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The experiences of Indigenous Australian psychologists and higher education

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The Experiences of Indigenous

Australian Psychologists and Higher Education

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Abstract

Disparities exist between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians on indicators of life expectancy, alcohol and drug use, adult and juvenile incarceration, and rates of hospitalisation for self-harm, suicide, and mental and behavioural disorders due to psychoactive substance use (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008; Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Psychology is a discipline that can assist in remedying these issues, yet disparities are evident in Indigenous participation in higher education generally, as well as within tertiary psychology education specifically (Jones, Dudgeon, & Kelly, 2010). Ten Indigenous Australian psychologists were interviewed to investigate possible barriers and enablers for Indigenous students studying psychology. Hermeneutic phenomenology guided the research and its analysis, whereby the data went through a process known as the 'hermeneutic circle' (Whitehead, 2004). Data was analysed in itself, as well as part of the whole, leading to the worldviews of the participant and researcher converging into a 'horizon of meaning' (Whitehead, 2004). Sources of support for Indigenous students included family support, financial assistance, and Indigenous student support centres. Potential barriers to tertiary study of psychology were negative conceptions of higher education and psychology by the community, 'culture shock' upon relocating to the metropolitan area, a lack of Indigenous content and staff, and culturally insensitivity by staff members. Efforts should be made to address these barriers to participation, as well as to build those structures and services that were supportive for students.

Shaun Cameron

Dr. Ken Robinson

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DECLARATION

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The participants, for their honest participation and including me within their world.

Dedicated to

My parents, Donald and Anne,

for their unlimited support and encouragement

Johnny Lee

12.03.1957 – 24.08.2011

The dead cultures left the celebration early,

as people rejoiced

- Author, aged 10

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The Indigenous peoples of Australia have travelled the continent for at least 42,000 years, with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission estimating Australia's human history at a possible 150,000 years (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1998; Gillespie, 2002). Prior to the first landing of European settlers in 1788, the population of Indigenous Australians was estimated to be between 500,000 and 1,000,000, which was made up of 260 distinct language groups and 500 dialects (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010; Ranzijn, McConnochie, & Nolan, 2009). Complex social systems were in place that had weathered great changes such as migration, warfare between tribal groups, natural disasters, and overseas trade (West & Murphy, 2010). It was only one century after the arrival of the settlers that the Indigenous population had declined to a low point of 60,000 and hundreds of distinct groups had been destroyed (Attwood, 2005; Ranzijn et al., 2009). With the arrival of these settlers came new diseases, new violence on the frontier, as well as a wave of new elements that could not be explained by Indigenous worldviews (Ranzijn et al., 2009). The lands that Indigenous groups had walked for thousands of years were claimed by the invaders for the pastoral industry, the expansion of which brought more and more British immigrants to work the land (Dudgeon et al., 2010). The loss of land was of particular importance to the Indigenous people due to its cultural significance. Land boundaries are fixed and are validated by The Dreaming creation stories, whereby Indigenous peoples have a strong connection to particular areas (Dudgeon et al., 2010). Individuals do not own the land, but rather belong to the land, and have spiritual obligations to it (Dudgeon et al., 2010). This was the beginning of the colonisation of Australia.

In the 1850's a series of Select Committees declared that the Indigenous peoples of Australia were an inferior race requiring protection with the only solution being segregation to minimise their suffering and abuse at the hands of the colonists (Ranzijn et al., 2009). This heralded a series of government policies in all states and territories segregating the Indigenous population into reservations or fringe camps (Ranzijn et al., 2009). State control over the lives of Indigenous peoples was extreme and they were denied the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of Australian citizens (Dudgeon et al., 2010; Ranzijn et al., 2009). This period of policy implementation became known as the protection era and lasted until 1911 when all states and territories had enacted legislation denying Indigenous people's rights and segregating them from the rest of the community (Ranzijn et al., 2009).

During the 1930's a new way of thinking towards the Indigenous population formed and after the Commonwealth-State Native Welfare Conference of 1937 the government of the time decided to begin an assimilation process for the Indigenous people (Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997). This was an intensive process where it was hoped that by removing mostly 'half-caste' Indigenous peoples and forcing them to adopt Anglo-Celtic values, beliefs, and lifestyles they would assimilate into the rest of the community (Ranzijn et al., 2009). It was believed that the rest of the Indigenous population were dying out and could live out their days on missions until extinction (Ranzijn et al., 2009). The removal of Indigenous children from their families became a major part of assimilation policies; a process that continued until the 1980's and gave birth to the Stolen Generation, a term given to those who were removed from their family (Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997; Dudgeon et al., 2010).

The 1960's were a time of change and advancement in modern Indigenous history. State and Commonwealth government enacted legislation removing restrictive policies of the past

culminating in the 1967 Commonwealth Referendum, which resulted in full citizenship rights being granted to Indigenous Australians (Dudgeon et al., 2010). This marked a move towards integration, reconciliation, and self determination for Indigenous Australians, where becoming a part of Western society did not involve a loss of cultural identity and moves were made to reconcile the ills of the past (Flood, 2006; Ranzijn et al., 2009).

The Indigenous peoples of Australia are strong and resilient, but the effects of subjugation have rippled through time and generations. While progress has been made in establishing policies and services designed to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians and heal the lingering traumas of the past, there are still clear disparities between the lives of Indigenous Australians and the rest of the community (Ranzijn et al., 2009). Indicators show that Indigenous people have a life expectancy 10 to 11.5 years shorter than the non-Indigenous population; Indigenous infant mortality rates are 1.6 to 3 times higher than non-Indigenous infants, and the proportion of Indigenous 20 to 24 year olds who reported completing year 12 or equivalent was half that of their non-Indigenous peers (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Indigenous Australians had a substantiation rate for child abuse and neglect 7 times higher; were more likely to be victims of violence; and are imprisoned at a far higher rate than that of the non-Indigenous population as both juveniles and as adults (23; and 14 times higher, respectively) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). The particular toll of forcible removal is evident in data from Zubrick et al. (2005) showing that the children of carers who were forcibly removed were at a higher risk of clinically significant emotional problems, conduct problems, and hyperactivity; and had higher levels of alcohol and drug use than children with carers who were not removed. These gaps in health, education, and justice are all descendents of the trauma,

exclusion, and subjugation embedded within Indigenous history; relived by generation after generation with racism continuing to fuel the fire.

One avenue of healing for Indigenous Australians is through psychology. The use of psychology is beneficial not only in light of the transgenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous Australians, but also for the issues in mental health caused by it (Ranzijn et al., 2009). The rate of hospitalisation for mental and behavioural disorders due to psychoactive substance use is three to five times higher for the Indigenous population than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008). Indigenous patients were also hospitalised for self-harm at two and a half times the rate of non-Indigenous patients and rates of suicide were also two and half times higher within the Indigenous population (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). While psychology has its place in the future of the Indigenous people, it too has had its place in their history.

The use of Western-based psychometric tools to explore the intellectual characteristics of Indigenous Australian children in the early 20th century led to a misguided belief that this population were of low intellectual capacity, justifying the policies of the protection era (Ranzijn et al., 2009). This application of Western models of psychology continued into the assimilation era, with misdiagnoses of mental health problems in Indigenous parents being used to support the removal of children from their families, as well as supporting the idea that Indigenous children were deficient and required special education (Ranzijn et al., 2009; Rickwood, Dudgeon, & Gridley, 2010). There is an absence of psychology as a whole, as well as individual psychologists, standing up against the poor evidence supporting these viewpoints, as well as overlooking evidence of the trauma involved in the removal of children while they were carrying out these actions (Ranzijn et al., 2009). Indigenous Australians have experienced a long history

of mistreatment by mainstream health services and in particular psychology, and have become fearful and mistrustful of these services (Rickwood et al., 2010).

While psychology has moved on from that bleak part of its Australian history, misdiagnosis and misinformation is still arising from the use of Western-standardised tests on the Indigenous population (Drew, Adams, & Walker, 2010). The application of Western worldviews and a lack of understanding of the trauma, history, and cultural differences of Indigenous Australians are continuing to hamper the efforts of modern psychology to aid Australia's first peoples (Jones, Dudgeon, & Kelly, 2010; Ranzijn et al., 2009). Dudgeon and Pickett (2000) have also stated that the two assumptions of universal applicability and individualism evident in psychology can come into conflict with treatment of Indigenous clients. The current state of mental health services are failing to meet the high level of need within the Indigenous community, one solution to the crisis being the training of more Indigenous Australian psychologists (Jones, Dudgeon, & Kelly, 2010).

Authors such as Sheldon (2010) and Peeters (2010) have stated that Indigenous psychologists and counselors are required as guides to Indigenous healing. Indigenous psychologists have a familiarity with the culture and knowledge of Indigenous history that transcends cultural competence which can be advantageous when working with Indigenous clients (Koolmatrie & Williams, 2000). The cultural competence obtained by non-Indigenous psychologists can often be undermined by the standards, regulations, and protocols of mainstream services intended to provide uniformity of service and best practice (Walker & Sonn, 2010). Drew, Adams, and Walker (2010) also assert that assessment with Indigenous clients is likely to be most accurate and effective when it is undertaken from an Indigenous perspective.

The main problem with the current state of affairs in psychology is that there are not enough Indigenous psychologists.

At present, there are 40 registered Indigenous psychologists within the whole of Australia, a number that would need to reach 624 for parity with levels of non-Indigenous practitioners (Jones, Dudgeon, & Kelly, 2010). The challenge of training so many Indigenous practitioners leads to a further problem. The overall proportion of Indigenous Australians aged 20 to 64 who had or were working towards post-secondary qualifications in 2008 was 34% compared to 58% of their non-Indigenous counterparts (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Hence, not only are there fewer Indigenous psychologists, there are fewer secondary school graduates who are able to be university trained.

More specifically, of the 34 students who have studied psychology at Edith Cowan University since semester one, 2009, only five have shown any sign of progressing in their studies, as determined by consecutive semester enrolments in their course up until semester one, 2011 (see Appendix A). The current state of the experience of Indigenous Australian students in tertiary education requires careful investigation.

Research with Indigenous Australian tertiary students has been carried out in numerous ways with varying student groups. DiGregorio, Farrington, and Page (2000) completed research aiming to illuminate the factors that promote or challenge academic success for Indigenous Australian students in the health sciences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students completing the Diploma of Health Sciences (Aboriginal Health and Community Development) at the University of Sydney. This two-year diploma program was designed by, for, and about Indigenous Australians, and is offered in an on-campus/off-campus block mode for flexibility. Students in block mode alternate between

studying externally and coming onto campus for shorter, intensive study sessions. In this case students studied in their communities for a six-week period before coming on-campus for ten-days, which occurred four times during the study. Participants represented males and females; metropolitan and rural; students currently employed as health workers and those who were not; and were from a variety of ages, although they were all mature age students. The numbers for each of these groups of students was not disclosed. Following independent analysis by three researchers, as well as cross-member checking, various commonalties were uncovered.

All of the participants had left school prior to, or at a year 10 level, and had completed some form of TAFE or university preparatory course (DiGregorio et al., 2000). It was also found that the reason why all of the students had enrolled was related to the poor health status of Indigenous Australians in the community and a desire to make a difference to these health deficits. Participants also found the experience of studying on campus during their first block overwhelming and did not know where to seek assistance, the difficulties of which eased with time. It was also found that small problems experienced by students could have cumulative effects, such as studying away from their family, feeling isolated, and concerns over what was happening in the community. Participants also spoke of Indigenous staff as an advantage as they had an understanding of Indigenous perspectives and also gave students increased confidence to enter class discussions. While this research may have issues with generalisability, considering the experiences of Indigenous students studying an Indigenous course within an Indigenous centre would be vastly different from the general tertiary experience, it has outlined the difficulties of Indigenous students first coming into university as well as how they came to be there. It has also illustrated that Indigenous Australians hoping to help their people do not need to complete the arduous years of psychology study, or even to complete secondary school, if they

wish to work in the health field. This fact is backed by a survey of community and state controlled health services conducted by Sibthorpe, Becking, and Humes in 1998 showing that of 792 Indigenous Australians working in the health-related field, only 3% had a bachelor degree.

