

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

## **Indigenous Wellbeing in University Spaces:**

*Experiences of Indigenous Students at the Australian National University*

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies  
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Cover Page: Photo of the Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre on the ANU Acton Campus. Picture taken by Maeve Powell

*For my Nanna*



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# Abstract

This thesis aims to address the issue of Indigenous Australian conceptions of wellbeing in the context of university education. It will examine the role of an Indigenous student support unit in providing a space in which Indigenous wellbeing is enacted, supported and strengthened. The findings are based on discussions with six Indigenous students who were enrolled at the Australian National University and used the Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre and one staff member.

In this research I discuss how Indigenous students conceptualise and articulate wellbeing in a local university context. I also address institutional arrangements of university spaces in accounting for the differences in Indigenous student wellbeing. Lastly I examine how spaces for Indigenous wellbeing at the university are produced.

I argue that students' conception and articulation of wellbeing is based in a sense of belonging. Students experience challenges to wellbeing in university spaces as they enter racialised spaces. Wellbeing has also been challenged by culturally unsafe practices in some courses. The Tjabal Centre represents a space for Indigenous wellbeing which has been produced through spatial practice, the use of signs and symbols, and through planning. It is a space where Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies can be enacted in the everyday. Students have extended space for wellbeing on campus through the use of tactics and everyday acts of resistance.



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# 1 Introduction

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Health and wellbeing of Indigenous people is often discussed in public forum, government, media, and academia. This discourse focuses on health indicators, life expectancy being the most common, and how to ‘close the gap.’ However, there is not much discussion of what is meant by Indigenous health and wellbeing. As a young Indigenous woman I do not fit the stereotypes of Indigeneity and I never saw myself reflected in the discussion. What wellbeing means to me, and how I experience it did not seem important. In undertaking this research project, I wanted to do research that I could see myself in, research in which showed what it is like being an Indigenous student at a large urban based university. I also wanted to show what wellbeing means and how being a university student can contribute to, and challenge, wellbeing. I wanted to take an approach to Indigenous wellbeing embedded in the stories and reflections of Indigenous students. This thesis will thus look at Indigenous wellbeing in the context of university studies at the Australian National University. I will look at how Indigenous students conceptualise, articulate and work to strengthen their wellbeing in their everyday life at the university. I will discuss how wellbeing is enacted within university spaces, and how university spaces account for the differences of Indigenous student wellbeing. I will then discuss how the Indigenous community situated around the Indigenous student support centre is creating and extending spaces for Indigenous student wellbeing within the university. This thesis will address themes of belonging, community, diversity, representation, and individual and collective agency.

## 1.1 Scope and Research Goals

The goal of this thesis is to present Indigenous students’ voices on both their understanding and experiences of wellbeing in university education. This goal is informed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s description of an Indigenous project of representing. This relates not only to the political sense of having a voice in decision making processes but also in the sense of expressing an Indigenous spirit, experience or world view.

Representation of indigenous peoples by indigenous people is about countering the dominant society’s image of indigenous peoples, their lifestyles and belief systems. It is also about proposing solutions to the real-

life dilemmas that indigenous communities confront, and trying to capture the complexities of being indigenous.<sup>1</sup>

Inspired by Smith's project I have aimed to highlight the voices, experiences, and views of participants in relation to wellbeing. I also aim to present the multiple challenges to wellbeing, and the individual and collective agency of students in response to these challenges.

The central research question of this project is: *How do Indigenous students at the Australian National University experience wellbeing?* This topic raises some further questions which will be addressed in the thesis. These are: *How do Indigenous students conceptualise and articulate wellbeing? How do institutional arrangements recognise the differences for Indigenous student wellbeing in university spaces? How is space produced for Indigenous students to strengthen their wellbeing in everyday life?*

The setting of this research project is the Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre (hereafter Tjabal Centre) at the Australian National University (ANU). The ANU is situated in Canberra, the capital city of Australia, located in the Australian Capital Territory in the south-east of the country. Figure 1 shows the location of Canberra, state and territory boundaries, and major cities of Australia.

Although this thesis is relevant to broader studies of Indigenous wellbeing, it is not intended to be representative of all Indigenous Australians, nor does it aim to make a direct comparison with non-Indigenous Australians. It is about how the students at the ANU conceptualise wellbeing, and what their needs and experiences are within the specific institutional and educational environment of the university. That said, it also address the students' needs and hopefully this research can contribute to discussions on best practises of for supporting student wellbeing the institutional level by the ANU and Tjabal Centre and so the thesis aims at having relevance for Indigenous university students, universities, and Indigenous student support centres.

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<sup>1</sup> L.T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Otago University Press, 2012), 152.



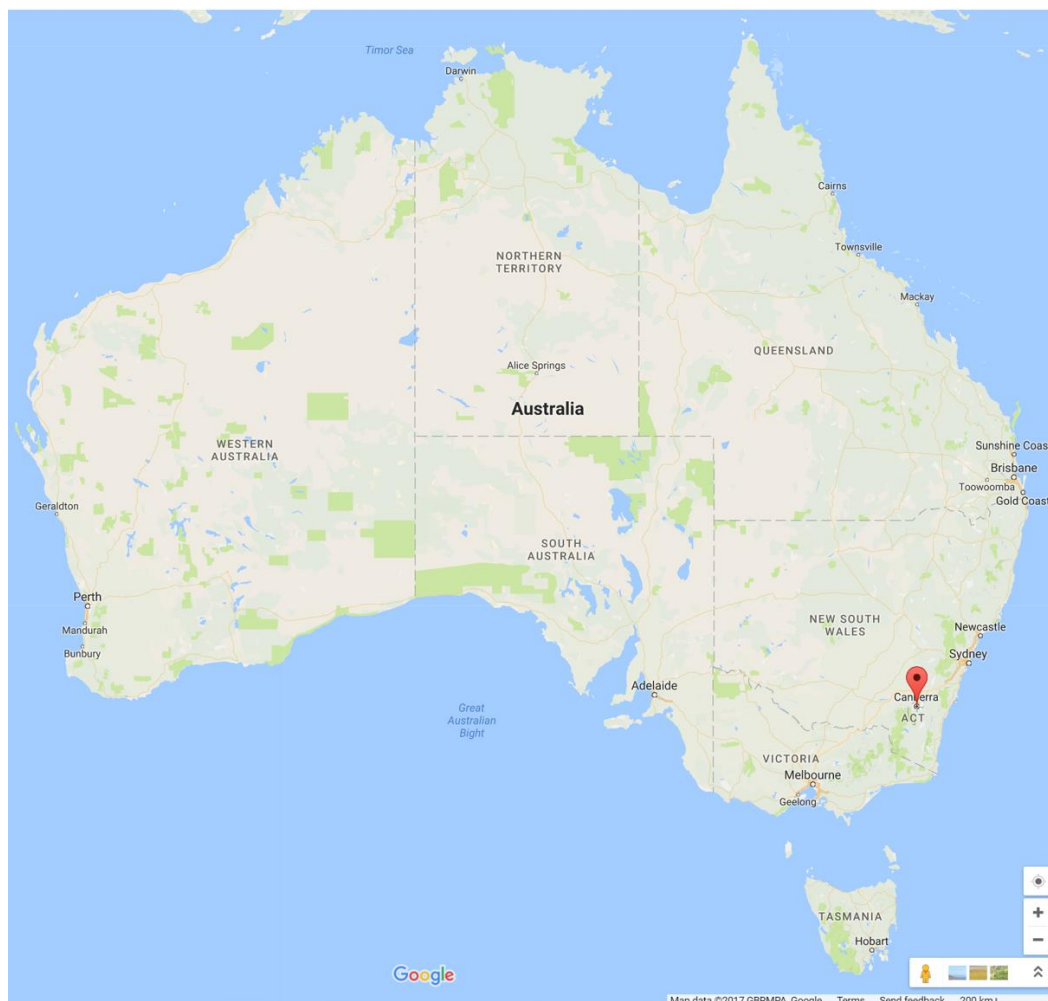


Figure 1: Map of Australia showing states and territories with capitals and major cities.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 A Note on Terminology

The term 'Indigenous' is not consistently agreed upon as the term for Australia's first peoples. At the time of colonisation there were upwards of 500 language groups living throughout the continent. Some Indigenous Australians prefer to identify themselves as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Others prefer regional terms such as Koori for those coming from New South Wales or Victoria, Murri from northern New South Wales and Queensland and so forth. Yet others prefer to use their own nation, clan or tribal group, or a combination of these terms. For the purpose of this thesis I will use the single term Indigenous to refer to these diverse groups. While there are Indigenous students from other countries at the ANU, my focus is on Indigenous Australia. Further, my research is confined to those students who are using the

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<sup>2</sup> Google Maps, "Australia," Google, accessed April 2, 2017  
<https://www.google.com.au/maps/place/Australia/@-24.8623077,133.9780598,5.08z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x2b2bfd076787c5df:0x538267a1955b1352!8m2!3d-25.274398!4d133.775136>.

Tjabal Centre. I make no claim or assumption as to which term the students use to identify themselves. In referring to the scholars whose work I draw on as a theoretical tool, I will use the term they use to identify themselves. Unless otherwise stated I will use the term Indigenous to refer to Indigenous Australians.

### 1.3 Background Context

In this section I will provide a background description of the research context. This includes an overview of issues in Indigenous health and wellbeing and Indigenous tertiary education, and provide some background context to being Indigenous in Australian cities.

#### 1.3.1 Indigenous Health and Wellbeing

Colonisation has had a serious impact on Indigenous peoples' health and wellbeing internationally. The survival of Indigenous people has been threatened by the destruction of Indigenous bodies through violence and disease, and by threat to Indigenous cultures, and connections to people and place. In Australia the effects of colonisation continue to impact Indigenous health and wellbeing.<sup>3</sup> The gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is often described as the shame of Australia. Since 2008, the dominant policy discourse in Indigenous affairs has revolved around *Closing the Gap* in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>4</sup> *Closing the Gap* is a ubiquitous term which is used in Indigenous policy statements, services strategic planning, performance reporting and media commentary.<sup>5</sup> It is an evidence-based approach to Indigenous policy which focuses on the reporting of measurable outcomes in Indigenous disadvantage from the community services sector to multiple government departments across levels of state, territory and federal government.

Its clarity and simplicity, political neutrality and promise of measurable progress, along with its imagery of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians working together to achieve a common goal, gives the Close the Gap approach tremendous appeal across government and community sectors.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Juanita Sherwood, "Do No Harm: Decolonising Aboriginal Health Research" (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2010); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies : Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Jon C Altman, *Beyond Closing the Gap: Valuing Diversity in Indigenous Australia*, vol. 54 (Citeseer, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Kerryn Pholi, Dan Black, and Craig Richards, "Is 'Close the Gap' a Useful Approach to Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Indigenous Australians?," *Australian Review of Public Affairs* 9, no. 2 (2009): 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

The poor health of Indigenous Australians is not new, nor is the policy approach of statistical equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. *Closing the Gap* has been criticised for a number of reasons. First, it does not account for the history of colonisation and structures of power which reinforce the poor health of Indigenous people. Second, *Closing the Gap* represents a conventional deficit approach to Indigenous policy which problematises Indigenous people for failing to assimilate. This impacts on and understanding of Indigenous people, implying they need to be fixed.<sup>7</sup> Third, it fails to recognise diversity amongst Indigenous people and in their life circumstances.<sup>8</sup> Fourth, it does not critically engage with, or investigate, different cultural understandings of wellbeing.<sup>9</sup> I will provide greater discussion on these issues in Chapter 3.

An alternative to mainstream approaches are Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS). The first ACCHS was the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service in inner-city Sydney which was set up in the early 1970s. Its goal was to address health inequities of Indigenous people in the area by providing free culturally sensitive health care. Its secondary aims were to be a space of advocacy, sharing health knowledge and supporting Indigenous identity and culture. Today, there are 150 ACCHS throughout Australia which offer services determined by the community and which are responsive to Indigenous understandings of health and wellbeing which go beyond the individual physical health to include the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the community.<sup>10</sup> They provide services which may include primary clinical care such as general physicians, mental health care, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, support groups, education and repatriation to name a few. ACCHS are an example of Indigenous run organisations which play an important role in urban centres of bringing communities together, and providing a meeting place and point of departure for political movements.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3.2 Indigenising the Academy

Historically, education has been used as a tool of colonisation with Indigenous education have being designed to assimilate ‘part-Indigenous’ people with the devastating effect on Indigenous

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Altman, *Beyond Closing the Gap: Valuing Diversity in Indigenous Australia*, 54.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy A Carey, "Defining Australian Indigenous Wellbeing: Do We Really Want the Answer? Implications for Policy and Practice," *Psychotherapy and Politics International* 11, no. 3 (2013).

