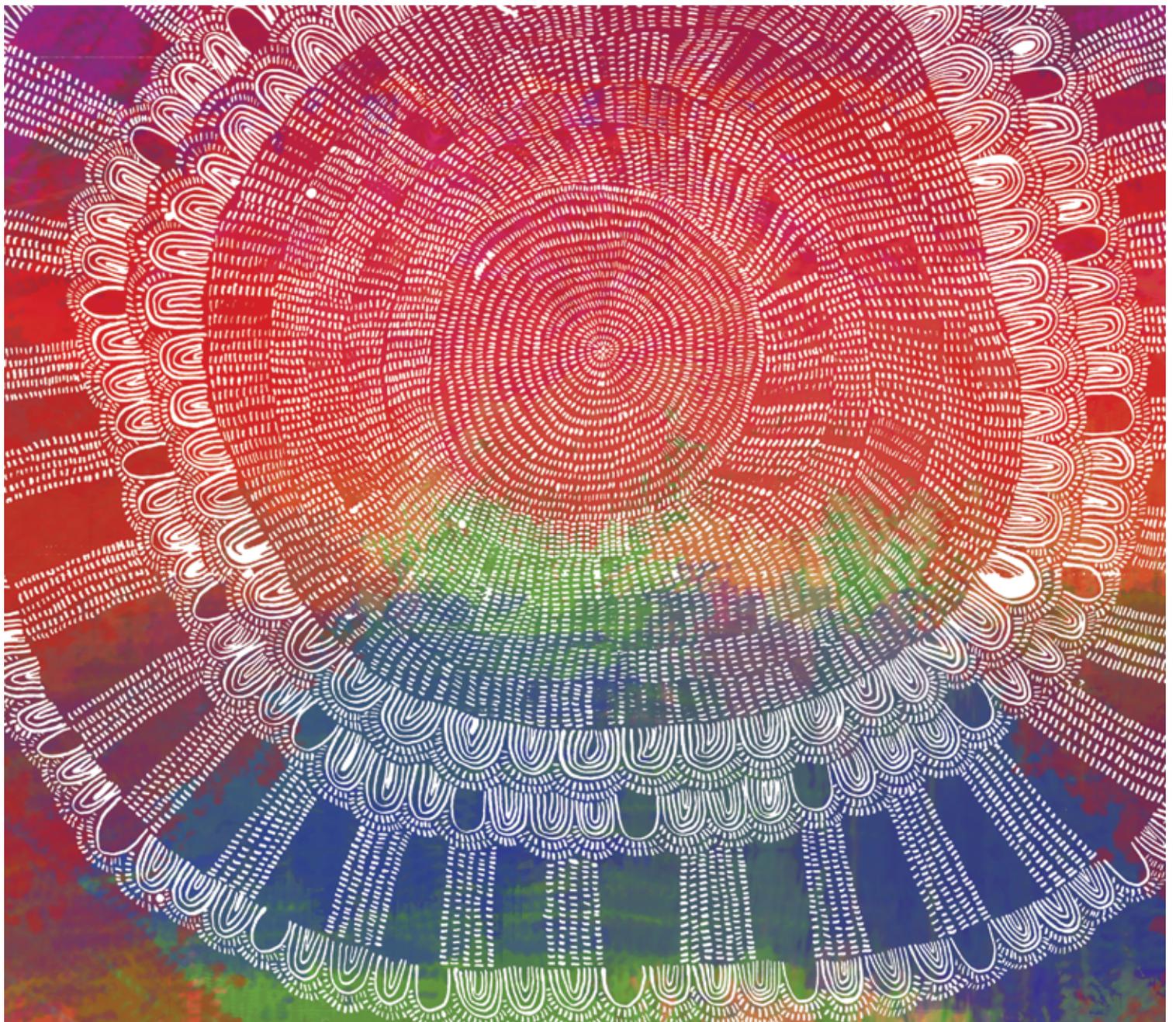
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