Ellender et al. (2008) conducted research with Indigenous Australian students in the mainstream tertiary system, investigating the reasons Indigenous medical students gave for leaving their courses. Ellender et al. sent out questionnaires containing nine open-ended and eight closed-ended questions to 130 Indigenous Australian students from all 14 Australian medical schools, receiving only 12 responses, a particularly low response rate. These responses showed that the most prominent reason for Indigenous Australians withdrawing or deferring from their medical studies was financial reasons, with relationship problems being another frequent response. The majority of the participants had been working at the time of study, with some being the primary financial provider for their family and/or extended family, and the majority had also entered medicine with the aim of improving Indigenous health outcomes. Once these students entered their courses seven stated that the course was not what they had expected, with all seven citing disappointments with teaching attitudes and methods being a barrier. Although this research has uncovered the views of Indigenous students studying within the mainstream university system, the low response rate questions the generalisability of the results. It may be that the students who did not respond were those that were particularly unhappy, which may mean Indigenous students were having an even worse experience than the study uncovered. The survey method may also have constrained the answers participants were able to provide to those expected by the researchers, considering they would have chosen the topics participants were able to answer questions on.

Hossain, Gorman, Williams-Mozely, and Garvey (2008) also employed a survey technique with undergraduate first-year Indigenous students at the University of Southern Queensland with the aim of uncovering the needs of Indigenous students at university, as well as possible reasons for why secondary students may have issues enrolling at university. To investigate the views of the secondary students, Hossain et al. (2008) conducted focus groups with 50 students in year 10 through to year 12. Following thematic analysis it was found that while many of the secondary students had accurate knowledge of the role of universities, none of them had any knowledge of enabling programs available and many saw the costs of study, higher academic expectations, and possible racism and prejudice from students and university staff as deterrents. Students who did not have an interest in university were also those who had negative self concepts, a probable reason for them not viewing university as an option or a likely direction. Of the 30 first-year Indigenous undergraduate students surveyed using a Likert scale, 53% were 25 years old and below, 87% were female, and only 50% of the tertiary students had completed year 12. Prior to enrolment students wanted more information on support available, pathways into university, fees, and costs of university. Once students had begun their studies information on the different courses offered, tutorial assistance, support services, economic support, as well as increased employment information would have been beneficial. While this research has illustrated the negative views of Indigenous secondary students going into tertiary education, something which psychology will need to overcome to increase student numbers and is very helpful, the survey method used for undergraduate students has only uncovered superficial information relevant to all students, rather than indigenous specific issues.

Morgan (2001) examined the experiences of 37 Indigenous Australian current and former students at Flinders University in South Australia, and their perceptions of factors that influenced

their ability to study. Participants were surveyed after their first semester using a Likert Scale for factors that could influence their attrition or success, as well their self-ranked likelihood of withdrawing from university and if they actually then went on to withdraw. The resulting data was entered into SPSS using an undisclosed analysis. Ten of the participants were male and 27 were female, with 26% holding scholarships; 35% studying part-time; 68% coming to university after working; and 23% leaving employment to study. Thirty-two of the participants were over the age of 21, with five being aged 21 and under. Data on how many participants were current students, what they may have studied, and how many were those who had withdrawn were not provided.

Following analysis it was concluded that the likelihood of students dropping out of tertiary studies was higher if it had been considered previously; that a good orientation program and support from Indigenous services staff were seen as significant enabling factors; and that participants over the age of 21 were less likely to withdraw (Morgan, 2001). Morgan found that female students were more likely to discuss their problems with family members and that students under the age of 21 were less motivated and more likely to accept advice from their peers than others. Many of the students stated that their main motivation in undertaking tertiary studies was to gain better employment, and part-time and female participants indicated a lack of support from their domestic partners as an inhibiting factor. This research has provided a wide variety of information on the experiences of Indigenous students at university and although students may only have a limited experience of their studies after one semester, the data appears to delve deeper than is usually seen with survey research. Information on the various impacts on motivation for students and how students in differing demographics sought out and responded to

support was useful. One limitation of the study was that the information uncovered does not appear to relate to Indigenous specific issues.

Research using a qualitative approach was carried out by Kippen, Ward, and Warren (2006). Kippen et al. (2006) conducted two focus groups and six interviews with the aim of highlighting issues of access, participation, retention, and outcomes for Indigenous Australian students wishing to study at a tertiary level or who were currently studying a Bachelor of Public Health at the Bendigo campus of La Trobe University. The 16 participants who took part in the research came from a cross-section of stakeholders in public health courses, including elders of the Indigenous community, members of a local Indigenous consultative group, past and present Indigenous Bachelor of Public Health students, Indigenous students from the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, and the coordinator of the Bendigo La Trobe University Aboriginal Tertiary Studies Unit. The exact make-up of this sample was not provided, although it was stated that two of the participants were non-Indigenous lecturers in the Public Health programme at La Trobe. Thematic analysis was carried out on these interviews and focus groups, the results of which were validated with a sample of the participants.

Issues uncovered from the sample included a lack of inter-generational experience of tertiary education for Indigenous people (Kippen et al., 2006). This becomes a barrier because families do not push their children to continue their education into university and cannot provide the support required if they do. Participants also spoke about a lack of a visible presence of Indigenous people within the university staff and the resulting lack of positive role-models, as well as information on the course not reaching potential students, particularly in Indigenous communities. Students leaving these communities to study also noted problems they faced with leaving family, as well as financial, accommodation, and transport issues. Students also spoke

about the Aboriginal Tertiary Studies Unit becoming a major source of support during their study, with staff and community members identifying a large number of functions they would like it to fulfill. These included political lobbying within the university, providing information and resources to staff, and supporting individual students; a workload for an Indigenous centre that was seen as unrealistic by Kippen et al (2006). Problems were also reported with the content not being relevant to Indigenous communities as well as academic staff behaving in culturally insensitive ways, such as singling students out during the presentation of Indigenous content.

This research has succeeded in highlighting issues in access, participation, retention, and outcomes for Indigenous students, but not in a way specific to a Bachelor of Public Health programme (Kippen et al., 2006). The use of participants external to the university and who may not have had an understanding of the tertiary system, such as community members, may have contributed to a lack of depth in discussing issues relevant to current students. The contribution of community members may also be seen in the unrealistic expectations placed on the Indigenous centre as well as certain issues being raised that were not spoken about by students, such as the concern that Indigenous students would come under the negative influence of non-Indigenous students during their studies.

McLisky and Day (2004) also used a qualitative approach with participants from the University of Sydney to try and understand the underrepresentation of Indigenous Australian students in science and technology at Australian universities. Twenty-seven interviews were conducted with science and non-science students, their tutors and lecturers, staff at the university Indigenous centre, teachers and students at the local schools, a TAFE representative, and a coordinator of the National Indigenous Cadetship Program. One focus group was also held with five undergraduate students and surveys were circulated to students studying in block mode at

the university's Indigenous centre, eight of which were returned. The same seven questions were used for all three approaches, with a total of 40 participants taking part. The composition of participants was not provided. Thematic analysis was conducted on the resulting data leading to numerous themes being uncovered.

Over half of the participants stated that Indigenous people viewed science and technology as irrelevant to Indigenous communities, that it did not explain or address problems facing Indigenous communities and was seen as something white people do (McLisky & Day, 2004). Although participant information was not provided, a quote from a psychology student was included stating that the difference between that particular Indigenous student and others was that they could see the connection between what they were studying and its application in the community, which aided study. This shows that it is possible for Indigenous psychology students to see their studies as relevant to themselves and their communities, although it is unclear what led this student to feel this way. It is in the unknown possibilities that could have influenced this student that we can see the need for further research in the area involving Indigenous psychology students.

School-leaver participants also spoke of the impression that they were obligated to study a course that would feed directly back into the community, which three members of university staff also observed in the emphasis on ideals of community service in the wording of scholarship forms (McLisky & Day, 2004). Participants stated that science and technology was not something they could see themselves doing and that there were a lack of role-models for the study of it. A lack of Indigenous staff was also a part of this problem as students and communities did not see Indigenous people working in science and technology academic positions, which led to students not being trained so that they could take up these types of

positions; an apparent cycle that would not end. Students also felt that science was too hard for them, possibly a result of being discouraged by school teachers, careers advisors, and family members from continuing their science studies in secondary school and university.

A number of issues specific to male Indigenous students were uncovered, such as a lack of male role models at university, pressures to leave school for work, and perceptions from teachers, students, and communities that sport and trades were the conventional avenue of success for Indigenous students over academic subjects such as science and technology (McLisky & Day, 2004). This research by McLisky and Day has provided various insights into why Indigenous Australian students are not choosing to study science and technology. These results may be generalisable to other university subjects that do not see high enrolments from Indigenous students and may be facing similar issues to science and technology tertiary courses. One concern was that as the exact make-up of the sample was not provided, it cannot be known how many students may have contributed to the results and whether the number was relatively large enough that the findings can be viewed as significant. There also appeared to be a degree of interpretation or speculation from staff member participants, which may have been the basis for certain topics being discussed as an issue.

Sharrock and Lockyer (2008) completed research with Indigenous Australian students within a Western Australian context with the aim of investigating the effectiveness of flexible course delivery at the Curtin University of Technology. Seventy-six Indigenous students studying either an Associate Degree or Degree (Aboriginal Health) or an Associate Degree or Degree (Indigenous Community Management and Development) completed a survey containing quantitative and qualitative questions about their experiences of university. A 96% response rate was obtained from the surveys, a high response rate relative to that of other research in the area.

Participants were taking their courses at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS) at the University through a 'reverse block' delivery mode. These students attended up to eight weeks of teaching on campus and also received four visits in their community from teaching staff over the academic year. This form of content delivery was a response by the Centre to Indigenous attitudes and understandings of the close connections between students, kin, country, and community, leading to a more culturally sensitive way of teaching. Exploratory data analysis techniques using descriptive statistics with SPSS were used on the resulting quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used on the qualitative data.

The reverse block delivery method was seen as significant in aiding students, with 82.9% of participants rating receiving a visit from a lecturer as very important, and a further 17.1% rating it as important (Sharrock & Lockyer, 2008). A significant number (79.7%) of students stated that there had been a time during their studies when they had received a visit while they were thinking of withdrawing and then decided to continue, 84.2% of which stated that this visit was significant in making their decision. Students put a high value on this 'face to face' and 'one to one' contact and the support they received was beneficial in increasing their confidence, getting advice, and being able to discuss problems and issues they were having. The visits were seen as a commitment by the University to the student as well as to the community and that the University understood the students' experience of living in a remote area. Participants also did not mind whether or not the visiting lecturer was Indigenous or non-Indigenous as long as they had knowledge of the course content as well as Indigenous culture and issues, showing that in this situation a staff members Indigeneity was not as important as the support provided and their Indigenous knowledge .

Sharrock and Lockyer (2008) have shown that the reverse block method can be highly successful with and valued by Indigenous students. The use of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for data clearly showing the importance of this mode of delivery to students, as well as going on to investigate the possible reasons for this importance. An issue with this research is that it may not be generalisable to the Indigenous student population outside of those studying Indigenous degree programmes within Indigenous centres. Indigenous students within such centres would most likely not be exposed to issues such as relevance of course content and the lack of Indigenous staff that mainstream students may come into conflict with, and it could be impractical for the larger number of mainstream external students to receive staff visits.

Research with mainstream Indigenous Australian students in Western Australia was conducted by Sonn, Bishop, and Humphries (2000). Sonn et al. (2000) aimed to investigate the experiences of Indigenous Australian students at Curtin University of Technology through qualitative interviews. A steering committee for the research was formed consisting of three authors, a delegate from the University's Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS), and three Aboriginal research assistants. Two Aboriginal research assistants also assisted with the development of the interview schedule. A list of 110 current and former Indigenous students was obtained from the CAS, from which every third person was selected for recruitment until the researchers recruited 30 participants. Ten participants had completed tertiary programs at the University, ten had withdrawn from their studies, and ten were participating in bridging courses at the CAS. An additional 12 participants were completing mainstream courses at the university, although data from only 34 of the total number of participants recruited was used due to eight interviews being lost. The final course demographics of the sample after these disruptions were not provided. There is also an ambiguity about the status of the original participants and whether

or not they were actually taking courses within the CAS, or if the additional mainstream students were recruited to bolster numbers, although the former seems more likely due to the wording of certain parts of the article. Ten of the participants were male, 24 were female, and 31 participants were mature-age students, with the remaining three being school leavers. Three participants were from the Perth metropolitan area and 31 were from a variety of country or interstate regions. Two students had scholarships, although most received some form of financial support to study, and nearly all participants had children and/or dependants from their extended family, the specific numbers of which were not provided. The majority of participants were in or had been enrolled in social science courses, with the remainder having studied or currently studying commerce, business and service management, fine arts, or occupational therapy. Three students were from psychology, and the majority of all participants studied full-time. Once the participants had been interviewed by one of three Indigenous women trained in interviewing for research, their transcripts were coded by three independent researchers for unique and recurrent themes. Key themes were uncovered after discussion and cross-checking between researchers, as well as validation with some participants.