<sup>10</sup> Peter Khoury, "Beyond the Biomedical Paradigm: The Formation and Development of Indigenous Community-Controlled Health Organizations in Australia," *International Journal of Health Services* 45, no. 3 (2015).

<sup>11</sup> Larissa Behrendt, "Aboriginal Urban Identity: Preserving the Spirit, Protecting the Traditional in Non-Traditional Settings," *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 4, no. 1 (1995).

languages, communities and cultures. Indigenous Australians were excluded from entering universities until the 1950s. It was not until 1966 that Charlie Perkins became the first Indigenous Australian to complete an undergraduate university degree.<sup>12</sup> The movement to Indigenise the academy began during the 1970s following the 1967 referendum to allow the federal government to make policy for Indigenous people. It began with the implementation of the Aboriginal Task Force (ATF) at the South Australian Institute of Technology in Adelaide. The ATF was created to train Indigenous people in the area of social welfare work. The program aimed to embrace Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives, and to train students who were likely to succeed and were committed to working in their communities. The final goal was to adopt cultural safety practices by providing an exclusive space for students. This model has been taken up by universities throughout Australia.<sup>13</sup> It has informed the broader goals to Indigenise the academy in Australia. These goals are: access and retention of students through Indigenous student support units; scholarships, and remedial courses; the development of Indigenous staff within the higher education work force; the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in university curriculum; changing the culture of universities to become more inclusive; and implementing ethical practices for research involving Indigenous people.<sup>14</sup>

Although many improvements have been made in efforts to Indigenise the academy and Indigenous participation in higher education has increased, disparities remain between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In 2015, Indigenous students made up 1.1 per cent higher education students nationally.<sup>15</sup> This is far below population parity as Indigenous people make up 3 per cent of the Australian population.<sup>16</sup> There are a number of reasons for these ongoing challenges. To start with, the impossibility of looking at access to higher education without discussing the role of primary and secondary education as the pathway to university. There are many overlapping barriers which impact on Indigenous students progressing along

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<sup>12</sup> Lester-Irabinna Rigney, "Indigenous Higher Education Reform and Indigenous Knowledges," Review of higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Maryann Bin-Sallik, "Cultural Safety: Let's Name It!," *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 32 (2003).

<sup>14</sup> Lester-Irabinna Rigney, "Internationalization of an Indigenous Anticolonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies: A Guide to Indigenist Research Methodology and Its Principles," *Wicazo Sa Review* 14, no. 2 (1999); "Indigenous Higher Education Reform and Indigenous Knowledges."

<sup>15</sup> Department of Education and Training, "2015 Student Summary," accessed April 18, 2016 <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/41616>.

<sup>16</sup> According to latest census data. Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011," accessed 25 February, 2016 <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001>.

this pathway. Many Indigenous student still suffer from negative experiences in primary and secondary education such as racism, language and multiple cultural barriers mean that fewer Indigenous students are graduating from high school and eligible for university entry. Other barriers to university entry include financial and social barriers. Intergenerational poverty, low socio-economic status, and coming from regional and remote areas can make the practicalities of attending university more difficult for Indigenous students. Social barriers include being the first in the family to attend university and a lack of role models to emulate. These barriers are systemic and for these reasons there is a need for greater, responsive academic and social support for Indigenous students.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.3.3 The Australian National University

ANU is one of Australia's Group of 8 universities (Go8) which are older and more research intensive universities. The Go8 universities are more successful in Indigenous student completions, whilst also having lower Indigenous enrolment numbers than average. Go8 universities tend to have low participation for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and Indigenous students are more likely to come fall in this category. Go8 universities also have a lower proportion of Indigenous staff than other Australian universities.<sup>18</sup> ANU conforms to these trends. In 2015 the participation rate of Indigenous students at ANU was 1.02 per cent.<sup>19</sup> There were 161 Indigenous students at ANU, 63 of whom were male, and 98 were female.<sup>20</sup> This is a small number compared to the University of Newcastle which had 949 Indigenous students, the highest number out of any Australian university. Still, the ANU has been successful in graduating Indigenous students. In 2013 the completion rate was 80 per cent, the highest in the country.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, the ANU is an interesting place to conduct research to understand the successes of Indigenous students at the university. ANU also has low Indigenous

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<sup>17</sup> Rhonda G Craven and Anthony Dillon, "Seeding Success in Indigenous Australian Higher Education: Indigenous Australian Students' Participation in Higher Education and Potential Ways Forward," in *Seeding Success in Indigenous Australian Higher Education* (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2013); Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews and Bronwyn Carlson, "The Legacy of Racism and Indigenous Australian Identity within Education," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 19, no. 4 (2016).

<sup>18</sup> Ekaterina Pechenkina, Emma Kowal, and Yin Paradies, "Indigenous Australian Students' Participation Rates in Higher Education: Exploring the Role of Universities," *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 40 (2011).

<sup>19</sup> Department of Education and Training, "2015 Equity Performance Data," accessed April 18, 2016 <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/41766>.

<sup>20</sup> "2015 Indigenous Students," accessed October 6, 2016 <https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/2015-indigenous-students>.

<sup>21</sup> Ekaterina Pechenkina, "Nothing Has Changed since Indigenous Higher Education Review," *The Conversation* (2015), accessed February 13, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/nothing-has-changed-since-indigenous-higher-ed-review-41354>.

staff levels. In 2016 ANU employed 30 Indigenous staff members: 22 non-academic staff, 8 academic staff although only 3 of these staff members had teaching responsibilities.<sup>22</sup>

There are a number of mechanisms for supporting Indigenous students. The primary support is from the Tjabal Centre which provides a space on campus where Indigenous students can meet and study. Its primary role is providing academic support to Indigenous students but also provides pastoral support, career advice and access to ANU services. The Tjabal Centre also administers the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS). ITAS provides one-on-one tutoring to Indigenous students to assist in coursework. The ANU Students Association (ANUSA) also provides funding for social events to the Indigenous Department which is made up of elected students.

In terms of inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the curriculum, ANU offers the Indigenous Studies Major to undergraduate students as well as individual courses and topics within other courses, for example Indigenous land management within Environmental Science. ANU also offers graduate degrees by coursework and research. Within the strategic plan ANU aims to increase the number of Indigenous staff and student numbers at all levels of study and across all disciplines.<sup>23</sup>

#### 1.3.4 Indigenous in the City

Indigenous people living in cities are often thought of as having lost their culture and being inauthentic.<sup>24</sup> Representations of Indigenous people based on false stereotypes inform the view of Indigenous people as authentic or inauthentic. Ideas of authenticity are “racism and primitivism in disguise.”<sup>25</sup> They are common in media, popular culture, art, literature and research, as well as being found in classrooms, tutorial rooms and lecture theatres and in interactions on university campuses. Expectations of authenticity require Indigenous people to be trapped in time and place. Authenticity traps Indigenous people within a false binary of ‘native’ or ‘settler’. Those Indigenous people who do not exist within this binary, such as those who are educated, living in cities, impure, and not black are considered inauthentic.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Department of Education and Training, "2016 Staff Indigenous," accessed April 18, 2016  
<https://docs.education.gov.au/node/42376>.

<sup>23</sup> Australian National University, "Anu Strategic Plan 2017-2021," (Canberra: Australian National University, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Behrendt, "Aboriginal Urban Identity: Preserving the Spirit, Protecting the Traditional in Non-Traditional Settings.,"; Jeffrey Sissons, *First Peoples: Indigenous Cultures and Their Futures* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 61-84.

<sup>25</sup> *First Peoples: Indigenous Cultures and Their Futures*, 37.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-59.

Prejudice, informed by expectations of authenticity, is a common experience which affects the daily lived experiences and consequently the health and wellbeing of urban based Indigenous Australians who do not fit popular stereotypes of Indigeneity.<sup>27</sup> It is assumed that Indigenous place is in the bush or desert, not as one of the neighbours in the city. However, 34.8 per cent of all Indigenous people live in major cities.<sup>28</sup> This assumption fails to recognise that all cities in Australia are built on the land Indigenous peoples. For example, the city of Canberra is built on the lands of the Ngunnawal people.<sup>29</sup> Indigenous Australians living in cities include traditional owners of the land as well as those who have migrated either recently or generations ago.

Colonisation has led to the removal, dislocation and migration of Indigenous people which has informed different relationships to Country (the term used for one's traditional territory or land of origin). This has led to diverse types of Indigenous community. The term community itself is a Western imposed concept but has been adopted by Indigenous people. The term is not neutral, it is political, and has been used broadly by Indigenous Australians in seeking rights to self-determination and has been used in the area of community controlled service delivery. However, Indigenous perceptions of community are fluid and may have political, social and geographic associations. Ultimately, Indigenous perceptions of community are based on belonging and collectivity through shared values, beliefs and attitudes, and through familial ties and ontological connection to Country.<sup>30</sup>

A number of prominent Indigenous figures have challenged ideas of authenticity in mainstream society and those internalised by Indigenous people. Stan Grant is a Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi journalist who has called for recognition of diverse Indigenous identities which are not linked to disadvantage.<sup>31</sup> Eualeyai woman and academic, Larissa Behrendt affirms that a distinct Indigenous culture exists within urban Aboriginal communities and that contemporary

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<sup>27</sup> Larissa Behrendt, "The Urban Aboriginal Landscape" (paper presented at the After Sprawl: Post-suburban Sydney, E-Proceedings of the Post-Suburban Sydney: the City in Transformation, Conference, Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011".

<sup>29</sup> The Ngambri and Ngambri-Guumaal people are also contesting traditional ownership of the land. Confusion and disputes regarding traditional ownership are a consequence of government policies of displacement and assimilation. See Tegan Osborne, "What Is the Aboriginal History of Canberra?," *Curious Canberra* (2016), accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/curious-canberra/2016-04-04/curious-canberra-what-is-the-aboriginal-history-of-canberra/7286124>.

<sup>30</sup> Pat Dudgeon et al., "Contemporary Aboriginal Perceptions of Community," in *Psychological Sense of Community* (Springer, 2002); Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "I Still Call Australia Home: Indigenous Belonging and Place in a White Postcolonizing Society," in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, ed. Sara Ahmed, et al. (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Stan Grant, "The Australian Dream: Blood, History and Becoming," *Quarterly Essay*, no. 64 (2016).

Indigenous culture is fluid not immutable.<sup>32</sup> I will end this section with a quote from Indigenous academic Yin Paradies on identity recognition.

I am suggesting that we free Indigeneity from the prison of romanticisation and recognize that although the poor and the rich Indigene, the cultural revivalist and the quintessential cosmopolitan, the fair, dark, good, bad and disinterested may have little in common, they are nonetheless all equally but variously Indigenous.<sup>33</sup>

#### 1.4 Thesis Outline

In chapter one I have given an introduction to the research project including the scope and research goals as well as the background context of Indigenous wellbeing and tertiary education in Australia. In chapter two I will present my methodological approach to answering the research questions. I will discuss Indigenous Methodology, insider research and research methods. I will also make some reflections on the research process in relation to practical challenges, and ethical concerns. I will discuss the theoretical tools I will use to help me understand the data and provide a review of the literature in chapter three. In chapter four I will discuss the way students conceptualise and articulate wellbeing. In chapter five I will give an overview of how Indigenous student wellbeing is supported through the institutional arrangements of university spaces. In chapter 6 I will look at how the students and staff at the Tjabal Centre are producing, and extending, a space for Indigenous student wellbeing within the ANU. I will finish with chapter seven, providing a summary of findings, recommendations and concluding remarks.

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<sup>32</sup> Behrendt, "Aboriginal Urban Identity: Preserving the Spirit, Protecting the Traditional in Non-Traditional Settings."; "The Urban Aboriginal Landscape."

<sup>33</sup> Yin C Paradies, "Beyond Black and White Essentialism, Hybridity and Indigeneity," *Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 4 (2006).



## 2 Indigenous Methodology and Methods

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### **My Research Journey**

I cringe at the texts that disregard and misrepresent my identity  
I'm embittered by the data that confounds my notion of social justice  
I weep at the reckless abuse of ignorance and power  
I reject the consciousness of superiority and prejudice  
I reflect on the despair of my brothers and sisters  
I rejoice in the empowerment of my people's voices  
I dance on the mother as she responds to our growth  
I claim my inheritance of resisting oppression  
I write my story to counter misbeliefs and encourage understanding  
And I will my story to nurture a place for safety and respect of our cultures and our peoples<sup>34</sup>

In this chapter I will introduce Indigenous methodology and the methods which form the basis of this research project. The above quote is from Juanita Sherwood whose work on decolonising Indigenous health research has, amongst others, inspired my research approach. I will discuss Indigenous methodology which influenced my approach to undertaking the research, paying particular attention to the topic of insider research. I will then present the research methods I used in collecting primary and secondary data. Finally, I will discuss the challenges I encountered in undertaking this research project. I will give particular attention to the process of ethical approval and putting research ethics and Indigenous methodology into practice.