One broad theme revealed involved issues related to relocation (Sonn et al., 2000). Relocating students often experienced 'culture shock' moving from remote areas into the metropolitan area, an experience likened to that of students coming from overseas. Relocation issues were also exacerbated by the loss of family support once students moved, with students also feeling a lack of support from the community in their decision to undertake tertiary education. A number (44%) of participants also reported experiencing cultural insensitivity during their studies, 14% of whom reported experiencing racism or discrimination. Students were most likely to perceive the social sciences as insensitive and ethnocentric, and 44% of

participants expressed concern over the insensitivity towards and lack of awareness of Indigenous issues; possibly the same 44% who had experienced insensitivity. Participants felt that only certain epistemologies and worldviews were advanced, and in particular psychology was seen as individualistic and did not allow for collectivistic conceptions of people and community. One student stated that she was happy with the Aboriginal content, but that she was a Torres Strait Islander and that the concepts and meanings across groups would differ. The CAS was also seen as an important source of support for the majority (70%) of participants, providing emotional and physical support to students. The Centre was seen as a place of acceptance where their cultural worldviews could be validated.

This research has provided information on the experiences of Indigenous Australian students to a degree not seen in much of the literature (Sonn et al., 2000). Numerous issues in the academic lives of Indigenous students were uncovered, although it is unclear whether the majority of participants were students within the CAS, possibly reducing generalisibility to the mainstream student population. Great effort was made to ensure the research was carried out in a culturally sensitive manner, which would have improved the experiences of participants in the research and elucidated better data. One limitation was the apparent wide variety of courses students came from, which was most likely a result of the small sample size, an issue in conducting research with a small, vulnerable population. This research has also uncovered numerous perceptions held by Indigenous students which may not have been previously clear or understood, such as participants reporting that a lack of cultural awareness and insensitivity on the part of teachers was linked to racism. This may be an area where the perceptions and understandings of staff and students differ and need to be brought closer.

Numerous other authors have outlined their views on how Indigenous students, people, and communities interact with the discipline of psychology and tertiary study in general within discussion articles. Dudgeon and Pickett (2000) have stated that psychology often ignores the cultural, historical, and social realities of Indigenous people, as well as relying on two principal assumptions; universal applicability and individualism. Changes would need to be made in the predominant presentation of Western worldviews before psychology was seen as trustworthy in the Indigenous community (Dudgeon & Pickett, 2000). Anderson, Bunda, and Walter (2008) lamented the low participation rates of Indigenous Australian students in tertiary education, but also spoke of higher education becoming a part of the worldviews of Indigenous young people. The role of Indigenous centres on campus was outlined as a major source of support for students, as well as one that should be strengthened through the expansion of networks to high schools and technical colleges and the improvement of bridging courses (Anderson et al., 2008). Nakata (2007) has also stated that the higher education sector must remain flexible in its delivery of content so that the best fit with student needs can be maintained. Discourse on Indigenous Australians and tertiary education is often thoughtful and can offer insights from authors in the field, but their utility in progressing debate is limited relative to that of actual research.

Research into the experiences of Indigenous Australian students at university and the barriers and enablers they may come into contact with has been carried out with various students in a number of Australian universities with numerous results. Students, staff, and community members have spoken about the importance of Indigenous centres on campus in providing support to students, as well as issues faced by students in relocating. It was found that more information on tertiary education needs to be disseminated to secondary schools and the Indigenous community before an increase in Indigenous student numbers occur. Students

came across the issue of cultural insensitivity from university staff, as well as within the course content they deliver. Indigenous Australian students appeared to be mostly female and have come to university as mature age students, possibly due to a culture within Indigenous males that goes against academia and issues of self-belief for students coming out of secondary school, which may also be evident in many participants having not finished secondary school.

What is also evident from the literature on the experiences of Indigenous Australian students is that there is no clear progression in research. Studies have been completed involving a wide variety of participants, many not from the tertiary environment, and using a number of techniques. Some authors have gone to great lengths to use culturally sensitive research methods while others have gone to relatively little, which may have affected the resulting data if participants did not feel comfortable taking part in the research. Research using surveys was prevalent, which not only made more in-depth answers harder to obtain, but also increased the level of interpretation by authors of their results. This could lead to problems where researchers may not have been Indigenous Australians themselves, or if they were not intimately involved with the tertiary programs from which they recruited their participants. These issues appear throughout the research, and further the appearance that there has been no consolidated effort to build, enhance, and expand research in the area. The information elicited is often not deep enough to warrant debate within the academic community and influence university policy. It should be noted that research in this area appears to have a very low response rate in their sampling, which may in fact be the reason for participants coming from various degrees and backgrounds.

While these points are all issues that need to be addressed in future research involving Indigenous Australian tertiary students, the most important limitation for the present project is

that there has been no research conducted into the area of Indigenous students studying psychology and their experiences. Research completed by Sonn et al. (2000) and McLisky and Day (2004) did contain students studying psychology, but that was just a circumstance of their university-wide sampling. The need for further research in the area is also clear in the negative perceptions of psychology held by psychology students in Sonn et al. (2000). There is a current gap in the research and our understanding of the experiences of Indigenous Australian students studying psychology.

This project originally intended to specifically conduct research with current Indigenous Australian students at ECU, due to the lack of research with Indigenous students at ECU in general and in particular psychology students at ECU. This initial attempt fell victim to the issue of not being able to recruit enough participants to continue, possibly the selfsame sampling issue that may have plagued other authors and their research in the area. The details of this initial research attempt are outlined in Appendix B. As a result, this research aims to address the question of what is the experience of Indigenous Australian students studying psychology at all Australian universities. This will be elucidated through those who have already completed their courses and have already become psychologists. The research questions for this study are what barriers Indigenous students have found to their study, possible enabling factors they have experienced, as well as any other possible factors that they feel are important in relation to their study.

Method

Methodology

The theoretical framework guiding this research was hermeneutic phenomenology. Within this framework the researcher aimed to create a rich and deep account of the participant's

own experiences (Hein & Austin, 2001). This approach takes into account that an individual's understanding of reality is informed by factors such as that individual's culture, history, and experiences (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). These factors, as well as their overall worldview, are also described as that individuals 'horizon of' or 'horizons of meaning', a perspective they bring into any situation and that influences their understanding of the world (Gadamer, 2004; Lawn & Keane, 2011). These 'horizons' are held by both the participant and the researcher, whereby the interaction and dialogue between the two parties will come together into a fusion of the two 'horizons of meaning' for an issue or topic (Crotty, 1998). The researcher experiences an evolving process of change in their own understanding of a topic that involves a comprehension of the whole issue through the grasping of its individual parts, as well as the comprehension of those individual parts through an understanding of the whole, a notion described as the 'hermeneutic circle' (Crotty, 1998).

Hermeneutics is a method of sharing meaning between communities or individuals, which ultimately leads to a fusion of the worldviews between participant and researcher leading to a more truthful or enlarged understanding (Crotty, 1998; Polkinghorne, 2000). In this way, participants are co-researchers in the investigation of topics (Koch, 2006). Although this fusion of the horizons of the participant and the researcher is an aspiration that can never fully be achieved, as no two individuals can truly know another's reality, researchers within this framework continue to work towards mutual understanding (Lawn & Keane, 2011). Hein and Austin (2001) have also stated that there is no single, correct way to conduct phenomenological research, as each method used is variable based upon the purposes of the researcher, their skills, and the experiences of the participants.

This methodology was suited to research between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians as the gulf between the experiences, cultures, worldviews, and understandings of the two groups can be immense. The use of hermeneutics allowed for the most accurate picture of the experiences of Indigenous students studying psychology to be uncovered through its emphasis on seeking understanding from the participant's perspective and its methods for working towards this goal. It allows for a more truthful representation of facets of this experience that would otherwise be lost, such as the influence that culture and family may hold.

Participants

The research participants were 10 Indigenous Australians from the psychology field. Selection criteria for participants were that they identified themselves as Indigenous Australian and had completed an undergraduate degree in psychology within Australia. Four participants were male, six were female, and ages ranged from 27 to 58 years ($M = 37.7$, $SD = 4.62$). Three were currently studying at a PhD level, with the remaining seven being practicing psychologists, and five participants had entered their undergraduate degree straight from school, with five being mature-age students. Five research participants completed their undergraduate studies in Queensland, three in New South Wales, and the remaining two in Western Australia. Five of the participants were working in a clinical, research, and/or policy capacity for either health or justice state government agencies, with the remaining five being employed at universities. These five worked in teaching and/or research, although all were working in some way within Indigenous centres and/or on Indigenous issues. Eight research participants were still working in the state they studied in, while two had relocated.

Procedures

A steering committee was formed for the research, consisting of the project supervisor Dr. Ken Robinson, as well as Professor Colleen Hayward; the director of the ECU Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research (Kurongkurl Katitjin). Other members of the committee were Mr. Darren Garvey; a lecturer for the Curtin University of Technology Centre for Aboriginal Studies and School of Psychology and Speech Pathology, and Mr. Jason Barrow, a staff member at Kurongkurl Katitjin. The committee met as a group at the beginning of the project, and was consulted throughout the research as problems and issues arose.

Research participants were recruited through the personal contacts of the project supervisor, Dr. Ken Robinson, as well as through two emails that were sent to all members of the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association by the association secretary. A snowballing technique was also employed where participants were asked if they were aware of any other Indigenous Australian psychologists who may be willing to participate. These individuals were then contacted by the participant asking whether they wished to participate. The researcher did not have access to any information on participants unless they contacted the researcher wishing to take part in the research, or another participant had already confirmed with the individual that they wanted to participate and that the researcher should contact them.

Once a participant had contacted the researcher they were sent an information letter, proposed interview schedule, and a letter of informed consent (see Appendices C, D, and E, respectively). An appropriate time was arranged for the researcher to contact the participant to complete the interview. All interviews were conducted over the phone, using the provided interview schedule, and were recorded using a dictation recorder. Informed consent was gained verbally during the interview, and participants were asked whether they had read and understood

the documentation of the research that was provided. If they had not read it, or did not understand, the documentation was read to them verbally with any queries being answered. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing for further investigation of issues that arose. Interviews were transcribed at a later date using a computer, and participants were deidentified.

Analysis

Data analysis was carried out over four general phases, a similar technique as that outlined by Bartova (2007). Firstly, the researcher read the transcribed interviews several times to gain a general picture of the data. Next, the researcher read the individual interviews looking for key words or concepts. In the third phase, the researcher considered broad themes as they relate to the overall picture of the phenomenon. Wertz (2005) has stated that this involves analysing the text further than any explicit meaning offered and reading 'between the lines'. Whitehead (2004) has described this process as a 'hermeneutic circle', whereby analysis involves a reflection on the piece of data by itself, as well as the data as a whole, which allows any new information coming out to be open to divergent interpretations. Hence, this is a continuous and building process; where with each successive iteration further understanding is sought. This may, and did, involve the researcher taking into account aspects of culture, history, and experience, whereby the thoughts and feelings of the participant fuse with the interpretations of the researcher to create a shared meaning. The researcher checked these interpretations with the participant as they arose to ensure that his understanding was matched by that of the participant.

To increase the rigour of the analysis process, the researcher's own diary was consulted during the research and analysis process, giving further insight into the interpretations and the

thoughts of the researcher. A personal statement has also been included by the researcher outlining how he personally approached the research (see Appendix F). Bartova (2007) described the last phase that was used in her hermeneutic analysis as the actual fusion of the two horizons of meaning, whereby the themes that have emerged are integrated into a coherent picture of the experience of the phenomena. Once the researcher completed this process, overall interpretations were provided to each participant for corroboration, or to be clarified. Interpretations were only able to be checked with the majority of participants, as some agreed with the interpretation given during the interview or could not be contacted.