### 2.1 Indigenous Methodology

The theoretical underpinning of this research is inspired by Indigenous methodology which developed from the international movement to decolonise research. In her influential text *Decolonising Methodologies*, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses the historical impact of research on Indigenous people and the role it has played as colonial practice. Research has privileged Western ways of being, knowing, and doing, whilst appropriating research has appropriated Indigenous knowledge and cultures, and denying Indigenous people a role in creating their own futures.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Juanita Sherwood, "My Research Journey," *Kauria Higher Education Journal*.(7) 62 (2001), quoted in Juanita Sherwood, "Do No Harm: Decolonising Aboriginal Health Research," 119.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies : Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

Smith draws on the work of Edward Said in discussing how research has represented Indigenous people as the Other. Said has coined this term to describe the Western academic reproduction of difference between the West and the Rest. In *Orientalism*, Said describes a social relationship between imperial centre and colonial periphery. The West reproduces a colonial relationship with the Orient through epistemological reconstruction, by “dealing with it, by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”<sup>36</sup>

Othering, he argues is supported by Western academy through institutions, scholarship and the types of research that is done, imagery and symbology, theory, and bureaucracy.<sup>37</sup> Consistent with these arguments, representing the Indigenous as Other, the Western academy risks reproducing distinctions to define itself in contrast to the primitive, traditional Indigenous often constructed as trapped in time and place, and for the modern society a ‘problem’ to be solved. In contemporary settings there is a danger of reproducing colonial relationships between Indigenous people and academic institutions and we should be critical toward the epistemological reproduction of the Indigenous peoples as Other. Said, and other postcolonial scholars also inform the critique of the assumption of objectivity. Being outside of the Indigenous communities has not made Western researchers more objective. Rather, the assumption of objectivity has been used to obscure their subjectivity and the Othering of research on Indigenous peoples.

Juanita Sherwood has introduced the concept of decolonisation into discussions about Indigenous health research in Australia. She describes how research on Indigenous health has maintained colonialism. This has been done through research agendas, funding, ignoring social and historical contexts when studying Indigenous health, the production of deficit data, and ignoring Indigenous voices. Paradoxically research on Indigenous health has caused stress and injury and thus had a negative impact on Indigenous health and wellbeing.<sup>38</sup>

Indigenous methodology has been proposed by many Indigenous scholars as a means to disrupt the problematic relationship between academic inquiry and Indigenous people.<sup>39</sup> This should

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<sup>36</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Sherwood, "Do No Harm: Decolonising Aboriginal Health Research."

<sup>39</sup> Rigney, "Internationalization of an Indigenous Anticolonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies: A Guide to Indigenist Research Methodology and Its Principles."; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies : Research and Indigenous Peoples*; Sherwood, "Do No Harm: Decolonising Aboriginal Health Research."

be done by changing the assumptions and goals of research and the relationship between researcher and community. Smith proposes an approach to research and knowledge creation which is more equal and collaborative. Further, it does not require the assumption of objectivity of the researcher, emphasising the benefit of the researcher being a part of the community. There is no standard Indigenous methodology because the research should be responsive to the community with whom it is being done. Often research drawing on Indigenous methodology will use standard and Indigenous practices for research.<sup>40</sup> Indigenous Australian scholar Lester Rigney proposes that the goal of Indigenist research should be to inform the struggle for Indigenous rights. He suggests that research should highlight Indigenous voices and be of use to communities.<sup>41</sup>

Indigenous methodology influenced my research design as well as the research goals and questions. It was important to me to highlight the voices and strengths of the students in the research, looking not at wellbeing deficits but at what the students do to improve their wellbeing within the university setting. It was also important for me to represent the diversity of Indigenous communities, which is often overlooked. I have also prioritised the voices of those who have participated and have aimed to ensure that the research has some use or interest to the individuals, community and organisation involved.

### 2.1.1 Insider/Outsider Research

Lester Rigney puts forward the principle of privileging Indigenous voices as central to Indigenist research. Whilst recognising differences between Indigenous people, he suggests that Indigenous Australians are best positioned to undertake research which represents the voices, experiences, and ideas of other Indigenous Australians. The benefit of this type of insider research is that the researcher is more aware and respectful of cultural traditions and is more accountable to Indigenous institutions and communities.<sup>42</sup>

Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests that the challenge for insider research is the need for constant reflexivity and maintaining high ethical standards.<sup>43</sup> Reflexivity refers to the ability of the researcher to reflect on their position within the research. It involves thinking about background, identity, and experiences in order to understand how the researcher knows what

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies : Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

<sup>41</sup> Rigney, "Internationalization of an Indigenous Anticolonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies: A Guide to Indigenist Research Methodology and Its Principles."

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies : Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 137-40.

they know. In recognising that researchers are never truly objective, it is important to understand how these dynamics affect, and are affected by, the research process.<sup>44</sup>

In this research project I am positioned as both an insider and outsider and will thus have to straddle insider and outsider boundaries. I am an Indigenous Australian student and an ANU graduate. I also used the Tjabal Centre and its services during my first few years at ANU. This gives me an insider perspective on the research topic and allows me to relate to the participants. It also gives me greater understanding of the specific context of the ANU and the challenges that Indigenous students may face there. I am also an insider because I know Aunty Anne Martin, Director of the Tjabal Centre socially and because she works with my uncle whom she considers to be like family. In undertaking the research I do not want to reflect badly on my family members and I do not want to damage my relationship with Aunty Anne or the students who participated. It is because I am an insider, that I feel highly accountable for the external and ongoing effects of this research project.

I am currently a student in Norway and most of the students with whom I spoke did not know me prior to conducting the research, so I could also be considered an outsider. It should be noted that in the Indigenous student community at ANU is diverse. While I was able to closely relate to the experiences of some of the students, particularly those who had grown up in cities as I had, with others I was less able to relate. I have therefore made an effort to include a variety of perspectives and experiences in the thesis in order to respect the diversity within the community.

## 2.2 Methods

### 2.2.1 Researching with an Indigenous Organisation

My first step in conducting the research was to meet with Aunty Anne, the director of the Tjabal Centre. I made a research agreement setting out the questions, methods and procedures for the research. The benefit of having a research agreement in place is that the Tjabal Centre and I are aware of our respective roles and how the research should progress in relation to the topic and the collection and analysis of data. It is also useful in clarifying the expectations regarding timing of the research and communication between researcher and centre. I will further reflect on the challenges and ethical implications of the research agreement in section 2.3.

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<sup>44</sup> Suki Ali and Moira Kelly, "Ethics and Social Research," in *Researching Society and Culture*, ed. Clive Seale (London: Sage Publications, 2012), 59-60.

One aspect of the agreement was that Aunty Anne would make initial contact with potential participants. The benefit of this being that she chose students who would be able and willing to participate. The limitation of this is that I was only able to interview students who regularly use the Tjabal Centre. This limits the research to those who use the Tjabal Centre and excludes those students who, for unknown reasons, do not use Tjabal.

### 2.2.2 Primary Data

The main source of primary data is transcripts from individual semi-structured interviews. I interviewed six Indigenous students, Anne Martin, Director of the Tjabal Centre, and Richard Baker, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Student Experience. I also use photographs of the Tjabal Centre that I have taken using my mobile phone.

I chose individual semi-structured interviews as they are best suited to this research topic. Whereas focus group research is used to raise topics in a general way, to define terms, or to bring up points of discussion, individual interviews are used for research into individual attitudes, values and experiences. Semi-structured individual interviews allow for more considered and detailed responses and focus on the voices of participants.<sup>45</sup>

This method is suitable for this research project because discussing wellbeing can be a sensitive topic and because I wanted to highlight the individual student voices. The Indigenous student community at ANU is diverse, coming from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and from different parts of the country. While Indigenous Australians share many cultural aspects, I do not want to essentialise and assume that the students would all agree on conceptions and experiences of wellbeing. By having individual interviews, discussions were more in depth and responsive to individual voices.

I conducted the interviews between October and December of 2016. I used skype for the interviews because during the interview period I was based in Tromsø in Northern Norway whilst the participants were based in Canberra in South-Eastern Australia. The negative side of using skype was that the interview process was less personal than speaking face-to-face. Further, I was less able to read non-verbal cues such as body language and so could not be as responsive as if the interviews were conducted in person.

However, using skype also meant that I did not have to decide on the location of the interviews. Participants could feel comfortable in their chosen environment. Some of the students skyped

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<sup>45</sup> Bridget Byrne, "Qualitative Interviewing," *ibid.*

me from the Tjabal Centre, some skyped from home, and others did not disclose their location. Some of the students did not turn the camera on during the interview. I did not ask the reason for this, whether it was a conscious decision or due to technical problems. Having the interview space online meant that the setting was more neutral as both the participants and myself were in our own chosen physical space. Although the interview process was limited to using skype, it did perhaps give a little control back to the participant during interviews.

### 2.2.3 Secondary Data

During my time in Australia prior to interviews taking place, during scoping activities I was invited to a meeting held by Indigenous students. This meeting was called *Nothing About Us, Without Us* and aimed at discussing how Indigenous studies is taught at ANU. Since the initial meeting the group has had subsequent meetings. Half of my participants have been involved in this group. Due to timing I was unable to attend the meeting. However, one of the attendees has posted anonymous quotes on the ANU Indigenous Twitter account. I refer to these as a source of secondary data to support my primary interview data.

## 2.3 Challenges

### 2.3.1 Studying in Norway, Researching in Australia

There were challenges of conducting research in Australia whilst studying at a Norwegian university. First, was joining two ethical, university, and bureaucratic systems. In Norway my research was approved by the Data Protection Official for Research, Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). This process was straight forward and did not involve any significant follow up. In Norway there are currently no guidelines for research involving Indigenous people. There is a single body to approach for ethical approval and one set of ethical guidelines.

In contrast, research involving Indigenous people in Australia must be approved by a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). There are many HRECs operating under different institutions and organisation which use different guidelines for research with Indigenous people. The primary role of HRECs is to ensure that research involving human subjects complies with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* which has been developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Second, the time constraints in which I could undertake fieldwork despite hoping to undertake participatory research which takes time for negotiation and collaboration. I returned to Australia

for approximately three months over the northern-hemisphere summer break of 2016. During this period I spent most of this time contacting Indigenous Community organisations, utilising contacts, and communicating with the Tjabal Centre once it was agreed that they would be willing to participate. This meant that I did not have any time to conduct interviews while still in Australia. I also had to seek ethical approval from the ANU HREC which added to the time before I could begin interviews.

Third, a lack of clear and available information in the system. Although I had some guidance in this process from ANU ethics, there was a lack of transparency in information about what the requirements were of a student researcher from a foreign academic institution. There was also a lack of information about which HREC to go to for approval and which guidelines to use. It became clear that I had to receive approval from the ANU HREC due to the issue of jurisdiction. Ethical approval is not only about protecting research participants but is also about risk management and avoiding liability of institutions. In this case the ANU had jurisdiction for ensuring research involving students and staff is ethical. As part of the approval process I was required to submit a number of documents including research proposal, research agreement with the Tjabal Centre, participant information sheet, and consent form. These documents were reviewed by the ANU HREC which provided feedback, revisions, and asked follow up questions. After making revisions to the information sheet and consent form, and answering follow up questions, I was granted approval.

### 2.3.2 Ethical Approval

As mentioned already the process for ethical approval was much more extensive in Australia than in Norway. Since the 1980's in Australia there has been an effort to shift the relationship between Indigenous people and research away from exploitation toward self-determination.<sup>46</sup> Some of the principles introduced in these guidelines include community benefit from the research, community control and engagement, cultural sensitivity, and reciprocity. Numerous guidelines have been written, and re-written, and have varying degrees of success in addressing this goal. There are points of overlap and differentiation between the various ethical guidelines.<sup>47</sup> I will not focus my discussion on comparing all the guidelines. In applying for

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<sup>46</sup> Sherwood, "Do No Harm: Decolonising Aboriginal Health Research," 243; AHMRC, *AH&MRC Guidelines for Research into Aboriginal Health: Key Principles* (Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of New South Wales, 2013); AIATSIS, "Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies," (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> AIATSIS and Lowitja Institute, "Researching Right Way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Ethics: A Domestic and International Review," (NHMRC, 2013).

ethical approval from the ANU ethics committee I was not asked to refer to a specific set of guidelines.

The National Health and Medical Research Council ethical guidelines emphasise consultation and formal agreement between researcher and community.<sup>48</sup> This has become standard practice in research involving Indigenous Australians. For these reason I made a written agreement between myself and Anne Martin, Director of the Tjabal Centre. Feedback from the ANU HREC made it clear that such an agreement was valuable in receiving approval.

Although this agreement provided clarity for the relationship between myself and the Tjabal Centre, it did not change the power dynamic between myself as researcher, and those who participated in the research. Ultimately, I still had the power to represent the centre, and those who participated. I attempted to ameliorate this imbalance by speaking with Aunty Anne about my preliminary findings during the writing process. She either confirmed or provided greater clarity for me in making conclusions. Given this dynamic it is clear that the research agreement was useful for myself and the university in granting ethical approval and so served the interests of myself and the university rather than directly serving the Indigenous community at ANU. This raises the question, do institutions which aim at redressing power imbalances between Indigenous communities and researchers actually reproduce this relationship?

### 2.3.3 Ethics in Practice; Indigenous Methodology?

I encountered three challenges for using the ethical guidelines in practice. First, applying the concept of community. The Australian guidelines give no definition of community despite term being used so frequently both in guidelines and Indigenous studies in general. In contrast, the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans in the chapter on research involving First Nations, Metis and Inuit defines community as “a collectivity with shared identity or interests that has the capacity to act or express itself as a collective.”<sup>49</sup> It also recognises that “the boundaries of communities are fluid, organisations are communities as well and an individual is part of mutual communities.”<sup>50</sup> Another limitation of

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<sup>48</sup> NHMRC, *Keeping Research on Track: A Guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples About Health Research Ethics*, trans. Keeping research on track (Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Tri-Council Policy Statement : Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Ottawa, ON Canada: Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research, 2014), 111.

<sup>50</sup> AIATSIS and Lowitja Institute, "Researching Right Way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Ethics: A Domestic and International Review," 39.



Australian ethical guidelines is that they do not recognise the diversity both within and between Indigenous communities. From an Indigenous methodologies perspective this is a problem because ethical research should be responsive to each community in terms of need, cultural protocol and practice.

The lack of clarity in these areas has implications for my research. The student community at ANU does not conform to traditional definitions of community of being a group of Indigenous people from the same cultural background. This has particular impact on the issue of data ownership. Australian ethical guidelines for research involving Indigenous people include that the data outputs from the research should be owned by the community.<sup>51</sup> In the case of my research the data collected takes the form of interviews. For these to be owned by the community I would have to provide the Tjabal Centre with transcripts and audio recordings of the interviews. However, I do not think it appropriate for the Tjabal Centre to own this data. The Indigenous student community at ANU is not a homogenous group and the content of the interviews are more individual than communal, due to the diversity of the students. For this reason I have offered the individual participants a copy of their data and my copy will be deleted on completion of the research project.

Second, the issue of privacy and anonymity of the students participating was important during the writing process. This is important when the information gathered during the research process is sensitive, or when doing research in small communities and/or where publication may cause conflict and difficulty for participants.<sup>52</sup> This was particularly relevant for this research project because experiences of wellbeing are both personal and often sensitive. Further, in my discussions I found differing opinions amongst the students relating to strategies for engaging with the university. All the students spoke with respect about other's perspectives and no one spoke to me about conflict. However, it is ethically important that my research does not contribute to, or create, any tension regarding these differing opinions.

I have ensured privacy and anonymity in this research by using pseudonyms when writing the thesis. I have used names taken randomly from a list of popular baby names in Australia.<sup>53</sup> In some cases I have chosen not to include relevant stories or experiences because they are

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<sup>51</sup> AHMRC, *AH&MRC Guidelines for Research into Aboriginal Health: Key Principles*; AIATSIS, "Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies."

<sup>52</sup> Ali and Kelly, "Ethics and Social Research," 65, 72.

<sup>53</sup> Emily Blatchford, "Most Popular Baby Names in Australia since 1950," The Huffington Post, accessed 22 March, 2017 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2015/12/06/most-popular-baby-names-australia\\_n\\_8734972.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2015/12/06/most-popular-baby-names-australia_n_8734972.html).

particularly sensitive and/or may reveal the identity of the participant telling the story. In other cases, I have removed identifying words from quotes or have paraphrased information from my participants in order to preserve anonymity.

Third, the challenge of implementing the goals Indigenous methodology. One of the central goals of Indigenous methodology is to involve Indigenous communities in a participatory research process, from conception to the final written report. In the case of my research with the Tjabal Centre and Indigenous students, I am hesitant to claim the research was truly participatory because students and Tjabal Centre were not involved throughout the research process. While Aunty Anne approved my research methods and questions, neither she nor the students took part in formulating them and the thesis writing was done by me alone. That said I do not believe the topic is entirely irrelevant to the Indigenous community at ANU. Many of the students expressed interest in the topic and told me they were glad I was looking into their wellbeing. Also, by keeping interview questions flexible I was also able to be responsive to topics the students themselves found of interest. This has led to a shift in the direction the thesis has taken.

Lester Rigney describes Indigenist research as “research by Indigenous Australians whose primary informants are Indigenous Australians and whose goals are to serve and inform the Indigenous struggle for self-determination.”<sup>54</sup> My research project certainly conforms to this definition. I am Indigenous Australian, all my informants were Indigenous Australian and my research goals were to further self-determination of Indigenous Australia. I did this by prioritising participants’ voices, being respectful and aware of diversity and representation, and focusing on issues of importance to students. However, Indigenous methodology goes beyond this definition. I was less able to fulfil to fulfil Indigenous methodology with respect to the goal of participatory research methods and embedding the community in all stages of the research process.

## 2.4 Chapter Summary

Indigenous methodology warns researchers of the danger of research in representing, exploiting, appropriating Indigenous people and knowledge. It asks me to examine power and reflexivity, to look at my position of power as a researcher and question the relationality of this power. This methodology inspired my research in many ways from taking a strength based

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<sup>54</sup> Rigney, "Internationalization of an Indigenous Anticolonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies: A Guide to Indigenist Research Methodology and Its Principles," 118.

approach to broader research goals and ensuring the topic is relevant and useful. It also inspired the project in terms of how I treated the participants both during the interview process and during writing. It meant showing respect in representing these students and Indigenous people more broadly in terms of diversity, culture, voice. I did not do participatory research and for this reason, while my research was not unethical, it is more an example of acceptable practice rather than best practice when it comes to Indigenous methodology.



## 3 Theoretical Tools and Literature Review

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In this chapter, I will introduce the theoretical tools that I will use to analyse the empirical material that this thesis built upon. In addition, I will review the literature on the topic. I will first outline some of the theoretical debates that circulate around Indigenous wellbeing. This is a topic of concern among many scholars, and Indigenous scholars in particular have argued that there is a need to build upon Indigenous epistemological understanding of wellbeing. I will draw on the work of Vicky Grieves and Lorraine Muller's Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory.<sup>55</sup> Second, I will look at previous research into the experiences of Indigenous Australian university students. Third, I will discuss the concept of Cultural Safety and its relevance to Indigenous student wellbeing in universities. Fourth, I will introduce the concept of space and tactics presented by French sociologists and urban theorists Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. Lastly, I will place this research thesis in relation to previous research and theory.

### 3.1 Conceptualising Indigenous Health and Wellbeing

There is no clear definition of the term wellbeing as it has been given different definitions in Indigenous and other policy and services contexts both in Australia and internationally. It has been used synonymously with health, as a euphemism for mental health, as a set of socio-economic indicators, and as general life satisfaction.<sup>56</sup> Wellbeing can be understood as both a way of doing and feeling a sense of wellness but also as a theoretical tool to understand welfare. It has been understood in relation to two models of health which Michele Ivanitz outlines.<sup>57</sup> The first is the biomedical model which addresses physical symptoms of illness. This model is based on Western epistemologies and the Cartesian mind body dichotomy. In this model,

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<sup>55</sup> Vicki Grieves, "What Is Indigenous Wellbeing?" (paper presented at the Mataranga Taketake: Traditional Knowledge Conference, 2007); Lorraine Muller, *A Theory for Indigenous Australian Health and Human Service Work: Connecting Indigenous Knowledge and Practice* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> For example see: United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*, vol. 9 (United Nations Publications, 2009); Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "Young Australians : Their Health and Wellbeing : Key National Indicators," (Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006); Christopher Holland, "Close the Gap: Progress and Priorities Report 2016," (Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016); Carlos Corvalan, Simon Hales, and Anthony J McMichael, *Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Health Synthesis* (World health organization, 2005); Brian Pink and Penny Allbon, "The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples," (Canberra, Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> Michele Ivanitz, "Achieving Improved Health Outcomes for Urban Aboriginal People: Biomedical and Ethnomedical Models of Health," *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 59, no. 3 (2000).

disease is a physical entity occurring in body. Health is seen as a negative state, the absence of disease, rather than a positive state. The second model is the ethnomedical model which uses a holistic understanding of health and wellbeing and the mind, body, and spirit are viewed as interconnected rather than separated. The individual and their community will assign meanings behind an illness, which will determine how the illness is managed. Ivanitz calls for an alternative model that operates at the interface of biomedicine and ethnomedicine. She suggests that more research be done on defining health and illness to Indigenous people and operationalising these understandings.

Policy documents such as the ones referenced above fail to capture all aspects of Indigenous wellbeing but are criticised for reproducing Western epistemologies in conceptualising health and wellbeing. Timothy Carey suggests that policy definitions of wellbeing compartmentalise Indigenous health and wellbeing and maintain a focus on quantifying it for policy outcomes. By focusing on separate outcomes, policy conceptions of wellbeing fail to recognise the dynamic interaction between individual, context, community and Country that is fundamental to Indigenous understandings of wellbeing.<sup>58</sup>

Peter Khoury's research presents an explanation for why it will be difficult to bring together different definitions of wellbeing and operationalise them in policy contexts.<sup>59</sup> He suggests that Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations provide a space in which Indigenous understandings of health and wellbeing can operate and contends that rise of neoliberal ideology in Australia since the 90s poses a threat to these organisations. This ideology has economic rather than a social focus, informing the withdrawal of the state in favour of market mechanisms. This has led to cuts to public spending on health, education, and social welfare. It has also influenced the rise of managerialism within the public service and social service delivery, which focuses on financial calculation, auditing, cost cutting, setting targets, and performance indicators. The neoliberal ideology is suited to the biomedical model of health because it allows for quantifying individual health and wellbeing outcomes, setting numeric targets for disease reduction and focusing on performance indicators for health practitioners and organisations. Ideologies of governance will therefore influence how Indigenous wellbeing can be operationalised by social services and organisations.

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<sup>58</sup> Carey, "Defining Australian Indigenous Wellbeing: Do We Really Want the Answer? Implications for Policy and Practice."

<sup>59</sup> Khoury, "Beyond the Biomedical Paradigm: The Formation and Development of Indigenous Community-Controlled Health Organizations in Australia."

Aboriginal researcher Vicky Grieves examines how Indigenous philosophy and spirituality relates to concepts of Indigenous wellbeing in much of her work.<sup>60</sup> Indigenous definitions of health and wellbeing are grounded in practices, events, and stories through which spirituality and epistemologies are enacted.<sup>61</sup> Indigenous Australians' worldview is based on the interconnectedness between people and the land, environment, universe and spirits; however, it can be enacted differently in relation to gender, age, class and urban/rural difference. Grieves posits that the English term 'wellbeing' is used to signify an Indigenous concept which cannot be directly translated. For example:

There is no word in Aboriginal languages for Health. The closest words mean "well being" and well being in the language of Nurwugen people of the Northern Territory means 'strong, happy, knowledgeable, socially responsible, to take a care, beautiful, clean' both in the sense of being with in the Law and in the sense of being cared for and that suggests to me that country and people and land and health and Law cannot be separated. They are all One, it's how we work with and respect each other, and how we work with and respect the country on which we live that will enable us to continue to live across generations.<sup>62</sup>

Grieves warns that Indigenous Australian understandings of wellbeing could be lost in the goals of policy and government bureaucracy, and through ignoring Indigenous voices in the policy context.<sup>63</sup> She draws on Indigenous rights to intangible cultural heritage in her research into Indigenous understandings of wellbeing. She draws on human rights instruments such as the International Labour Organisation Convention no 169, which recognises the rights of Indigenous peoples to "maintain and develop their identities, languages and religions."<sup>64</sup> She suggests this constitutes a right to intangible cultural heritage and are essential for survival of Indigenous people, their spirituality, and way of life. Grieves argues that wellbeing is ensured through intangible cultural heritage based in Indigenous spirituality.