Ethical Considerations

As the research involves Indigenous Australian participants, the ethical considerations of working with this population must be and were considered. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (2003) have outlined six values that researchers should understand and address in their research involving Indigenous Australians.

The first value outlined is that of reciprocity (NHMRC, 2003). This research met the value of reciprocity as it has the potential to be of great benefit to the Indigenous Australian community through the raising of issues that might be hindering the success of students studying psychology. It may also raise issues of benefit to Indigenous Australians in the broader tertiary context. It is also possible that this research may lead to positive changes within the university environment for Indigenous Australian students, leading to an increase in students completing their psychological studies, and going on to benefit the Indigenous Australian community through their professional work as psychologists.

The second value guiding research involving Indigenous Australian participants is respect (NHMRC, 2003). The researcher has shown respect for the participant by providing them with

knowledge regarding the research process they are participating in. This includes information on how, when, and who will be engaging in the research process with them. The researcher has made a concerted effort to increase his own knowledge regarding Indigenous culture and values, as well as any culturally competent practices that he needs to engage in. These efforts included completing a two-day cultural competence workshop held by the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association and Jones, Dudgeon, and Kelly (2010), as well as consultation with members of the steering committee. Moreover, the process of hermeneutic psychology enabled the participant to be a co-researcher, and indeed, the researcher to be a co-participant. This was an example of a mutually respectful process.

Equality is another value of research involving Indigenous Australians (NHMRC, 2003). The methodology chosen was one that sought to share the power of the researcher with the researched, where both the researcher and the participant have contributed to the research.

Responsibility is another essential factor of research involving Indigenous Australians, and has been recognised by the NHMRC (2003). The principal researcher and his supervisor took full responsibility for the study; have and will continue to ensure that participants will be protected, so that participants are able to maintain their trust in the process.

Another value outlined by the NHMRC (2003) is survival and protection. The researcher and his supervisor were aware of the damage that colonialism has enacted upon the Indigenous Australian community, and this research aimed to strengthen this community through the identification of possible barriers to Indigenous Australians students' tertiary success in the study of psychology.

Spirit and integrity is another value required when completing research involving Indigenous Australians (NHMRC, 2003). The Principal Researcher believed that this research is

of value to the Indigenous community, and has received the support of Professor Colleen Hayward, the director of the ECU Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research. The continued consultation with and support received from Professor Hayward and the other members of the steering committee ensured that the spirit and integrity of the research and its dissemination was maintained.

Results

Analysis uncovered numerous themes that could be categorised under three broad headings: Issues that arose before tertiary study, those that arose during study, as well as issues related to post-university life. Advice participants had for students and staff is also discussed.

Pre-University

Thoughts and Feelings on Going to University

Valerie expressed her mind-state of going to university as being "truly, truly terrified". She had no idea about things the average student might have some knowledge of, such as what clothing students wore to university, what happens there, or what tutorials were. Valerie's mindset typified that of the sample with the majority describing some form of fear and anxiety at the thought of going to university. The bases of these fears were described as a fear of failing for some, and a fear of the unknown for others; Melinda even going so far as to describe the experience as "a little bit like going to a foreign country and not knowing the language". One participant who stated that they didn't have any anxieties about going to university was Sarah, who had been assisted by and had planned with her school careers advisor to go to university since year 9. Those participants who had had experiences with some form of post-secondary education, such as TAFE or some form of college, felt that it prepared them for their studies.

Many participants chose their university out of convenience, either because it was the closest institution to where they resided or because it was where they were accepted.

"I definitely think so (that there is a small town mentality about university), none of their parents have gone to uni, that kind of thing, so it was like most of them went and, you know, the girls kind of went and worked and did check out chick stuff and the guys went and worked in the factories, so I don't think uni was really on their radar to be honest, and we didn't kind of have anyone come to our school and say uni's great, you should do it or, it was kind of like if your parents weren't really behind you then you just didn't go." Melinda

Garry also spoke about becoming disillusioned with education after negative experiences in secondary school, something that was only really reconciled during his second year of university. Elwin also spoke about a lack of encouragement from his school to focus on academics and being encouraged into sports, while Veronica outlined how she had not understood that she could perform well at mathematics and sciences until she completed a bridging course at university.

"I think it wasn't a high priority, I could tackle and I could kick a football and run, the only high priority list I was on was the football teams priority list...my education wasn't really encouraged by the school, I was more encouraged by family, and I think that was driven by, you know, we talk about closing the gap now, well families have been trying to do this for years." Elwin

Family Experience and Support

Valerie described being the first person in her family to go to university as "intimidating, in a word, intimidating". The five participants who were first-in-family to attend university described being more anxious about going to university, and had troubles adjusting in an

environment no one in their family had been able to inform them about. Although these families may not have been able to assist with information on the tertiary experience, they did provide important support and were often seen as driving forces in their children's decisions to attend university. Arthur, Veronica, and Dean described how their parents may not have been well-educated themselves, but still saw the value in education and wanted their children to have opportunities that they themselves had missed out on. This support from family was common to all participants not only before university, but also during their studies. Students were supported in various ways, including emotional, financial, and physical support, even if students were relatively far away geographically.

Family members who had previously gone to university were able to provide advice and mentor those new to tertiary study, while participants such as Elwin and Veronica found that they themselves had become role-models after some of their family members followed them into tertiary study. While families were supportive of their children going to university, this enthusiasm did not always extend to the study of psychology. Suzie spoke about her family having misconceptions about what psychologists actually do, while Valerie's father originally described psychology as a profession for "troublemakers", a view that later changed after she was able to show him how psychologists are able to help people in the community. Veronica and Arthur also spoke about a general cringe that could be present in the community towards education, possibly stemming from being denied the opportunity to study in previous generations and misconceptions about it being only for non-Indigenous people.

"I think there are still, we've still got a way to go in the way that Indigenous communities and families support their young people, I think there is still a cultural cringe about being educated and...and being able to literally break the poverty cycle, but that's within the family system, not the university system." Arthur

Veronica relayed a conversation she had had with an Indigenous grandmother in her community, where she conveyed that younger generations did not believe that employment and education was a part of their culture, something that was not true and needed to be changed.

"If you looked at work in the context of traditional communities and traditional families, where everyone worked, was the norm, if you didn't work, if you didn't go out hunting and fishing and gathering stuff, you didn't survive, so work has been a part of our traditional culture, since the days of, everyone knew and understood that..nowadays in contemporary society, we've got young people who are, you know, even saying things like aw work is not part ...of our culture, because they see working in an office, for instance, is not part of our culture." Veronica

Interest in Psychology

Veronica first became interested in psychology after seeing the overrepresentation of Indigenous Australians in and discovering the prevalence of self-harm and suicide within prisons. Including Veronica, only four of the research participants had actually began their university studies within a psychology program. Only one of these participants went into psychology straight from high school, while the other three participants had all worked in other areas before becoming interested in psychology through experiences of seeing health disparities in the community. The remaining six participants had each begun their studies in another degree before being exposed to psychology during electives or introductory units, with the exception of Valerie who was not accepted into her first degree choice of psychology and was too unsure of

the process to transfer into her preferred course of psychology once she had begun her studies. Degrees that participants had began their studies in included nursing, teaching, general social science, and writing. Many participants spoke about not receiving any information from their high school or information not reaching their community on psychology as a degree choice, psychology as a career, or on psychology in general. Negative misconceptions about psychology were also prevalent, with Valerie stating that many Indigenous people's experiences with allied health had only been when they inspected your property and checked up on your children, a role seen as "very destructive to Aboriginal community and family" and led to people viewing psychology with suspicion.

"Yep, yep, that were all sort of (negative misconceptions about psychology in the Indigenous community)...you know, we're gonna take people out of home and put them in hospital for long periods of time and all that stuff for people that are silly, that type of stuff." *Suzie*

Relocation

While there were issues for participants relocating for study, the overall experience of relocating was not described as a great hardship. Six of the participants relocated for study, some relocating interstate, two studying externally, and two travelling to their campus. Mature-aged students Suzie and Veronica relocation coincided with the beginning of new employment, which assisted with the transition. Issues for relocating students involved going into the metropolitan environment, such as Valerie, who had problems with the increased traffic and "a lot of that city stuff where people stand much closer to you", things that would seem normal for metropolitan students. Melinda and Sarah also spoke about receiving no support or information from their university while they were relocating. Other participants such as Dean and Melinda were able to

go home every weekend, with Dean driving himself and Melinda's family picking her up and dropping her off each weekend, but the majority of other participants who had relocated returned home only during the university holiday period.

University

Financial Issues

Dean received ABSTUDY to attend university; something that he stated made attending university possible for him, at least financially. Elwin felt the same about his cadetship. Another four participants also received financial assistance with their study, with two taking part in the Indigenous Cadetship Program, one receiving a scholarship, and another receiving ABSTUDY. While receiving financial assistance enabled participants to spend more time studying, none of the other participants specifically spoke about not being able to attend university without that financial support as Dean and Elwin did. Veronica and Suzie however did speak about how scholarships could assist them in buying the relatively small things like stationary and textbooks, which would allow them to spend money on their families. Suzie went on to state that if a parent was in the situation where they would have to take money away from their family to spend on their textbooks and such, they would probably give up their studies. Elwin also described using cadetship payments to pay for HECS so that he would not burden his partner with a study debt.

"I think just the ongoing costs of going to uni, like even just those $6,000 scholarships helped me with books...you, know, stationary stuff that if you had a family you'd prioritise your family first before that stuff." Suzie

The remaining five participants each supported themselves during university in various ways. Garry worked in part-time employment, Arthur was in full-time employment, while others worked in various casual positions. Valerie even supported herself by running several small

businesses straight out of high school. Valerie also spoke about the shame that could be brought upon an individual and their family in the community by seeking financial assistance from others, a possible reason she gave for her starting up several businesses. Participants who worked numerous days per week adapted methods to study with their reduced time, such as Garry who studied on the train journey to work.

"I know (the university does) offer some scholarships, but for me as a parent with 4 children, again it's a side issue, but the scholarships simply aren't enough, I mean they help, but I was looking for that full-time, bursary type of thing, I could earn a, or have some regular income...in the way that you might earn a wage and, but I could focus on my study and so on."
Veronica

Psychology Course

All of the research participants spoke about how they enjoyed the psychology course and its general content, although there were various issues that were raised. Sarah and Valerie spoke about the 'hoops' that had to be jumped through for accreditation as a psychologist, with certain grades being required for particular units as well as certain overall grades being required to progress. They felt that there was never enough information for students on how these processes worked. This lack of information also applied to the course generally, with the majority of participants discussing not knowing how the course was structured and not realising that they had to study relatively uninteresting topics during their first year of study before being able to study the topics that they wanted to.

"I don't like putting people off it, but at the same time I want people to know that it's not all fun and games, you don't go in and lets all play experiments on each other, that's later."
Sarah

Sarah spoke about an Indigenous friend who had tried to complete the course externally and found the experience too hard to continue, while Suzie found completing the undergraduate degree externally a "breeze". Suzie actually found the experience of studying on-campus daunting, as a postgraduate, which she saw as a result of being older than the other students, with a family, and also the fact that her fellow students were now all non-Indigenous, as opposed to the Indigenous study groups she was used to in her community. Arthur also enjoyed studying externally, and enjoyed the residential schools the university provided, whereby he would come onto campus for a week of intense study, giving him access to the library and other services. Some students spoke about having more trouble than the average student with research methods and statistics units, which was viewed as a barrier. Lynne lamented the lack of qualitative research methods content within the curriculum, something which she believed indicated the lack of value placed upon it by the faculty.

"I think the universities, when it comes to content, have got their own agenda, it seemed to me like the content of the psych curriculum was very much geared towards research, and obviously that's where universities get a lot of their money….because when you graduate and you're out in the field and you're doing your internship even, it's like why have I learnt so much about statistics and research methods, like I'm not even doing that." Lynne

Flexibility in delivering the course was also seen as important to Suzie, Arthur, and Veronica, with Veronica continuing on to share an experience of having to return back to her community due to cultural obligations shortly after the semester had started, during which time an assignment was due. Veronica spoke to her lecturer and offered either to hand it in early or to gain an extension, both of which were denied. Veronica had to be assisted by the Indigenous student centre coordinator to resolve the issue. Veronica spoke about this disempowering

experience as raising themes of past historical processes such as colonisation and marginalisation. She also stated that if she had not have been assertive in this situation she would have failed that assignment, and how similarly culturally insensitive experiences could lead other students to withdraw from their psychology studies. Elwin recounted experiencing similar feelings to Veronica after he was told by a lecturer that he was wasting the universities time when he was struggling with some of the content.

"I mean knowing that if somebody is racist and they're a lecturer, don't take it to heart, go find somebody else who's a safer sort of person to talk to if you've got issues with your university assignments." Valerie

Indigenous Australian Content

None of the research participants stated that they encountered any Indigenous Australian content within their psychology curriculum. Dean described the only Indigenous content he was exposed to was through one-off lectures where a lecturer with an interest in a specific Indigenous issue may raise it, a circumstance also experienced by other participants. Lynne described this lack of content frustrating, while Veronica believed a tension could arise within students about the validity of psychology if they could not apply it to Indigenous communities. Veronica believed that this tension and the resulting questioning of psychology could lead to a student withdrawing from the course. The majority of participants stated that due to the curriculum presenting predominantly Western worldviews, they had issues seeing how the content would be relevant to Indigenous people and communities.

"I think the cultural barrier was quite distinct, writing essays on how marvelous I thought certain treatment modalities were when I just thought they were ridiculous in terms of family, it would never work, simple things like being told the best way to interview somebody is to sit at that beautiful 45 degree angle and face them and have lots of eye contact, that's the worst way to interview some of my, you know, my mob." Valerie

Valerie, Veronica, Suzie, and Elwin also expressed concern about graduates going out into the community where there is a high-chance of them coming into contact with Indigenous Australians. A lack of knowledge on the part of graduates could lead to wide generalisations and negative consequences for the client.

"I suppose the scariest thing for me is that at the end of 4 years you can have people that are going out, you know, students once they graduate, to practice (without adequate knowledge)." Veronica

The main method put forward by the majority of participants for the introduction of Indigenous Australian content into the psychology curriculum was embedding it throughout the curriculum. Participants saw opportunities for the presentation of Indigenous Australian worldviews, as well as worldviews other than the predominant Western worldview, in numerous subjects. Some reasons provided for this viewpoint were that elective units on the subject would not draw enough students, this method would allow students to put the Western perspective into a larger context, and that it would allow for a richer presentation of content across the curriculum. Elwin and Suzie believed that Indigenous Australian content should be presented through compulsory core units, while Dean and Garry believed there could be benefits from a specific unit set aside for as well as the embedding of Indigenous content. Arthur, on the other hand, stated that a cultural competence workshop for students could be more beneficial.

"Yeah (I would have liked to have seen a core unit), and not just tokenistic stuff, but really, I guess the big thing is the gaps for health, health outcomes, I mean that's, if they want it taught university style, giving new graduates all that information is really important." Suzie

The majority of participants, regardless of their preferred delivery mode, did speak about students from all humanistic courses such as nursing, teaching, psychology, and such, requiring access to Indigenous content. It was seen as important for students to have access to information on Indigenous history, worldviews, statistics on disparity, culture, as well as the transgenerational effects of colonisation. Dean and Elwin also spoke about the importance of including Torres Strait Islander content into curriculums, if only to acknowledge the differences between their histories, culture, and processes, and those of the Aboriginal population.

"It wasn't that long ago that I was sitting in training and there were people who had worked in Indigenous communities for 15 years and really had no understanding of the impact of the Stolen Generation...that it was a shock and they thought it couldn't happen and they didn't really know, and they didn't know anything about the history of Indigenous cultures of Australia." Elwin

Dean raised issues with how Indigenous content would be taught at university. He believed that students should be guided to examine themselves, their beliefs, and where they may be coming from in engaging with the material. Ideally teaching should cater to the needs of the individual student during these processes, although Dean accepted that this may not be possible with the large numbers of students filling classes in the modern university system. The reasons why and for what purpose Indigenous content was being delivered were also stated as important. Dean believed that there were roles for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in presenting Indigenous psychology, either within the classroom or for advocating Indigenous studies in

university contexts at least. Arthur felt differently, who found a non-Indigenous woman teaching undergraduate Indigenous studies to be culturally insensitive and believed he would have received a far richer experience from an Indigenous presenter.

"I think just because it's an Indigenous staff member doesn't make for a necessarily good, or valuable, or meaningful learning experience, and I, not pointing my finger at anyone else, I'll just say I've been involved in the attempt to facilitate things that haven't gone particularly well." Dean

University Support and Services

The issue numerous participants raised regarding support from their university in general was in reference to relocation. Melinda, Sarah, and Dean spoke about receiving no assistance from the university during their relocation on to campus, either in the form of specific information or staff to assist them. While this lack of assistance was discussed, Sarah stated that it probably was not the responsibility of the university to provide this support, and Melinda and Dean did not raise the issue as a major barrier. Valerie spoke about wishing there had been a service to connect students from the same area for networking, as well as carpooling and such, while Melinda discussed a peer mentoring service at her university that was able to create networks for relocating students. Lynne and Suzie also discussed how on-campus childcare would have assisted them in their studies. This was due to issues in bringing their children onto campus to study, as well as problems with finding childcare places outside of the university and the costs involved.

Indigenous Student Support Centre

The Indigenous student support centres were an important source of support for the majority of participants. Participants had access to 24-hour computer and printer facilities,

kitchenettes, student support officers, access to tutorial assistance, pre-orientation and bridging programs, cultural events, and a space for meeting socially. Lynne and Melinda described their respective centres as a 'home away from home', where they could seek and receive academic, social, emotional, and cultural support. Numerous participants described their centres as a major factor in how well they may have done in their studies. Centres often stepped in where university support may have been lacking, such as with information on accommodation, scholarships, and careers. Suzie outlined how she was still able to get similar support to students attending an Indigenous centre on-campus, due to the demountable set up in her community by her university and its Indigenous centre. Elwin discussed the benefits he received from a peer mentor program that was being run at the Indigenous centre at his university, where new students were connected with third or fourth year Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students and gained additional support. Melinda also saw the benefit at her alma mater of a peer mentorship program currently in operation matching first-in-family students with other third or fourth year first-in-family students.

"I think they actually paid for the transport to and from where we come from to the uni, to Brisbane, and then one of the staff members from the Centre picked us up from the, I think it was Roma Street, and actually they housed us at the on-campus accommodation so we could get a taste of what it was like." Sarah

An improvement to Indigenous centre services that was raised by numerous participants was in relation to networking. Valerie stated that a get-together for all the Indigenous students would have assisted her in meeting and talking to other students, as well as finding out information from the centre about university in general, something essential for a first-in-family student. Sarah also outlined a similar improvement where Indigenous psychology students could

be matched together for support. Veronica and Dean also spoke about Indigenous centres generally catering their support to those degrees that Indigenous people are stereotypically enrolled in, such as teaching or nursing, which meant that they weren't able to receive specialised support with psychology. Veronica went on to say that an Indigenous psychologist within Indigenous centres would be of benefit to Indigenous psychology students in providing this specific support.

"...like the other Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander students that were hanging around at the Centre, you wouldn't see them anywhere else, you wouldn't see them in the library, you wouldn't see them at the cafeteria, then when you talked to them, they just didn't feel a part of the university." Elwin

Some participants did not actually use their Indigenous student support centres. While Suzie benefited from a centre during her undergraduate degree, she did not even know where the centre was at the university where she completed her postgraduate studies, something she put down to receiving no information about it prior to studying there. Garry similarly did not use the centre at his university because he did not know what services were provided while he was studying. There was also a degree of anxiety about going into the centre for Elwin and Valerie, who had not received information about their respective centres and were not sure whether they would 'stick out' there and whether they would be welcomed. Valerie went on to say that "the traditional way culturally is you wait until you're invited and I didn't really feel invited".

"I spoke to other students there, it was the one thing that we all valued the most on campus, was that centre and all the services they had, the main barrier was just getting yourself through the front door." Valerie

Arthur spoke about being disenfranchised with his Indigenous identity and how the Indigenous centre could have assisted him with that, but that he never had any information on the centre and as he was only on campus for a limited period he was not able to go to the centre during normal office hours. Garry also revealed issues with generally hiding and walking away from his Indigenous identity, something an Indigenous centre could have supported him through.

Indigenous Staff

No research participants had Indigenous Australian lecturers during their psychology studies. The contact participants had with Indigenous staff was only within Indigenous centres. Valerie and Elwin would have liked to have had Indigenous psychologists within their respective Schools of Psychology, which they believed would have led to Indigenous students feeling better about studying psychology and would also have allowed students to be presented with content from a different worldview. Valerie also spoke about a positive experience during her postgraduate studies where she found a non-Indigenous staff member who was supportive of Indigenous students, which led her to feel safe and comfortable within the university and in pursuing Indigenous issues. Sarah related a similar experience she had during her undergraduate studies.

"Aw I'm not too sure if it would've made any difference (if there were Indigenous academic staff members) because there were a couple of people in particular who were very supportive, and they were very vocal in being supportive of anything to do with any of the Indigenous students in any area." Sarah

Melinda and Veronica raised the issue of Indigenous staff members receiving additional workloads from being heaped with Indigenous issues, without recognition for that extra workload or effort. Dean believed things had changed in that in the past Indigenous staff may

have been given Indigenous issues simply because Indigenous issues were seen as their problem, but thought that in the present there may be a more culturally sensitive thought process behind these forms of requests. Garry believed that any requests he received for work on Indigenous issues within his university workplace were because of his psychology background, rather than simply being Indigenous. The question of how a School of Psychology would support an Indigenous staff member so that they would not feel isolated and marginalised was raised by Dean and Veronica.

"I'd have to say I get tired of doing cultural awareness training, I get tired of telling people about Aboriginal cultures...and I've taken a bit of back step and sort of thought, it's your responsibility to inform yourself about Aboriginal people, it's...yeah, it's not my responsibility, it's your responsibility." Veronica

Cultural Insensitivity and Racism

Sarah found that as the only Indigenous student in her classes she would sometimes feel singled out when Indigenous Australian examples may arise, even if this was as simple as people turning to look at her. These experiences also followed her into the workplace, where she is the only Indigenous member of a multi-disciplinary team. Valerie discussed similar experiences of being singled out and being asked, verbal or otherwise, to confirm Indigenous examples during class.

Garry, Valerie, and Veronica also spoke specifically about experiencing racism during their studies. These experiences usually arose from misconceptions students and staff had about Indigenous people, leading to students being singled out, staff not understanding cultural obligations students may have, and even class discussions devolving into debates on benefits Indigenous students may receive.

Post-University

Lynne and Dean stated that they did not feel prepared for the postgraduate world, in terms of the training they had received, as well as issues with careers advice. Dean also spoke of leaving university without a sense of direction, even though he would later work in the field of psychology. Various participants also followed opportunities to work on Indigenous issues, which influenced where they completed their postgraduate studies, what organisation they worked for, as well as where they pursued these opportunities. Veronica discussed her post-graduate research in the community, where she found that not only did communities have a negative perception of psychology, but that this crossed over to post-graduate study itself as well. Veronica stated that this was the result of culturally insensitive researchers coming into the community simply for research, rather than building trust and relationships as she did. This form of culturally insensitive and inadequate research was also something Veronica had experienced in her own community in the past.

Advice for Students and Staff

Participants offered advice for students hoping to study psychology, as well as for staff teaching psychology. Advice for students included suggestions such as searching out support networks, and students finding their own relevance in the material. Staff were advised to be culturally sensitive towards their students, and not single them out during class discussions on Indigenous issues. A full list of advice given by participants to students and staff are presented in Appendices G and H, respectively.

Discussion

The results of this research have shown that Indigenous Australian psychologists have experienced a number of barriers as well as enablers to their study of undergraduate psychology. Issues of concern for participants included the fear and anxiety experienced before going into university, as well as the culture shock from entering the metropolitan campus environment. The support of family members before and during their psychology studies was of great benefit to participants, although some also found misconceptions about psychology and higher education within their families and communities. Once participants had entered their courses they found issues with the relevance of the psychology curriculum to Indigenous communities, and a lack of Indigenous staff, with some participants experiencing cases of cultural insensitivity and racism. Participants spoke about a lack of information being disseminated to themselves and their communities about the psychology degree and the career path of a psychologist. Indigenous centres were an important source of support for participants, providing a number of services for students and completing a number of functions. Participants enjoyed their psychology studies in general, but some felt unprepared in using their training within the post-university world.