[Aboriginal spirituality] needs to be directly recognised and acknowledged in the program statement, and in society more generally, in such a way as to

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<sup>60</sup> Vicki Grieves, "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities," (Sydney, Australia: Department of Environment and Conservation, 2006); "What Is Indigenous Wellbeing?"; *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, the Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing* (Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health Casuarina, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> Grieves, *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, the Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing*; Grieves, "What Is Indigenous Wellbeing?"; Grieves "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities."

<sup>62</sup> Judy Atkinson in "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities," 20.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> International Labour Organisation, "C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention," accessed May 4, 2017 [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312314](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312314).

make clear the centrality of cultural ways of being and doing, ways that cannot be accommodated by a *perspective*.<sup>65</sup>

Grievés sought to articulate what is meant by Indigenous wellbeing in her research with a group of Indigenous experts called the Redfern Focus Group. The people in this working group were members of the Indigenous community centred on the Eora College in inner city Sydney. The group comprised of members from different communities of origin from New South Wales, to Queensland and Western Australia, all currently urban based. They ranked tangible and intangible cultural heritage factors for Indigenous wellbeing. The intangible cultural heritage factors included factors such as spirituality, knowing about my peoples' history and culture, education, being able to give to family and friends and being with my family and extended family. The Redfern focus group ranked these factors more highly than tangible factors such as a better a better place to live, and better physical fitness.<sup>66</sup>

Grievés' research approach was to provide the Redfern focus group with a survey of wellbeing factors and ask them to rank the factors and explain what they mean. This differs from my approach, which was to use open interview questions. The focus group identified indicators that were omitted from the survey, such as mental health, absence of substance misuse, standard of living, and being free from racism.<sup>67</sup> These factors were present in my research and I will be including reference to these in the thesis.

Lorrain Muller, a Murri researcher from Northern Australia, has introduced the Indigenous Australian Social-Health Theory.<sup>68</sup> She has written the theory based on a research project *Murri Way!* in which she co-theorised with Indigenous health service workers about Indigenous ways of working. They interpreted Indigenous Social-Health Theory from oral theory inextricably linked to practice of Indigenous workers in helping professions. It represents "...a collective project written by us, for us; it articulates our model of practice and identifies our values and beliefs that underpin our unique theory. It privileges our knowledge, our beliefs and our ways of practice."<sup>69</sup> Indigenous Social-Health Theory is hence is both descriptive, in terms of defining Indigenous Australian social-health, and prescriptive, in presenting a set of principles

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<sup>65</sup> Grievés, *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, the Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing*, 51.

<sup>66</sup> Grievés, "What Is Indigenous Wellbeing?," 110-12; Grievés "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities.,"; Grievés, *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, the Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing*.

<sup>67</sup> Grievés "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities," 47-8.

<sup>68</sup> Muller, *A Theory for Indigenous Australian Health and Human Service Work: Connecting Indigenous Knowledge and Practice*.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



for best practice in service delivery and research. She includes a number of concepts in the theory including equality, the inclusion and value of individuals; respect for the importance of elders and leaders; reciprocity and sharing; humour and hospitality; and connection to community and remaining grounded.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.2 Indigenous Student Experiences in Higher Education

Previous research into the experiences of Indigenous students in higher education can be placed into two overlapping categories. First, research focusing on individual factors for student success in higher education. Marcia Devlin suggests that individual success factors include socio-cultural capabilities such as how students seek help and information, and socio-emotional competence such as personal attributes of persistence, resilience, and organisation.<sup>71</sup>

DiGregorio, Farrington and Page added to previous research by looking at the students' motivation for university study and conceptions of academic success.<sup>72</sup> They spoke to Indigenous students in a health sciences course at Sydney University. The students were motivated to pursue higher education in order to contribute to the health service needs of their communities, which they were aware of through personal and family experiences. Students were later motivated to continue with their studies as they saw themselves become role models for the younger people in their lives. Thus, while the students felt it was important to earn credentials or high marks, it was also important to be able to fulfil a role beyond individual achievement.<sup>73</sup>

Pachenkina's research linked resistance to the success of Indigenous students at an Indigenous student support unit at a major Australian university. She found that Indigenous students felt that peers and teachers placed expectations on them based on stereotyping. These expectations included physical appearance and essentialised ideas of indigeneity, adopting the role in the classroom of the token Indigenous expert, and conforming to deficit narratives of the competence of Indigenous students in higher education. She found that the students were

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 156-206.

<sup>71</sup> Marcia Devlin, "Indigenous Higher Education Student Equity: Focusing on What Works," *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 38, no. 01 (2009). see also Maree Toombs and Don Gorman, "Why Do Indigenous Students Succeed at University?," *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal* 34, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>72</sup> Kristie Daniel DiGregorio, Sally Farrington, and Susan Page, "Listening to Our Students: Understanding the Factors That Affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students' Academic Success," *Higher Education Research & Development* 19, no. 3 (2000).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

motivated to achieve academically and assert their identity in order to resist these expectations.<sup>74</sup>

The second category of research focuses on factors that exclude Indigenous students from university study or challenge their academic achievement and strategies for universities and Indigenous support units in supporting students. Howlett et al. show that some Indigenous students feel alien or foreign. Some students also feelings associated with being the first person in their family to attend university such as feeling out of depth, feeling like they do not belong, and lack role models to emulate in their careers.<sup>75</sup> Andersen et. al. suggest these challenges be addressed by recruiting Indigenous staff to induct, support, strengthen Indigenous students and have a present and visible centre central to student persistence and educational survival. This also sends a message to students and the university and broader community that Indigenous education is valued.<sup>76</sup> Nakata, Nakata, and Chin contend

Indigenous students confront complex challenges in negotiating their engagements with concepts, conventions, and practices of established disciplines, while maintaining the standpoints forged in their experiences of being Indigenous.<sup>77</sup>

Indigenous students face the challenge of positioning their own cultural understanding and experiences against what they are taught at university.

Malin and Maidment have used the concept of wellbeing to analyse the legacy of assimilationist Indigenous policy and to look at contemporary social project. They suggest that formal educational programs should focus on the general wellbeing of Indigenous people and harness inter-sectoral collaboration to improve educational outcomes.<sup>78</sup> Maree Toombs uses concepts of resilience and social and emotional wellbeing to bring together research on support and teaching.<sup>79</sup> Her research took an holistic view of student experiences to look at how university study impacts on Indigenous students' overall wellbeing, looking at a broad range of themes

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<sup>74</sup> Ekaterina Pechenkina, "'It Becomes Almost an Act of Defiance': Indigenous Australian Transformational Resistance as a Driver of Academic Achievement," *Race Ethnicity and Education* (2016).

<sup>75</sup> Catherine Howlett et al., "Retaining Indigenous Students in Tertiary Education: Lessons from the Griffith School of Environment," *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 37, no. 01 (2008).

<sup>76</sup> Clair Andersen, Tracey Bunda, and Maggie Walter, "Indigenous Higher Education: The Role of Universities in Releasing the Potential," *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Martin Nakata, Vicky Nakata, and Michael Chin, "Approaches to the Academic Preparation and Support of Australian Indigenous Students for Tertiary Studies," (Brisbane: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland, 2008). p.140

<sup>78</sup> Merridy Malin and Debra Maidment, "Education, Indigenous Survival and Well-Being: Emerging Ideas and Programs," *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 32 (2003).

<sup>79</sup> Maree Toombs, "What Factors Do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students Say Affect Their Social and Emotional Wellbeing While at University?" (PhD Thesis, University of Southern Queensland, 2011).

from family and community, to physical and mental health, resilience and experiences of racism at university, among other factors. She made a number of recommendations for universities in addressing the needs of Indigenous students. These included developing cultural competencies for staff, developing a resilience resource for students and embedding Indigenous perspectives into teaching and learning.<sup>80</sup>

### 3.3 Cultural Safety

The concept of cultural safety is used by practitioners in the field of service delivery and work practice. Maori nurses in the practice of nursing education first used it to mean “no assault on a person’s identity.”<sup>81</sup> In the Australian context, Robyn Williams defines cultural safety as follows:

...an environment, which is safe for people; where there, is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what, they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity, and truly listening.<sup>82</sup>

She suggests that the people best equipped to provide a culturally safety in service delivery are people from the same culture. Further, non-Indigenous people working with Indigenous people can provide a culturally safe environment by examining their preconceived ideas and stereotypes and how this affects their organisations and work practice. Indigenous Australian academic Maryann Bin-Sallik applied the concept to Indigenous higher education in Australia. She describes a number of sources of a lack of cultural safety: institutionalised racism, discrimination and racism from teachers, incorrect and pejorative terminology, derogatory representations and misrepresentations of Indigenous Australians in classrooms and the literature, and the exclusion of Indigenous histories, experiences and perspectives. She suggests university strategy of cultural safety relating to designated Indigenous spaces, culturally appropriate curricula, culturally appropriate courses and behaviours, and employment of Indigenous academic staff to teach Indigenous studies.

Universities Australia has created the *National best practice framework for Indigenous cultural competency in Australian universities*. It puts forward a definition of cultural competence, which is attempt to operationalise cultural safety for use in higher education institutions bringing together cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and safety. The Framework looks at

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Robyn Williams, "Cultural Safety—What Does It Mean for Our Work Practice?," *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health* 23, no. 2 (1999): 1.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

bringing together learning about distinctiveness of Indigenous cultures and effects of colonisation, with non-Indigenous self-reflexivity, and using this to inform work practice. It suggests the use of cultural competency for use both within the organisation but also by individual professionals and as an expected learning outcome of graduates.<sup>83</sup>

However, there are a number of problems with operationalising cultural competency in that it is difficult to measure it empirically.<sup>84</sup> This creates a challenge for universities in assessing the competence of students or professionals. Research in the field of social work practice shows that cultural competence has become formulaic in ensuring risk minimisation and cost-effectiveness in service delivery rather than addressing individual client needs.<sup>85</sup> Michele Carey critiques cultural competence in universities as being reliant on a constructed Indigenous/ non-Indigenous binary and on an essentialised view of indigeneity. In so doing, cultural competence perpetuates that which it seeks to overcome; respect for Indigenous students in university settings.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.4 Space and Action

In *The Production of Space* Henri Lefebvre introduces the concept of social space, which is both a physical and social environment.<sup>87</sup> It is a social product, which is a tool of thought and of action, and produced through political, economic, cultural and social practices. Social space embodies social relationships, and is intrinsically characterised by systems of power. He describes a conceptual triad of three interacting dimensions of the production of social space; spatial practice or how spaces are used; representational space or how space is experienced through signs and symbols; and conceptualised space, or how space is conceived by planners.<sup>88</sup> Lefebvre distinguishes between two types of social space: abstract space and differentiated space. Abstract space is a dominant form of space, a centre of wealth and power, it is institutional, where strategies are enacted. Abstract space tends toward homogeneity and has an assimilative capacity because, according to Lefebvre, space simultaneously constrains, and is constructed by, action. This assimilative capacity can be resisted on the grounds of the right

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<sup>83</sup> Universities Australia Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, "National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities," (Australia: IHEAC, 2011).

<sup>84</sup> David Paul, Shauna Hill, and Shaun Ewan, "Revealing the (in) Competency of "Cultural Competency" in Medical Education," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 8, no. 3 (2012).

<sup>85</sup> David Hollinsworth, "Forget Cultural Competence; Ask for an Autobiography," *Social Work Education* 32, no. 8 (2013).

<sup>86</sup> Michelle Carey, "The Limits of Cultural Competence: An Indigenous Studies Perspective," *Higher Education Research & Development* 34, no. 5 (2015).

<sup>87</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-9.

to be different through the creation of differentiated spaces. This right can only be achieved through practical action and struggle to be different, to create differentiated spaces in contrast to the abstract space. Creation of differentiated spaces, “a space that is other”<sup>89</sup>, must go beyond signs, images and symbols to creative actions. Construction of this space is not systematic; rather it is constructed through the everyday. Spaces are thus created through action, and in turn constrain what actions are acceptable.

Sarah Ahmed builds on Lefebvre’s idea about how space restricts action.<sup>90</sup> She links actions to how bodies occupy space, positing that not only does space restrict the action of certain bodies, but that the action of bodies will also shape how bodies occupy space.