One of the findings from this study that matches much of the literature is in the simple demographics of the sample. The majority of participants were female, and many were mature-aged students. McLisky and Day (2004) found that Indigenous males still studying in secondary school have a lack of academic role models, felt pressures to leave school for work, and were also subject to the perceptions of teachers, students, and communities that sport and trade-work are conventional avenues of success. These negative school experiences were evident within the present research with Garry speaking about becoming disillusioned with education during high school and Elwin outlining how he was encouraged to play sport, but not to study. Similar

experiences were not found with the females in the sample. Veronica also outlined not believing that she could complete mathematics and science subjects, which could be a result of teachers discouraging Indigenous students from studying certain subjects. This in turn could be a reason why many Indigenous students were not confident with statistics. This may be an explanation for the predominance of mature-aged students, whereby Indigenous students are leaving high school believing that TAFE or other colleges may be their only option for post-secondary education. It may be that these experiences that show them that they can indeed succeed academically, something outlined by participants whereby studying at these institutions gave them the confidence and preparation to study at a tertiary level.

Negative attitudes about their academic abilities, instilled in Indigenous Australian students during secondary school, may also be related to the fear and anxiety experienced by many participants at the thought of going to university. These fears may be a result of family members and such not being able to advise them on what to expect at university, typical of being a first-in-family student.

The perceived lack of support in some communities for tertiary study has been previously discussed by Sonn et al. (2000). This lack of support was also evident for psychology in general. Negative historical experiences have left families and communities mistrustful of psychology. Participants felt that there was a lack of information from universities and Schools of Psychology on what psychology is all about, as well as the experience of studying the discipline, how to become a psychologist, and how it can improve community well-being. This lack of information about university courses and subsequent career paths was also lamented by university and high school students in Hossain et al. (2008). Information on the course and the profession should be aimed not only at the student, but also at their family, high school, and community. Improving

the knowledge of the course and the benefits of psychology within the community, as well as the demonstration of good research and clinical practices by psychologists in these communities, will likely help to break down some of the negative perceptions held about psychology, and improve family support for students wishing to study it. Communities and families themselves might also support their children in pursing academics, otherwise higher education may never even be perceived as an option for children growing up.

It is true that a lack of family support can become a major barrier for Indigenous students, but family assistance can become, and was an important source of support for many students once it is provided, which was seen within the sample. This support was not only pivotal in giving participants the confidence to go to university, but also supported them in remaining there. This research has gone further in explaining this support than other literature in the area. Research such as that of DiGregorio et al. (2000) and Sonn et al. (2000) have only been able to show that the loss of family support can be a barrier to students, whereas this research has shown how families support and push their children to succeed in academics, even where those family members have not had the educational opportunities that they are now encouraging their children towards. Universities might help by increasing the information provided to remote communities to dispel any negative misconceptions families may have about university. Indigenous staff members could also support universities in this regard, showing that the tertiary environment is not hostile towards Indigenous Australians. All of the participants were supported to attend higher education, although sometimes this support did not extend to studying psychology. This pattern is consistent with the explanation that a lack of family support is an important determinant of course withdrawal, although this would need to be verified in an appropriately designed study. This support was also evident with Robert (see Appendix B), the current

Indigenous Australian psychology student interviewed; whereby he felt that his family provided him with important support for his studies.

The support family members provide can be in the form of role-models, where family members have been to university themselves, or simply the support they can provide in instilling within their children the belief that education is a valuable resource for Indigenous communities. These students then become role-models to their families and communities, breaking the transgenerational cycle of Indigenous Australians not seeing Indigenous role-models within tertiary education. Robert's (see Appendix B) parents had both attended university, which may have provided him with positive role-models and led to him discussing how he had no issues with or negative misconceptions about going to university. He also discussed how many of his Indigenous peers had gone on to university after secondary school, possibly showing that the negative misconceptions of higher education alluded to earlier are being broken within Indigenous families, at least in the metropolitan area.

The sense of 'culture shock' experienced by students relocating from regional into metropolitan areas appeared extreme. Similar results were found by Sonn et al. (2000) as well as DiGregorio et al. (2000). The description of the experience as similar to a student coming from overseas was also found by Sonn et al. (2000). Relocating students can face great stresses in possibly making their first move out of their regional area, away from their family and support systems. They may also be moving out of home for the first time into a tertiary environment, an environment that can seem stressful even for students living in the metropolitan area. While some participants did not appear to have any issues in relocating, for those that do it may cause great stress, something which should be considered by universities and Indigenous centres in the support they provide. Relocating students should be informed of issues they may face and how to

overcome them, and opportunities should be taken to acclimatise them to the university environment, such as conducting pre-orientation programs and allowing them to stay on-campus for a period before semester begins.

Financial assistance was another important issue, which saw five participants receiving assistance, two of whom explicitly stated that they would not have been able to attend university otherwise. This was something that was found by Ellender et al. (2008), whereby financial reasons were a main reason for withdrawal. While financial issues were important, many participants did make it through university without assistance, showing not only their own resilience, but also that graduation can occur without a scholarship of some form. Robert (see Appendix B) was also working full-time whilst studying, although his workplace was flexible with his working timetable so he could attend lectures. Students benefitted from financial assistance, but there seemed to be other issues that had greater effects upon their experience. This finding shows that simply increasing scholarships and financial assistance will not solve all of the issues that Indigenous Australians may experience within the tertiary environment. While financial assistance did in fact assist Indigenous students in their studies, and in doing so taking steps to end educational disparities, there appears to be a presumption behind these resources that non-Indigenous students would not also benefit from these forms of assistance simply because they are non-Indigenous, and that Indigenous students require them simply because they are Indigenous. It should also be noted that it is a possibility that those students who required financial assistance and did not receive it may have withdrawn from their studies, and would not have been able to participate in this research.

The finding that many participants wanted Indigenous worldviews presented within psychology content, and that the lack of this in the curriculum led them to have issues in finding

its relevance to the Indigenous community was a common one in the literature. Kippen et al. (2006) found that Indigenous students felt the same way in a Bachelor of Public Health; Ellender et al. (2008) uncovered these feelings within medicine; McLisky and Day (2004) within science and technology; and Sonn et al. (2000) within psychology. While the introduction of Indigenous content would make the curriculum more engaging and useful for Indigenous students, Schools of Psychology should look into this issue as an issue of training their students to be the most prepared for post-graduate life. Due to the disparities between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians in numerous areas, there is a fair chance that graduating students will come into contact with Indigenous Australian issues and clients in whatever field of psychology they enter. Training in how Indigenous Australians see and experience the world, as a result of their shared history and otherwise, is required so that students will be best prepared in meeting these challenges and so that Indigenous clients and communities can be assisted in the best way possible. This increased knowledge will also lead practitioners and researchers to enter Indigenous communities with a greater sense of understanding of the realities faced by its inhabitants and how to research in a culturally sensitive manner.

The result that Indigenous Australians find content in so many curriculum areas irrelevant to their communities raises the question of how much the academic community actually knows about Indigenous worldviews. Many of the health-related disciplines may have interrelated issues in the presentation of similar Western healing practices, but this result also being evident within science shows that Indigenous Australian communities' viewpoints on what will benefit them may be completely different in a wide variety of areas from what is accepted about the world by Western viewpoints. The possibility that an Indigenous group of people living within a Western society could be using knowledges and experiencing the world so differently from their

non-Indigenous fellows across a broad range of areas appears alarming, as well as intriguing. The possibility that the pinnacle of thought and understanding within a Western society; universities, may have no comprehension of these issues is only alarming.

The majority of participants also spoke about an effective method of introducing Indigenous worldviews to the curriculum being embedding it throughout the content, something that has not been revealed in the literature before. This method is not only practical in that it would not require such changes as major overhauls of curriculum accreditation from the Australian Psychology Society, but it may be better for students to learn this content alongside Western content and to see it as a part of psychology, rather than segregating the content to a particular unit to be passed over or forgotten. It should be noted that some participants did believe that it would be better to actually have a unit within the psychology curriculum dedicated to Indigenous psychology; something which Robert (see Appendix B) also thought could benefit students.

Participants noticed a lack of Indigenous staff within their universities and Schools of Psychology. Similar findings were reported by DiGregorio et al. (2000), Kippen et al. (2006), and McLisky and Day (2004). While some participants specifically wanted Indigenous psychologists within their School of Psychology for academic and emotional support, many discussed finding non-Indigenous staff members who were supportive of Indigenous issues within the university context, and that these staff members made them feel safe and supported. Indigenous psychologists on staff within Schools of Psychology can provide positive role-models for Indigenous students while also symbolising the commitment a School may make to Indigenous issues and showing that the School is a safe place for Indigenous students. Male role-models within the university context may be of particular importance due to the issues outlined

earlier where males could be discouraged from academics and encouraged into sports and trades. Indigenous staff, or at least openly Indigenous-friendly staff, can also provide psychology-specific support for students, something they are going to and cannot receive from Indigenous centres. It may be appropriate for Indigenous Australians to present Indigenous content within Indigenous-specific units or during sections of the curriculum that have been set aside for Indigenous perspectives, but it could only require culturally-sensitive supportive staff members teaching within the rest of the degree to make Indigenous students feel included and engaged. Staff should have an understanding of Indigenous history and its transgenerational effects, as well as issues of cultural sensitivity that may arise. A lack of knowledge of these processes can lead university staff into situations where they are perceived by students as being insensitive, or even racist.

Participants outlined how they had felt that staff members acted in a culturally insensitive manner, sometimes viewing this behaviour as racism. Participants within Kippen et al. (2006) and Sonn et al. (2000) reported similar experiences, while Hossain et al. (2008) found that perceived prejudice within the tertiary environment could act as a deterrent to university for high school students. While it is hopeful that there could not be so many staff members actually behaving in a racist manner, it seems likely that there could be many behaving in a culturally insensitive manner. Staff could be motivated in a misguided manner that singling an Indigenous student out or confirming Indigenous content with Indigenous students could be some form of sensitivity and would result in better content on the topic being delivered, when it is in fact culturally insensitive. The same motivations could be behind other situations such as staff encouraging debates on Indigenous issues that eventually descend into racism. Staff need to be aware that behaviour such as this is perceived as culturally insensitive by Indigenous Australian

students, something that can be remedied with cultural awareness training. This behaviour by staff may be an example of the lack of knowledge held by academia on Indigenous issues and culture, leading them to try and confirm examples with Indigenous students.

Indigenous student support centres were seen as important sources of support, which was a finding also reported by Kippen et al. (2006) and Sonn et al. (2000). Indigenous centres provided a wide range of supports for students, not only making the university experience easier for them, but also improving that experience. These centres also seemed to have a role in supporting students through issues such as finding, supporting, and strengthening their Indigeneity through the creation of safe spaces for students filled with Indigenous people and culture. Robert (see Appendix B) also benefitted from the services and supports provided by his Indigenous centre, noting that he also enjoyed having an actual space filled with Indigenous artwork. When these centres did fail a student, it was because these students did not have adequate information about the services provided by the centre, and as a result did not feel comfortable in seeking or did not have time to seek out that support. It was also remarkable to find that many students had issues such as a 'culture shock' in relocating and had anxieties about going to university with these supports available. Indigenous centres could have a role in supporting students through these processes, especially those students who were first-in-family to attend tertiary education, and could begin their support before students begin their studies, rather than once they commenced. One example provided by a participant was a program allowing students to reside on campus for a period before university began, which helped acclimatise them to the campus and metropolitan environment. Networking, peer mentorship, and pre-orientation programs are also of benefit in connecting and supporting students.

One other perspective should be outlined in relation to Indigenous student support centres. Indigenous centres provide so much support to their students that they could never really require any general support, academic or otherwise, outside of that centre. Realistically, Indigenous students could graduate from psychology without ever really socialising or networking with their fellow non-Indigenous students and staff members. Those running Indigenous centres might contemplate the possibility that further efforts could be made to ensure that students are experiencing all that their university has to offer. Universities are a melting pot of ideas, cultures, and people from all over the world and to take Indigenous students away from the experience of engaging in this mix is limiting them in their learning. It would also be beneficial for non-Indigenous students to have the opportunity to form relationships with Indigenous students, to socialise and learn from them within the academic environment.