So, yes, we can remember that some spaces are already occupied. They even take the shape of the bodies that occupy them. Bodies also take the shape of the spaces they occupy and of the work they do. And yet sometimes we reach what is not expected. A space, however occupied, is taken up by somebody else. When bodies take up spaces that they were not intended to inhabit, something other than the reproduction of the facts of the matter happens.<sup>91</sup>

She asserts that institutions become racialised spaces for white bodies, and in which bodies which are Other become disorientated. She uses Said to discuss how whiteness is reproduced in contrast to bodies that do not possess whiteness are considered out of place, strange and to not belong.

Michele de Certeau takes up the theme of everyday action in his work titled *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which he dedicates to “the ordinary man.”<sup>92</sup> He suggests that spaces are created using tactics which are enacted in everyday life. This is in contrast to the use of strategies that manage, produce and impose on places over which an actor has power. In order to survive, relatively powerless individuals and groups use tactics to manipulate and divert spaces. Tactics are creative and surprising forms of everyday resistance.<sup>93</sup>

Most relevant to this thesis, Indigenous educator and academic Pat Dudgeon and John Fielder have applied de Certeau’s concepts of space and tactics to Indigenous academics opening up spaces for Indigenous studies in Australian universities.<sup>94</sup> They specifically looked at the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>90</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>92</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), vi.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 34-40.

<sup>94</sup> Pat Dudgeon and John Fielder, "Third Spaces within Tertiary Places: Indigenous Australian Studies," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 16, no. 5 (2006).

Indigenous Australian Cultural Studies program at Curtin University of Technology in Western Australia. The aim of the program is to learn about Indigenous culture within the academy. This is done not only innovative curriculum but through tactics of actively enacting principles of integrating diverse living cultural knowledge into educational experience. This includes shared learning through listening, validating and engaging with each other's life stories; bringing the local Indigenous community into the classroom through representation and participation in course delivery; and privileging Indigenous Australian knowledge. Dudgeon and Fielder thus show that everyday processes and actions, not only rhetoric, create space of intercultural learning in Indigenous studies.

Aboriginal academic Bronwyn Fredericks draws upon the work of Lefebvre and de Certeau in her research into Indigenous spaces in Australian cities.<sup>95</sup> Recognising that spaces are not neutral and are inherently political, she contends that symbols of place and space in urban areas can marginalise and exclude, or conversely engage and include Indigenous people. Fredericks explains that in the cities of Melbourne and Brisbane signs symbols of place such as statues, building names, signs, and images reinforce settler colonial notions of Australian identity and citizenship to the exclusion of Indigenous people. However, in these two cities Indigenous people have been reclaiming space through use of signs, symbols and representations within organisations and sites of belonging, attachment and identity.

Fredericks also analyses the role of space for Indigenous women accessing health services in the city of Rockhampton in the state of Queensland.<sup>96</sup> She found Indigenous women's willingness to access health services depended on whether the space was inclusive. Indigenous women perceived inclusiveness in seeing Indigenous faces in clients and staff, through symbols in the form of posters or paintings with Indigenous imagery, easily accessible health information in form of targeted brochures and leaflets that use clear language. She observed that unconscious symbols of power were present in health spaces. For example, health professionals typically have larger chairs while clients have smaller ones.<sup>97</sup> She suggested that health services should consider symbols of power in layout and physical structure of space.

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<sup>95</sup> Bronwyn Fredericks, "'We Don't Leave Our Identities at the City Limits': Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Living in Urban Localities," *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>96</sup> Bronwyn L Fredericks, "There Is Nothing That 'Identifies Me to That Place': Aboriginal Women's Perceptions of Health Spaces and Places," *Cultural Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (2009).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.5 Relevance

My research adds to previous research into student experience by contextualising wellbeing, examining the role of space for Indigenous students' wellbeing. I aim to increase understanding of how Indigenous student wellbeing is conceptualised and brought into university spaces. Introducing the concept of wellbeing to research into Indigenous higher education can bridge the gap in current research, which focuses on either support or teaching.<sup>98</sup>

I will draw on the work of Grieves and Muller to inform the analysis of the interviews this thesis builds upon.<sup>99</sup> These two Indigenous researchers draw on Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in providing understanding of Indigenous wellbeing. They provide useful tools for answering the first and third research questions, which relate to how Indigenous students conceptualise and create space for wellbeing. A limitation of this theory is that it will not provide me with a tool to analyse the challenges of the university context to student wellbeing.

In answering the second research question, I will draw on Sara Ahmed's discussion of inhabiting spaces to understand some of the experiences of the students within the university institution. I will also use Robyn Williams' concept of cultural safety to address the experiences of students in the institutional spaces of the university. Cultural safety is important because it recognises the diversity of, and respect for, Indigenous identities.<sup>100</sup> This is particularly relevant to this research because the students are from diverse Indigenous backgrounds. Further, unlike the concept of cultural competence, cultural safety focuses on the needs of the students, not of the institution. It is thus closer to my research, which takes the perspective of the students rather than the university, highlighting students' voices rather than examining the challenges from an institutional perspective. Torres Strait Islander researcher Martin Nakata asserts that relying on the concept of cultural safety provides no lessons for student resilience and that it positions students as passive rather than active agents.<sup>101</sup> I agree that a limitation of this concept is that it does not explain how students can respond to lack of cultural safety.

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<sup>98</sup> Nakata, Nakata, and Chin, "Approaches to the Academic Preparation and Support of Australian Indigenous Students for Tertiary Studies."

<sup>99</sup> Grieves, "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities."; *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, the Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing*; Muller, *A Theory for Indigenous Australian Health and Human Service Work: Connecting Indigenous Knowledge and Practice*.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, "Cultural Safety—What Does It Mean for Our Work Practice?."

<sup>101</sup> Martin Nakata, "The Rights and Blights of the Politics in Indigenous Higher Education," *Anthropological Forum* 23, no. 3 (2013).

I will draw on the concepts of space and tactics put forward by the French sociologists Lefebvre and de Certeau because they allow me to address student action, filling the gap presented by Nakata. I will use these tools to answer my third research question on the role of Tjabal Centre as a differentiated space within the university. I will analyse how differentiated space allows Indigenous wellbeing to be enacted. I will also looking at the tactics that the students within this space are using to create discussions, change, and challenge the university space. I will not be analysing the role of the university as an abstract space.

There may be problem in bringing together Indigenous Australian philosophy and French sociology. These theorists are based in different, and potentially competing, epistemic and ontological backgrounds. An example of where inner tensions could arise is in understandings of place. Aileen Moreton-Robinson discusses how Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have different understandings of belonging, place, home and Country. She contends that for non-Indigenous Australians these concepts are based on Western ontologies, the premise of terra nullius and on the dispossession and occupation of Indigenous land. Whereas for Indigenous Australians these concepts are underpinned by an ontological relationship to the land which informs Indigenous identities, bodies and belonging.

Despite these difficulties, Indigenous researchers have brought together Western and Indigenous knowledge. For example, Indigenous researchers Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Bronwyn Fredericks, and Pat Dudgeon draw upon Henri Lefebvre or Michel de Certeau in understanding Indigenous spaces.<sup>102</sup> I likewise aim to bring together Western philosophical thought and Indigenous philosophy to address my research questions.

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<sup>102</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies : Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 50; Dudgeon and Fielder, "Third Spaces within Tertiary Places: Indigenous Australian Studies."; Fredericks, "'We Don't Leave Our Identities at the City Limits': Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Living in Urban Localities."; Fredericks, "There Is Nothing That 'Identifies Me to That Place': Aboriginal Women's Perceptions of Health Spaces and Places."



## 4 Wellbeing

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In this chapter I will address how the students conceptualise and articulate wellbeing. I will present my research findings and argue that a sense of connectedness and belonging are central to Indigenous student wellbeing and plays out in different ways for the students. This chapter is made up of subsections relating to interrelated aspects of wellbeing to understand the Indigenous students' conception of wellbeing. In my conversations with the students we discussed how they look after themselves and what their needs are for strengthening their wellbeing as individuals. When I introduced the topic of wellbeing during the interviews, the students responded by connecting their sense of wellbeing to others and the importance of family, community and belonging. I will draw on Vicki Grieves' research in defining Indigenous wellbeing, with particular reference to intangible cultural heritage factors. I will finish with a discussion about Indigenous wellbeing and spirituality, drawing on Grieves and Muller.<sup>103</sup>

### 4.1 Family

Connection with family is one of the central intangible cultural heritage elements of wellbeing that Vicki Grieves discusses. It includes immediate family as well as extended family. Family was included in the elements of wellbeing such as knowing family history, and being with family. It was seen as particularly important for participants who grew up away from their natural family and were part of the Stolen Generations. For this group growing up away from family had a detrimental effect on their wellbeing due to not having that sense of connection to family, feeling excluded and not belonging.<sup>104</sup>

The four women I spoke to mentioned that proximity to family affected their decision to study at ANU. For three of them, staying in Canberra to study was important in order to be close to family. The fourth student delayed commencing study at ANU until she was older and felt able to move away from family.

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<sup>103</sup> Grieves, "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities."; Muller, *A Theory for Indigenous Australian Health and Human Service Work: Connecting Indigenous Knowledge and Practice*.

<sup>104</sup> Grieves, "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities," 49-50.

All of the students mentioned the important role of family in supporting their wellbeing. When asked what they do to strengthen their wellbeing most of the students mentioned spending time with or speaking with their family. When talking about the people who are important for her wellbeing, Sarah discussed talking to family as support system when she is struggling.

I always keep in touch with my family regularly. It makes me miss them but also helps me to keep going and knowing that I can call them and they've got time to listen and be there for me even though it's a bit extended, it's a long way.

The intangible cultural heritage factor of spending time with family and extended family is important for wellbeing because it provides a sense of support, belonging, and contentment. Two of the students spoke to me about how their role in their family affected wellbeing. Emily said that her role in the family is important to her but can be source of stress.

I tend to be the peacekeeper in the family so everybody comes to me with their problems and I'm the one who has to try and sort it out and work things through, conflicts in the family.

Jessica played a similar role in her family in counselling family members. She spoke about the importance of maintaining wellbeing and not being overwhelmed in supporting her family.

Being able to give to family and friends and knowing your place in family was another intangible aspect of wellbeing mentioned by Grieves. This is not about giving materially but as an expression of cultural values, of being able to express love and support.<sup>105</sup> It was mentioned in Grieves' work that participants recognised that giving to others also means not allowing yourself to be used.<sup>106</sup> This helps us to understand Emily and

Emily also mentioned how being a university student has negatively affected her wellbeing because it changed the family dynamic.

With my family it's been a little bit difficult because as I said, I'm the first person to go to university, some of my family members kind of think that I'm almost making myself be better than them and trying to one up them in one sense.

Lorrain Muller discusses how taking formal, mainstream education can be perceived as weakening one's connection to people and community. She describes a phenomenon of Indigenous people bringing someone down when they feel that person is perceived to be at risk

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 54.

of becoming lost to the community.<sup>107</sup> This phenomenon may be in play in the changing dynamic in Emily's family. Overall family is an important element for the wellbeing of the students I spoke with. It is interrelated with other aspects of wellbeing such as community, and place and Country.

## 4.2 Community

Community is an important element of wellbeing for Indigenous students at ANU. Four of the students told me that without the community at the Tjabal Centre they would have left ANU. Community was important for the students not only in terms of responding to a negative sense of wellbeing but also as a way that being at university has impacted on their wellbeing. When I asked Emily what was important for her wellbeing she responded:

Having a supportive community definitely affects my wellbeing. If I don't have the support of people around me then I think it would be very difficult to be able to focus on my studies and be healthy mentally.

Sarah likewise told me about how the Tjabal community support each other like a family, they do not only study together and support each other academically but also socially. She told me that it is good for her wellbeing to have someone to joke around with and take breaks from study with. Thomas mentioned that the Tjabal Centre impact on how he maintains his wellbeing and a positive attitude:

[...] the ways that happens is through the friendships that I've made at Tjabal. The Tjabal Centre has played a big role for me still being here. Being able to go to Tjabal, study there, hang out with all these people, have a chat to the staff there.

Olivia told me that she will stay in the Tjabal Centre in the evenings and will take a break from studying and hang out with friends or watch a movie. The students support each other's wellbeing by encouraging each other to take time off and look after themselves.

The community at the Tjabal Centre includes the students and staff who work there. All of the students mentioned to me how beneficial it has been to talk to the Aunties or other staff members at the Tjabal Centre. When they are having a difficult time, either academically or outside of university, they know they have people to turn to for advice or to listen. When I asked Jessica how Tjabal supports wellbeing she mentioned that it was important for community.