One limitation of this research is that the participants involved had completed their psychology studies many years before the research took place, meaning that the barriers and enablers to their study discussed may not be relevant or generalisable to a present context. While these years away from the tertiary environment may be a limitation, it may also be an advantage. Their testimony about the psychology curriculum has been able to uncover many themes that may not have been uncovered by current students, who may not have been able to take the same critical, thoughtful eye to their experiences as the current sample could. This is evident in comparing the information provided by any participant to that of the first year student Robert (see Appendix B), which was included in an attempt to showcase the present experience of students. The current participants were able to present a far richer testimony about the psychology curriculum than Robert, showing that this older sample may indeed have benefitted the research through their increased distance from their undergraduate education, and perhaps

increased ability to reflect on their experience. The fact that some participants are now working in Schools of Psychology or Indigenous centres also enables them to speak about the current situation in Indigenous students' experiences of psychology.

One further limitation is in relation to some of the content. This research has attempted to push deeper into the barriers and enablers experienced by Indigenous Australians studying psychology than ever before. An issue is that while new information has been revealed, it may still not be comprehensive enough to be immediately used by Schools of Psychology. One example is the introduction of Indigenous content, which suggested how it should be implemented, but specific information on what should be included was not. Presumably, an Indigenous perspective might be included in every unit of a Psychology undergraduate course, although this research, as well as Ranzijn et al. (2009), has shown that staff may not be adequately culturally competent to present that knowledge in the most effective, culturally competent manner.

This research has provided information on the experiences of Indigenous Australian students studying psychology within Australia which was not available before. The thesis has reported insights into how these students feel coming into the course, their experiences during the course, as well as how their studies have served them post-university. This information may be used to implement support programs for Indigenous students by universities and Schools of Psychology. Future directions might evaluate the performance of Indigenous support centres, and other interventions that may help the transition from family and community to university.

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Appendix A

Edith Cowan University Enrolment Data

Information was sought from the Edith Cowan University (ECU) Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research (Kurongkurl Katitjin) on the enrolment records of Indigenous Australian students in psychology for several years prior to 2011. This information was to be used in furthering the authors understanding of the numbers and pattern of enrolment for Indigenous Australian students studying psychology at ECU. Ethics permission for this data was granted from the ECU Office of Research and Innovation.

Information was provided by Kurongkurl Katitjin on a particular students course code, attendance type, campus of study, and their enrolment status. Records provided were from Semester one, 2009, to Semester one, 2011. Individual students were given a number so that the author could track their enrolment, but would not be able to identify them.

This information was analysed by simply by looking over the data and noting the enrolment status of students for each semester. This showed that out of 34 Indigenous students enrolled from Semester one, 2009, to Semester one, 2011, only five had progressed in their enrolment. This progress was determined by students enrolling in their studies during Semester one, 2011, as well as at least two of the semesters immediately prior. Four of these students were enrolled in the (E95) Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) degree and one was enrolled in (K82) Bachelor of Arts (Psychology and Counseling). Three students were studying part-time, and three were studying off-campus. All of the students who withdrew did so after one or two semesters.

This data shows that the majority of Indigenous Australian students are withdrawing from their studies after only one or two semesters at the university.

Appendix B

Experiences of a Current Indigenous Student

This research project originally attempted to sample current Indigenous Australian students studying psychology at Edith Cowan University. This attempt was unsuccessful. Ethics permission for this research was granted from the ECU Office of Research and Innovation.

Method

Methodology

This data was approached with the same methodology as the research; Hermeneutic phenomenology.

Participants

Out of a possible sample of 11 participants, three declined, two had changed their contact details, five were unreachable after three attempts, and one participated. This one participant, deidentified as Robert, was a 20 year old male studying part-time, on-campus, and had only completed his first semester.

Procedures

Procedures undertaken were the same as in the main research. The one exception was that participants were recruited from records for Indigenous students currently enrolled in psychology by Kurongkurl Katitjin, the only centre with access to the records. These students were contacted by a staff member at Kurongkurl Katitjin, who provided their details to the researcher if they chose to participate.

Analysis

The method of analysis used was the same as that employed for the research, albeit with one participant.

Appendix B

Results

Robert came to university to study psychology because he thought it would assist with his current employment at a school. His employer had given him the opportunity to study so that he could become qualified for his student support work, with financial assistance for fuel used and support in giving him time off to go to classes. His family also provided him with emotional and financial support, which made studying easier for him. He had also completed a Certificate 4 in one of the Indigenous programs provided at Kurongkurl Katitjin before entering the mainstream system, which he thought prepared him for study. Robert found the workload relatively easy part-time, although had deferred due to missing the enrolment date for the next semester. Roberts's parents had both gone to university, as well as some of his friends, which led him to state that it seemed normal to go to university. Robert did come across some Indigenous content, where Indigenous culture was used as an example in one of his units. He also thought a unit on Indigenous issues could be useful.

"Yeah, it might be quite beneficial, because I think if there's just a unit, it could be on…yeah, psychology, on Aboriginal psychology, cultural aspects, yeah it could be quite beneficial, and they if you choose to do that unit as an elective or whatever…but yeah, it could definitely be a good unit to do, yeah." Robert

Robert spoke about the usefulness of Kurongkurl Katitjin in providing services and support, enabling him to use the computer facilities and receive tutorial support. He also spoke about enjoying the experience of going there and seeing Indigenous art within the Centre. Robert believed he had all the support he needed from both the Centre and his family. He also provided some advice for students in that they should seek out all the support that they can.

Appendix C

The Experiences of Indigenous

Australian Psychologists and Higher Education

Information letter

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Shaun Cameron, I am a current 4th year Honours student in psychology at Edith Cowan University (ECU). I am conducting research involving Indigenous Australian psychologists and their experiences of higher education. I would like to invite you to participate in my research, the findings of which may provide an insight into the experiences of Indigenous Australian students studying psychology.

You will be asked to take part in a one-on-one discussion on your experiences that should last from 30 to 45 minutes. This discussion will be held over the phone, at a time and date of your choosing. Participation in this study in completely voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time. The discussion will be audio taped over the phone and the tapes will be consequently transcribed. After transcription, these tapes will be destroyed and these transcripts will be stored in a safe area by the researcher. All information disclosed will be completely confidential. You will also be provided with the results of the study upon request.

If you do choose to take part in the research, no personal details will be identified outside the context of the interview discussion and no outside person besides myself and the project supervisor will have access to the research data. A letter of informed consent has also been supplied that further outlines your participation in the research.

If you have any questions regarding the project or wish to take part you may contact myself or my supervisor, Dr. Ken Robinson. You may also wish to contact someone independent of the project, in which case you may contact Dr. Andrew Guilfoyle.

The director of the ECU Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, Professor Colleen Hayward is consulting for the project, and Ms. Kim Gifkins will be able to take any concerns or complaints about the project.

Appendix C

Shaun Cameron (Researcher)

Phone: 0422 697198

Email: Scamero2@our.ecu.edu.au

Dr. Ken Robinson (Supervisor)

Phone: 6304 5526

Email: k.robinson@ecu.edu.au

Dr. Andrew Guilfoyle (Independent)

Phone: 6304 5192

Email: a.guilfoyle@ecu.edu.au

Professor Colleen Hayward

Phone: 9370 6773

Email: c.hayward@ecu.edu.au

Ms. Kim Gifkins

Phone: 6304 2170

Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Appendix D

Interview Schedule

- Demographic details will be taken. These will include age, gender, current area of work, years of experience, what university/organisation they are affiliated with and why.

- What first made you want to study psychology?

    - Can include how they came to university, e.g.: scholarship, or no scholarship.

    - Previous information at high school regarding university and psychology?

    - Previous knowledge of psychology

- Did you have any previous experience with higher education before psychology?

    - May include other forms of learning.

- Had any of your family members had experience with higher education?

- How did you feel about going to university?

    - What were your experiences like of going into the university environment? E.g.: writing essays, time-tabling, and the actual structural environment.

    - Can include how their family and community viewed them going to university.

- Were you living in the metropolitan area when you first attended the university?

    - Did you have any issues with coming to the university from the metropolitan area?

    - (If they relocated) Where did you move from? Did you have any issues with moving from another area?

    - Can also include whether they have gone back to their community/family since they have begun their study and any experiences they have had in this regard.

- Were you working while you were studying?

    - Full-time?/Part-time?/Casual?

    - Can then enquire if that had an effect on their study, or if there are any particular reasons for their working.

- When you were studying, how did you find the content?

    - Did you come across any Indigenous content? How did that made you feel?

    - Do you think things have changed in the teaching of psychology since you studied?

    - How so? Have there been any changes in the teaching of Indigenous content?

- What were your experiences of the university facilities/services in your area?

    - Also, their experience at their campus, or off-campus study.

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    - Can include what sort of support they have had. May also move into what sort of support they lost since commencing study.

    - Can include their experience of university services, their faculty, and any Indigenous centre on campus they may have had

- Did you feel like anything enabled your study at university?

    - Can then discuss how this helped, and whether current Indigenous students may experience this

- Did you experience any barriers to your university study?

    - Do you think Indigenous students currently studying psychology may face any particular barriers to their study? How could these be overcome?

- What advice would you give to current Indigenous students?

    - Also advice for staff teaching psychology.

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

    - Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix E

The Experiences of Indigenous

Australian Psychologists and Higher Education

Letter of Informed Consent for Participants

Name of participant:
_____

Name of investigator(s): Shaun Cameron (Chief Investigator); Dr. Ken Robinson (Supervisor)
_____

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a copy of the Information Letter explaining the research study. I have read and understood the information provided, and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and has had any questions answered to my satisfaction. I am aware that if I have any additional questions they can contact the research team
2. I have been informed that with my consent the interview will be audio-taped and I understand that audio-tapes will be erased following transcription. The transcriptions will be de-identified.
3. I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential, and that my identity will not be disclosed.
4. I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research project, and how the information is to be used.
5. I understand that I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time, without explanation or penalty.
6. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher.

Participant signature: Date:
_____

Researcher signature: Date:
_____

Appendix F

Personal Statement

Originally I had not chosen to complete my honours research with Indigenous Australians studying psychology. When my supervisor, Dr. Ken Robinson, suggested it I jumped on the idea not because of any particular passion for Indigenous issues, but because I saw it as an opportunity to investigate some inequality that may be occurring in our society. I believe that everyone should be provided the same opportunity to enter tertiary education, as well as the right to equal access and opportunities generally. I was provided these opportunities at ECU through a bridging program after negative high school experiences, something I acknowledge and am thankful for.

I also have other lingering feelings that may influence my approach to the research. For one, I do not believe that simply increasing funding for Indigenous students, through scholarships and such, is a solution to low rates of participation, as well as for Indigenous issues in general. Providing financial assistance to students simply because of their Indigeneity is not something I agree with, and while this is definitely not true of many funding schemes for Indigenous students, it is still something that remains in my thinking. I also believe that increasing funding into Indigenous groups and organisations is not an answer to what I have heard labeled as the 'Indigenous problem'. Our Indigenous fellows are in need, and we should unite as a nation to assist our fellow Australians, rather than giving these groups funding and forgetting about and passing on the issue.

I should also note that my experiences with Indigenous Australians prior to university and outside of the university context have generally been negative. While I have had positive

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interactions with many Indigenous people through work, sports, and such, the majority of my experiences otherwise have been negative, either through personal experience or through listening to others. I obviously do not generalise these experiences to reflect all Indigenous Australians, but it is unfortunate that these individuals have often fallen into the negative stereotypes of Indigenous Australians that are prevalent within our society. On the other hand, all of the Indigenous Australians I have interacted with within the university environment and during my time here have been the resilient, strong people Indigenous communities probably aim to be. The possibility that this is a result of university education is not lost on me.

I would also like to relate an experience I had during my project where while driving to my university campus I saw a kangaroo by the side of the road that had been killed by a vehicle. I began to think of this kangaroo as a metaphor for the Indigenous peoples, as well as the place the kangaroo has within Indigenous spirituality. This was something I had a simple understanding of, and that I developed through research on the subject. This kangaroo had probably been traveling the same areas it had for thousands of years, yet had come into harm through the encroachment of Western civilisation. While it is a simple comparison, this was something that I saw within the history of and the effects of this history upon Indigenous Australians. The place of the kangaroo as a totemic ancestor to the Indigenous people and its relevance within Indigenous culture was something that gave further personal meaning to this experience, and, while it seems strange to admit within a research document; this experience made me feel a spiritual connection to the research and Indigenous culture. Whether or not this claimed connection could be perceived as culturally insensitive on the part of the researcher, I feel it gave me a deeper understanding and connection to the research.