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<sup>107</sup> Muller, *A Theory for Indigenous Australian Health and Human Service Work: Connecting Indigenous Knowledge and Practice*, 190-93.

Tjabal provides that place for interaction, for community development and through having events, we celebrate together, we mourn together. Not feeling alone on our journeys is so helpful. Having people here who inspire, and help you aspire, things that never crossed your mind before.

Supporting each other in their journey not only about giving support, listening, having a good time, but also being role models for each other. This is important because some of the students are the first in their family to attend university. Emily mentioned how she struggled with this and how it affected her enjoyment of university.

The part I didn't enjoy quite so much is – something I found quite difficult is because I'm the first person to go to university in my family, I kind of didn't really know what was expected of me and I didn't have a lot of the support from my family just because they didn't go like other people. You know talking to some of the other people in my degree that they could ask their parents to look over their assessment pieces or ask siblings about how to do certain assessment pieces because they've either been there before or they have a bit of an idea of what's expected.

Jack is also the first in his family, he explains his experience:

I feel like one thing I struggled with is not having anyone in my family do university. So for me that's been another thing as well, having role models who are educated I feel like, if I had that maybe I would have – I wouldn't say found it easier, but maybe found it sooner or things would have been different anyway.

Jessica told me how important it was to have and be a role model to emulate. When she was younger she never thought studying at ANU would be possible for her. Now she can be a role model and show younger people that it is possible. University study has had a positive impact on her wellbeing because she feels that she is “planting seeds” for her younger family members and being a role model.

Community was not an explicit factor of wellbeing in Grieves' analysis. Community was an underlying presence throughout and connected to other factors. For instance, it is interrelated with spirituality and feeling connected, to family, and to knowing about rights as an Indigenous person, and to learning. Community can thus include the community outside of the ANU, extended family, it can include more local communities, and the broader Indigenous Australian community, and this theme will recur in the thesis.

### 4.3 Place

The students mentioned that certain places were part of wellbeing. These places were Country and the Tjabal Centre. Connection to Country was identified by half the students as an element

of wellbeing. During my conversation with Jack, he elaborated on why Country was important for his wellbeing.

[...] connectedness to Country is big for me. I feel if I want to stay healthy and feel good about myself that being able to go home, and walk on the beach and physically walk in the sand or on red dirt and sleep at night under the stars without a tent or anything like that. That is what motivates me and keeps me going as well. [...] Canberra is not my Country and I see a lot of concrete where I am.

When telling me a story of what wellbeing meant to her, Jessica mentioned that although she grew up away from Country, she maintained a connection thanks to her parents.

They took us back to Country as often as they could which was great. I don't think we would have survived or we would be where we were if we didn't do that.

Sarah mentioned the difficulty of living away from home and that when struggling she regularly returns home during university breaks. Returning to a place and environment that she is familiar with and where family is based is important for her wellbeing.

Place and Country are elements of wellbeing in forming a sense of connection and belonging for Indigenous people.<sup>108</sup> Relationship to land and Country is important for identity, connection and relatedness to people.

Olivia has had a different experience in relation to Country. She has never been back to her peoples' Country. She has felt a sense of insecurity about her own identity as Indigenous and hence her sense of wellbeing.

It pisses me off still that I'm aware of that but I'm still struggling, I've still got at the back of my head that I need to go home, I need to have some sort of experience which I want to have. I get angry with myself a lot because I can't help but feel like I need to go home. At the same time is that coming from white people telling me that I'm not black until I've had an experience which is out bush or some shit. I've talked to so many people about this saying that it doesn't mean anything, you're Indigenous and you identify as Indigenous and you have this strong support around you and is that not enough or something? I don't know, it's a funny thing, being so aware of where it's all coming from, but it still gets to me.

It has been a struggle for her trying to balance the expectations that she feels comes from an external source with the expectations that she has of herself. It is clear that she has a connection to Country because she refers to it as home but that her connection is more ambiguous. This

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<sup>108</sup> Grieves, "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities,"

must impact on sense of belonging to be away from the place she considers to be home and studying in a faraway place. I will return to these experiences of Olivia in chapter 5.

When working with the Redfern focus group, Grieves was surprised that the factors visiting land and special places and living on land with community did not rank higher in importance for wellbeing. The focus group she worked with told her that this was because they were an urban based group so they were not often able to enact wellbeing in this way, although if they had the opportunity to be on Country it would add to their wellbeing. This implies that the elements of wellbeing are dependent on context. Grieves suggests that accepting where you are now can also contribute to wellbeing.<sup>109</sup> This may similarly be a reason why Country was not mentioned by some of the students with whom I spoke.

All of the students mentioned the Tjabal Centre as a place which is important for their wellbeing. Emily referred to the Tjabal Centre this when I asked about what the most important things are for her wellbeing.

And I suppose the other thing is probably kind of a location to be able to be and knowing that location there's always a place that I can feel comfortable. Even if there's no people there, that's a place that I can continually return to and that's a safe place, and have a bit of a connection and a bit of a meaning as well.

Sarah relates the element place to other aspects of wellbeing such as community and belonging. Grieves explains the importance of being in Indigenous cultural spaces for experiencing community and connection. She relates this to the factor of spirituality in wellbeing. The role of place in wellbeing, whether it is Country, another idea of home, or the Tjabal Centre, is closely linked with family, community, and belonging. I will be discussing what it means to be a safe place and how Tjabal Centre is a space for Indigenous student wellbeing in chapter 6.

#### 4.4 Learning

Learning is a central element of how the students articulated wellbeing. I use the term learning rather than education to emphasise that it encompasses informal and formal education. The informal aspect of learning was mentioned explicitly by one student I spoke with. When talking to me about what wellbeing means to her, Jessica pointed to learning as one of the most important aspects.

I think if we're dealing with truth then we're moving forward and progressing. I feel like a lot of people say "I know" too much and that's part of having that front, they want to be seen to be an expert on a topic. I really admire and

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<sup>109</sup> Grieves, "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities," 46.

appreciate people who acknowledge they're on a journey of learning and it's a life-long one. I feel like when you are uncomfortable, you're learning.

Jessica spoke about how wellbeing does not mean avoiding discomfort. Rather, wellbeing comes from the process of learning from times of struggle and understanding how the world works and ones' place in it. Other students implicitly mentioned informal learning in terms of speaking with the Aunties at the Tjabal Centre, what wellbeing means to them, how to look after themselves and building a support system while at university. Jack mentioned how his capacity for learning was an asset for his wellbeing.

I went out and did my research and looked for support, I was very proactive about it and I know that some people aren't always like that. If I wasn't so inquisitive I think that some things might be missed by other people.

Emily also mentioned this process of learning how to make her own support system.

You have to seek out these support systems rather than it being kind of thrust onto you in a sense or really been shown to you that it is available [...]

Grieves explains the role of informal education as an ongoing process of leaning through life experiences and shared experiences with others around you and learning the values and morals of Indigenous culture. Education could also be considered an intangible cultural heritage factor.<sup>110</sup> This cultural aspect of learning was not mentioned by the students perhaps because it is embodied, not explicitly taught and I will discuss it in chapter 6.

Undertaking formal education has contributed to the sense of wellbeing through educational programs, managing the life at a campus and taking classes. It has given them a sense of pride and achievement, and has helped to build their confidence. For example, when I asked Thomas how being a university student contributed to his sense of wellbeing, he told me about the sense of pride he had in regards to the grades he received in his coursework. Olivia on the other hand did not talk to me about grades but expressed enjoyment in the content of what she was learning. Emily's response was:

I suppose it would be the gaining of a lot of knowledge and being able to write in a more succinct way and being able to express myself is probably really positively impacted on me, making me more of a confident person.

For Emily, it was not only how university study made her feel but what she could gain in terms of skills. Most of the students were motivated to pursue higher education in order to contribute in some way to family or community. Emily mentioned that she felt a calling to help other

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 45-6, 60.

Indigenous Australians and that motivated her in her chosen field. She also said that studying at ANU has impacted positively on her wellbeing.

It makes me feel like I'm part of something bigger and that feels quite important to me to feel like I'm actually hoping to be able to make an impact on the community and on the world in some way, I found that really positive and kind of uplifting in a sense as well.

Jessica felt she was given a purpose to pursue education because she saw that she had access to knowledge that others did not and that she had a role in passing on that knowledge to her family and broader community. During my conversation with Jack we spoke a lot about his studies and ambitions. He also mentioned that learning was an important factor for his wellbeing as well.

I'm at university to not only help myself but I do want to help Indigenous Australians as well [...] my university experience of wellbeing is helping, not only myself, but why I'm here is so I can help other people.

Jack told me that he felt that the government and health systems had failed him and his family and he was motivated to attend ANU to learn how to change the system. Thus, studying at ANU is not only about improving individual opportunities but also about being able to contribute to family and community. Individual learning and wellbeing is thus linked to community wellbeing.

Education was an important factor for wellbeing in Grieves' research. Wellbeing is improved by both formal education and informal education from elders. Being educated means learning both Western and Indigenous knowledge which is important for survival and being able to pass on learning to the next generation. Education adds to wellbeing by allowing individual fulfilment and understand as well as being able to operate in society and earn a living.<sup>111</sup> Although recognising formal education, Grieves focused on informal rather than formal education but my results also highlight formal education. This is to be expected because the context of this research is a formal educational institution.

#### 4.5 Physical and Mental Health

Physical and mental health were important elements for wellbeing for the students. Four out of the six students mentioned that physical exercise was important for their wellbeing. Other than

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 60.



talking to someone, it was the most common piece of advice they would give to a friend who was struggling. Olivia mentioned why exercise was so important for her wellbeing.

Exercise is a pretty big one, running is a space that I can ignore all that external crap and keep going until I literally feel like I'm going to pass out or something.

Along with the other three students who mentioned exercise, Olivia linked physical and mental health. Other students mentioned this when discussing that knowing yourself is important for wellbeing. When asked what advice she would give to a friend who was experiencing poor wellbeing Sarah suggested:

Know what you want and what helps you to have that sense of wellbeing. Make sure you make time for those things, whatever they are. We can all get so busy, but you have to remember we can't keep pushing ourselves over the limit because our body and mind can't keep up.

Jack expressed a similar view when I asked about what was important for his wellbeing.

[...] I think for me it's having insight into the way I react to situations. I appreciate a balanced lifestyle, sport, a good social network, and also talking to family.

The students also identified having a positive outlook as being important for maintaining wellbeing. Conversely, stress and negativity were most commonly given as reason for poor wellbeing. Thomas mentioned both sides of this aspect of mental health.

I guess feeling positive wellbeing is probably mainly mental health for me, being positive in your head. [...] Stress is a big one that will put me in a bit of a run. Stress, but also feeling like I don't know what I am doing.

He also told me that he found ANU to be a competitive and pressure filled place and he was expected to put in more work than he had anticipated. Sarah also mentioned that her outlook was important.

It goes back to me trying to be positive, making the most of the little things. [...] just being appreciative for the stuff that other people do for you as well. Not being afraid to ask for help when it's offered.

Jessica told me about how being at university she has learned the value of persistence and of having a positive attitude. She told me about how it was important for her to not feel resentment when she is experiencing difficult times at university. I will return to this discussion with Jessica in the next chapter.

Physical fitness was mentioned in Greives' research as being important for wellbeing. It includes having a more active lifestyle, good nutrition, and unrestricted mobility. Although mental health was not included in Grieves' indicators of wellbeing, it was mentioned by participants in her research as linked to physical fitness.<sup>112</sup> Physical fitness is an extension of mental, emotional, and spiritual fitness and so these factors for wellbeing are interrelated.

#### 4.6 Standard of Living

Standard of living was not included in Vicki Grieves' initial survey of wellbeing factors but was identified as being important. Financial stability, or the lack of, had an impact on the wellbeing of three of the students. For Emily, being financially unstable and living pay-check to pay-check created stress for herself and her family. She also spoke about how it affected her at university:

That puts a lot of pressure especially on the way that we appear to other people that we may not- especially to people at uni who have more money than what we do- that we can appear not as well off or can't present ourselves as well as everybody else.

Emily's experience demonstrates that lack of money made her feel separate from other students at the ANU.

For Jessica, being a student provided a path to greater financial stability. Although she does not see herself as ambitious, she believed that she could apply for higher level jobs, provide financial stability for her family. Learning financial literacy has also had a positive impact on Jessica's wellbeing in providing greater stability and certainty in her life as she could control her debt. She used this as an example of what positive wellbeing means to her, by leaning about money she was able to take a positive attitude and take control over her financial situation and improve her wellbeing.

Jack pointed out how financial struggles impacted on other areas of his life at university.