Appendix G

Table G1

Participant Advice for Current Indigenous Australian Students

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Participant	Testimony

Melinda *"Hmm…I think the one thing I would probably say is that if they're experience is similar to mine and there are a few things that they can kind of identify in psych, because there are limited example of, you know, I guess us in psychology whether it be a client or a professional psychologist, there's not really that type of stuff on that, it can be hard to sort of, have a purpose, or have a clear vision of what you want in the end and you can feel like it's not for you, but my advice would be..if you can stick it out, do it, because once you've got undergrad out of the way you can make psych what you want it to be, yeah, and once you start doing your own research that's when I guess the stuff that you wanted to do in first year, I find that all comes into play and it can be rewarding then, because, you know, you're kind of driving it, so I guess, just stick it out and eventually it becomes relevant."*

Sarah *"Just to be clear about what they're doing it for maybe, about what sort of goals they've got in mind for where they want it to take them, coz I know there's different outcomes that can come out of it and again to be aware of the hoops involved that you have to actually meet to be a psychologist, it's not as easy as, some people think you go and do a psychology degree and you're done, you're a*

Appendix G

psychologist, that's not the way it works so, you know, for people to understand that it's hard work, it's not, I don't like putting people off it, but at the same time I want people to know that it's not all fun and games, you don't go in and lets all play experiments on each other, that's later, you have to actually go in and do a lot of hard work first and then you get to play…and of course it can take you into different areas of which they do talk to you about at the uni and they're very good at that, all the different streams and all the different job opportunities that can come out of it, but they usually don't tell you much about those things until later on as well, you have to have a bit of an idea yourself about what sort of areas you want to work in and what you want to use it for."

Valerie   *"Uh don't give up ever, would be the first one, the second on would be find those lecturers that are those safe places, and people to go to, find networks, you know, there's the Australian Indigenous Psychology Association, join up, if you don't want to join up, link up, you've really got to find people who have been in those journeys you've been on and get hints and tips and say well what do I do when, you know, my psych assessment lecturer's saying do this, but you wouldn't do that in an Indigenous population, how do we know this test's going to be valid or, you know, even reliable, giving them alternatives and linking them up with good literature and definitely setting the bar quite high."*

Veronica   *"I suppose I would talk to Aboriginal students about the fact that we were scientists, you know, so that Kartiya way…and the word I use just then is spelt K-*

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A-R-T-I-Y-A, it's a word for non-Aboriginal people from where I'm from, but it's talking to them about the relevance of Indigenous knowledge's and the overlap with Western knowledge's, Western models and so on, and how…you know, some of the Western theories and so on might apply to Aboriginal people…well you know, I guess promoting the relevance, but also giving them permission to reject stuff if it doesn't fit in with their communities…or just sort of say well that's interesting and that's what I mean by reject, that's interesting to know that and yeah it might apply to some people, but in my community it's not really how things work, how things look..yeah, so I'd probably want to have these sorts of conversations with students"

Arthur   *"Hang in there, we really need you (laughs) and I find it's great when we get together as an association, Indigenous psychologists association, we include our students to come along to at least a portion of our annual gathering and we have them at dinner with us, and when we…we subsidise, like for example the meal they might come to, we want them to feel a part of the Indigenous psychologists association already as associate and as student, so we have, like the APS, we have student members and associate members who are still yet to get their psychology registration, but yeah, I'd say, I would encourage them to persevere, they are most certainly sorely needed, we are very under-manned, if I can use that I suppose gender-specific word, we're very under-manned in relation to the numbers of Indigenous people out there, there are only 45 or so of us nationally*

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at the moment and we need a lot more when we make up 2.5% of the

population."

Dean   *"I would say give it a go, I would say...give it a go, surround yourself with...good*

people, students or lecturers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous...I would say act

early, or act soon at the first sign of problems, you know, if you have a question

about something to do with the course, ask someone about, don't let it grow into

something that becomes too big or it becomes big enough to be a reason to stop,

so ask questions early."

Elwin   *"I would probably let them know that there is a lot of support out there for them,*

and I would probably let them know that...that it can be challenging and probably

just share with them, share with them my experiences, and see if it was what they

were having...the advice I'd say is that...the, anybody, well I know when I

started working in Indigenous specific, targeting Indigenous issues, is that the

amount of support out there from other psychologists was, it wasn't like

lecturer/student, it was like brother and sister and uncle and aunt, it was a

different relationship...and that I'd like to share that with them, to say that you

know I had some...some really senior close friends, but it's not like they don't

maintain this..well, I'm doctor and you're an intern, you're a probationary

psychologist, it's a..like they're aunties and uncles to me and that they share their

issues, and they come from a life-lived experience..and they encourage you and

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so, I think if I had of had the knowledge of the exposure to the people who were in the industry already, were in the field, while I was going through, I probably wouldn't have come through so bitter and twisted at the end of it."

Garry   *"Um I guess the only thing I can really say is head down, bum up, be patient with it, don't let it overwhelm you at the start and keep an eye out for stuff that will really capture your attention, when you find something you like, you can then look at it from multiple disciplines in psychology and say for example, I dunno, maybe more of a symptom than anything else, but I became quite fascinated in pessimism during my undergraduate days and I remember looking at pessimism from different perspectives, whether it be developmental, biological, and so forth, in my assignments, and for me if you can latch onto something that captures your interests and it engages you, then you can try and apply it to other disciplines within the field of psychology, that will help quite a bit."*

Appendix H

Table H1

Participant Advice for Staff

Participant	Testimony

Melinda   *"Oh, we could be here for hours on that one (laughs), I think…including those examples of Indigenous stuff and not just, you know, this is the really horrendous health statistics and, you know, all the awful, multiple, you know, disorders that our guys can have, like some really positive stuff would be lovely..and some more cultural awareness stuff, you know, how in psych do we, you know, when we're going to go out there and we leave at three years, how will we, you know, best to interact with Indigenous clients and, you know, what's some useful things to know and that kind of stuff, I think it would be lovely if they were more open minded and made more of an effort to sort of integrate that stuff, because I think…having that stuff in there helps our guys feel like they belong and feel connected and that what they're learning is actually relevant for when, you know, you go back home to community and stuff you'll actually be able to do something useful if you can see it in practice when you're actually studying..I don't know if that made sense."*

Valerie   *"Yeah, I frequently do, often unsolicited I might add, I tell them to work out where their own culture is first, I found a lot of lecturers want to, especially older*

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lecturers, realise the huge issues faced by Indigenous peoples and they want to

race in and solve it or fix it or change it and I'm like ok, but before you do that,

who are you, where are you from, what's your story, what strengths do you bring

from your cultural perspective, what are the cultural strengths, perspectives of

psychology in general, what are the cultural strengths of these Indigenous people

you want to go help, how can you match up with those, instead of just always

saying deficits all the time with Indigenous people, look at some of the strengths,

and especially for the students in their classes, see the positives of, you know,

they come from strong proud people that are able to endure and survive, and I

think that's a very positive thing."

Veronica   *"I have a sense that...I have a sense that there's a perception that underneath it*

all we're all the same as human organisms...and...there's, I dunno if it's...too

difficult or maybe that staff don't know what to do about, if I can put it this way,

the Aboriginal question....it would be nice to have courageous conversation with

staff on this issue, yeah, and you know, perhaps a few of these conversations, and

about what...What can be done, how things can be changed to improve the

teaching of psychology, particularly, and as I said it's not just for Aboriginal

students, it's also for the student population, in terms of broadening their

perspective and so on, what I said to them."

Arthur   *"Okay...be aware that they may learn differently to others in their group, they will*

learn more experientially, they learn more experientially, and they may not have

the same, if I say something here it may sound a little bit demeaning, and I don't

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mean it necessarily that way, but…they will process things cognitively differently,

in a different way, because their learning is very much related to their world and

it's my observation, my experience..I would also like to see…for example an

acknowledgment of Aboriginal culture within universities in terms of not only of

the academic teaching and the resources within the university, but I would also

like to see a cultural acknowledgement, such as the opening of the academic year,

to be done with the assistance of a local elder, the only acknowledgement I saw

when I studied was one of the streets within the university campus was called

Wiradjuri Drive, an acknowledgement to the local people, the Wiradjuri

people…yeah, to have some acknowledgement, to include local elders in all of

that, and I think it starts to show particularly the non-Indigenous population of

the university just that the university as an institution acknowledges and honours

the Aboriginal culture as having a valuable contribution, but I guess the main

thing to bear in mind I think in terms of your piece of research is to understand as

we often say in the Indigenous psychologists association, for all of us, no matter

who we are, our experience of being Indigenous Australians is different for every

one of us, the risk that any researcher, or anyone interacting with an Indigenous

Australian can make is to stereotype us and I've seen that happen, I've seen that

happen in my work…I see it happen, for example they had a local Indigenous

rugby league weekend here last year, and I have an Aboriginal team advisor on

my team here and we both went to the game and there was a guy there who said

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aw there's some dancers out in the middle of the field doing an Aboriginal

traditional dance and the guy said they're not Aboriginal, they're not black

enough, and some of them were fair-skinned, and all different shades in between

really, but to me that underlined a stereotyping of what an Aboriginal person is

and I think Australians have still got to get to that yet, of understanding who we

are, and that we are all very different and our own experiences of Aboriginality

are all quite different, whether we've grown up in urban situations or whether

we're in very rural and remote areas and grown up in the traditional way

speaking the words of the language, it doesn't matter, you know, like in our

association we all accept one another for who we are."

Dean   *"Staff teaching psychology? I'd say be interested in the progress of your*

Indigenous students, but not so interested as to shame or embarrass your

Indigenous students, there's a...yeah, a balancing act there, you want to do the

right thing, but I've seen it and experienced it where too much attention can be

off-putting, be that always deferring to the Indigenous student for approval or for

confirmation, when the Indigenous student is there to be a student as well, a

confusion of roles...yeah, so that's, perhaps the staff, the Indigenous and non-

Indigenous staff, perhaps they have people they can speak to if they are of a, or

have the insight to think of hang on, I do feel a bit funny about how I'm behaving

in relation to this particular student there are people they can speak to, you

know...about that, that's good, maybe that's the common answer to both, is about

communicating about these things early, maybe that's, in terms of, where we started from in the interview, that's despite the advances or progressions that have been made, there's still murky, unspoken stuff that's there, but I dunno if we've got the words for it yet, so it's either, you know, denied or it's pushed aside, but it still gets in the way, can get in the way of things so, having lecturers and students brave enough to be brave, be brave enough to...speak imperfectly about something that's not quite right...yeah, that's a way forward, yeah."

Elwin   *"I think it would just be on the...crook that the cultural influence on any subject needs to be touched on at some stage...I think..having to, when I started working with multi-cultural, within a multi-cultural community, I was quite lost in some instances because I'd only been taught...western assessment, western theory and therapy, and then when I got into the community, you had a lot of these elders saying well you're wasting your time, why are you coming and treating a situation, and it was all about going back in history and going in the communities, and talking to families, you'd never be talking about psychology, you were actually talking about history...because they're still thinking that, you know, if you've got through your degree you can obviously put the dots together, we're gonna teach you about history because that's where it starts...yeah, so I think that they need to have some cultural stuff in whatever subject, whether it's the therapies or the...yeah."*

Garry   *"Keep an open mind, actually what I might give you if you don't mind, is something my mum taught me when I was very young or a lot younger in terms of*

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three truths, and it related back also to the lecture that I spoke of, of that first

year psychologist, but basically with the Dharawal people, who I recognise, or

I'm proud to say I'm part of, there were three truths, which were what you see,

what I see, and what is, and basically if you can look at things from different

perspectives you'll understand that the truth you know isn't the whole truth and

the truth other people know isn't the whole truth, but you've got to do your best to

try and incorporate as many perspectives to at least get a stronger understanding

of that ever elusive truth. So with that being said, don't dismiss students because

of their differing experiences, but try to do your best to incorporate their

experiences into what you're teaching."