If you can't afford it, you've got to work; and if you've got to work, how do you study?

His question clearly demonstrates the interconnected nature of wellbeing, how when one aspect is being challenged it will have ongoing effects to other elements of wellbeing.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 47.

Jack and Thomas both mentioned that housing was important for his wellbeing. It was important for both of them to be living in a social place. Jack mentioned feeling isolated living in one of the student residences and that his wellbeing improved when he moved to somewhere more social. Thomas told me that being able to socialise with his housemates was important for his wellbeing. Grieves mentions that a better place to live is important for wellbeing. For the individuals involved in her study this involved living in a place that is comfortable, with family or friends and a place of being at ease.<sup>113</sup> These stories show that the tangible aspects of wellbeing such as standard of living is important. They also show that there is diversity in terms of which particular tangible aspects are important for Indigenous students at ANU.

#### 4.7 Spirituality, Connectedness, Belonging

Vicki Grieves draws on spirituality to describe Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing. She describes spirituality is a way of being and of feeling. Spirituality was identified by the Redfern working group as the most important factor for wellbeing. Grieves describes spirituality as:

[...] a feeling, with a base in connectedness to the past, ancestors, and the values that they represent, for example, respect for elders, a moral/ethical path. It is about being in an Aboriginal cultural space, experiencing community and connectedness with land and nature including proper nutrition and shelter. Feeling good about oneself, proud of being an Aboriginal person. It is a state of being that includes knowledge, calmness, acceptance and tolerance, balance and focus, inner strength, cleansing and inner peace, feeling whole, an understanding of cultural roots and 'deep wellbeing'.<sup>114</sup>

In my conversations with the students only one explicitly spoke to me about spirituality. When I asked Sarah at the end of the interview if there was anything she would like to share with me, she told me that spirituality was important for Indigenous wellbeing in general. She explained that it was important for Indigenous people to be able to take time off to return to Country and participate in ceremony. This is important for knowing your place and who you are.

It may be that spirituality is not important for the students I spoke with. Alternatively, it could be that my questions did not prompt such a response. The fact that Sarah brought up the issue in response to my open question suggests this may be the case. It could have also have been due to the method of using skype which is more impersonal than face-to-face.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 61-2.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 52.

Another reason why the students did not mention spirituality could be because it is difficult to articulate and is not something that is necessarily thought about.<sup>115</sup> Grieves discussed how she knew that the intangible cultural heritage factors were valued by Indigenous people.

I had a sense of these values existing, having known many of the group individually for some time, living and mixing with urban Aboriginal people for the last eight months or so, and subscribing to these values myself over my lifetime. However, these cultural values are not often articulated by individuals, they are just 'lived' rather than be thought about or discussed; they are not often expressed in the concentrated and incontrovertible form that they appear in the focus group results.<sup>116</sup>

Similarly this is likely why the students did not discuss a sense of spirituality with me. However, we did talk about how wellbeing was something they lived. In doing so, the themes of connection and belonging were clearly lived experiences of the students and central to their wellbeing. When I asked the students about the elements for maintaining wellbeing, the concepts of connection and belonging were often given. Sarah already had a clear idea of how connection related to her wellbeing.

I think general wellbeing is just for me, maybe like a feeling, a sense of belonging and just generally feeling ok and happy with how everything is going and feeling supported if things aren't going that great. Whether it be an activity that you do or someone that you can talk to. I think it is place and person based depending on the situation.

The students identified a number people and places which were important for wellbeing. Family, community, Country and the Tjabal Centre all provide a sense of belonging and connection for the students. These three sources were identified by the students in terms of their central role in enacting wellbeing and conversely how wellbeing may suffer when belonging and connectedness are under pressure.

The elements for connectedness and belonging were not exactly the same for all the students. As mentioned earlier, connection to Country was a strong element of Jack's sense of wellbeing and belonging. For Olivia, her connection to family and urban-based Indigenous community was important for giving her a strong sense of identity and belonging. Emily spoke to me about the issue of connection to Country when introducing herself. She spoke about her identity and told me some of her family's story.

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<sup>115</sup> Grieves, *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, the Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing*.

<sup>116</sup> Grieves, "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities," 66.

I am a [clan name] woman but my great great-grandmother was part of the stolen generation so it's very difficult to try and reconnect sometimes with our culture and trying to find out our history and trying to reconnect with our family which my great aunty and uncles have been trying to do. So that's been a challenge over the last couple of years, trying to find out where we're from and trying to get that connection back to land.

One of the intangible cultural heritage factors discussed by the Redfern group is knowing about your peoples' history and culture. Grieves explains the importance of this for enhancing identity, providing a sense of belonging and connectedness to people and land. It allows for empowerment and living a positive life physically, emotionally, spiritually, and economically. In her research four participants identified the particular impact on wellbeing of government policy of removing children from their families. Such policies impact on wellbeing through loss of connection to family, and feelings of exclusion and lack of acceptance and belonging.<sup>117</sup>

Emily's introduction reflected this factor, although Emily was not specifically speaking about this in terms of wellbeing. She demonstrated not only her pride in her identity but also the intergenerational impact of child removal policies. Knowing family history was not mentioned by any other students, although this does not mean it is not important. It could be that the students considered it separate from their wellbeing as university students and did not feel it was important within the university context.

## 4.8 Chapter Summary

It's all interrelated and connected, like a spider web.

This is how Jack described what wellbeing means to him. This quote exemplifies the findings of my research. The localised articulations of wellbeing include intangible and tangible elements. These are; family, community, place, learning, physical and mental health, and standard of living. The elements for wellbeing are interconnected to each other and built upon a foundation of belonging and connectedness. Belonging is articulated in different ways, through connection to place, to family, and to community.

Some of the factors mentioned in Vicki Grieves' research were not mentioned by the Indigenous students at ANU. For instance, knowing interfamily relations and kinship, knowing about your peoples' history and culture, and being able to share, were not mentioned by any of the students. This could be because the factors for wellbeing are dependent on the situation.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

Greives use of Indigenous spirituality and intangible cultural heritage to understand wellbeing is useful in examining how university students conceptualise their wellbeing. However, it does not help to understand the diversity between Indigenous students in terms of their experiences of wellbeing. Some of the students' experiences might be in similar to non-Indigenous students, whilst others would be similar to Indigenous people who are not university students. For example the impact on wellbeing related to gender, sexuality, socioeconomic background, and being locally and urban based compared with having moved for university or coming from rural or remote areas. The strength of using concepts of intangible cultural heritage and spirituality in this research has been to illustrate the importance of connection and belonging to Indigenous student wellbeing and I will return to these themes throughout the thesis.

## 5 Wellbeing in University Spaces

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We're a part of these systems that were built without us in mind.

Jessica

In this chapter I will describe the impact of institutional arrangements of university spaces on Indigenous student wellbeing. First, I will give an overview of students' academic life, looking at how they are supported academically at ANU. Second, I will use Robyn Williams and Maryann Bin-Sallik's concept of cultural safety to discuss the interrelated topics of content, Indigenous perspectives, and Indigenous representation within courses.<sup>118</sup> Third, I will describe how students relate to the health services available on campus. Fourth, I will look at the social life of the students on campus and analyse their experiences of exclusion with reference to Sarah Ahmed's discussion of occupied and racialised space.<sup>119</sup>

### 5.1 Academic life

Outside of classes, the Tjabal Centre is the foundation for the academic life of the students. The students use the facilities at the Tjabal Centre daily which includes a kitchen, room with study desks, conference room and a computer laboratory. The Tjabal Centre also puts students in touch with assistance through scholarships and tutoring. Tutoring is provided as part of the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme – Tertiary Tuition (ITAS) program. ITAS is funded by the federal government and provides up to two hours per week per course for undergraduate students.<sup>120</sup> Apart from ITAS, students have also used the academic skills and learning centre to support their writing, and lecturers' office hours, although not many used the library because it is busy and difficult to find a desk.

Sarah's use of the Tjabal Centre is typical of the students I spoke with.

I practically live there, I find the centre itself a safe place. So if I'm not in class or tutorials I go there to study and use the computers. I go there after hours to work on assignments because I find that I work better there than in my room. I've applied for scholarships that have been on offer through Tjabal

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<sup>118</sup> Bin-Sallik, "Cultural Safety: Let's Name It!."; Williams, "Cultural Safety—What Does It Mean for Our Work Practice?."

<sup>119</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*.

<sup>120</sup> Larissa Behrendt et al., "Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Final Report," (2012).

and ANU in general. They've been really good with flagging opportunities with internships or scholarships through the email system

Staff at the Tjabal Centre also act as advocates for the students when they are struggling. For Jack and Olivia this has meant providing a letter of support to lecturers to support assessment extensions. This has taken the form of a letter of support for some of the students if struggling: having a member of staff to advocate for them to lecturers. Olivia mentioned that she is grateful to receive the support but feels that lecturers should take her struggles seriously without having to turn to the Tjabal Centre as a third party. The Tjabal Centre is thus a space in which students feel safe and supported in her learning in contrast to outside spaces. I will expand on this in chapter 6.

### 5.1.1 Cultural Safety

Maryann Bin-Sallik describes cultural safety in universities to include course content, Indigenous perspectives, and representation.<sup>121</sup> Course content includes the choice of topics, readings, lectures and tutorials. Indigenous perspectives are the voices of Indigenous people whether it be readings written by Indigenous people, Indigenous students in tutorials, and Indigenous lecturers and tutors. Indigenous representation relates to how Indigenous people are represented by the course, not only in terms of what topics are present, but also what is left out of course content. It also relates to perspectives and whether Indigenous people are representing themselves or being represented, or the number of Indigenous students in the class.

Course content was given as the most enjoyable thing about university for the students. Four of them told me that they enjoyed when they were learning about issues that were relevant to them or their communities. For example Jessica told me:

The things I enjoy about my course are learning things that I can relate to. [...] It's difficult, we have to learn the game to play it. What I like about my courses is that I'm learning how to play that game.

Being able to learn how things operate in her chosen field was enjoyable for Jessica because she felt she was able to use what she has learned to improve things for her community. Olivia said that it was important for her that she hear the perspectives of Indigenous people within the content.

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<sup>121</sup> Bin-Sallik, "Cultural Safety: Let's Name It!."



[...] I'm taking courses with CAEPR [Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research] that's been awesome and they're great people and they fly people in from communities so we get exposed to community based projects.

It was important for students enjoyment to not only include Indigenous relevant content but also to have Indigenous lecturers and perspectives represented in courses. Sarah and Emily found that there was sufficient Indigenous related content in their courses but three of the students were concerned about the limited inclusion of topics relevant to Indigenous people. Olivia and Thomas expressed disappointment with the lack of relevant content in classes outside of Indigenous studies. Jack would also like to be able to focus more on relevant topics in assessment items.

I don't enjoy that I can't be as flexible as I want in my studies. For example if I get a question that is broad, sometimes it might not be specific to what I want to do. Topics I'm doing now I can't relate to having an Indigenous aspect towards it. Which I do struggle with sometimes, the relevance of it all. Obviously I see relevance in the assessment but for me it would make so much more sense to go into the Indigenous side of things, particularly where there is not so much research. So that is one thing I don't like in an undergraduate degree is not being able to specialise from an early point. And I feel like it would still meet the required outcomes of the degree.

Even when the course itself did not focus on Indigenous related topics, Jack would like the option to focus on this area. Within his coursework he can perceive how the topic could be relevant to Indigenous people but is unable to focus on it. Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies are not being recognised within course design providing a contribution to the area of study. This relates back to understanding Indigenous student wellbeing, in which learning is important to be able to contribute to communities and/or Indigenous Australia broadly.

This is also why the course content the students enjoyed most was where they could see Indigenous perspectives and the relevance of the content to their goals of being at university. In my conversations with the students it became clear that there was a problem of a lack of cultural safety for some of the students. Jessica told me about how she struggled being the only person providing an Indigenous perspective in classes when she first became a university student.

I was very resentful in the beginning and I remember going to tutorials and being the only one providing an Indigenous perspective and how isolated I felt. I'm no activist or anything but I felt I had to be. I was certainly seen that way just for pointing out something quite basic, really basic knowledge for us but really confronting for others. [...] I remember being really agitated and being really angry and frustrated, it would play on my mind for weeks and

weeks. I would get anxious walking to my tutorials wondering what I would encounter next.

Jessica makes a clear link about how a lack of Indigenous perspectives within her courses, and being the only Indigenous student had an impact on her mental health and her wellbeing. Olivia has a similar view which she expressed when I asked what she did not enjoy about studying at ANU. She mentioned that in one of her anthropology courses, the content focused mostly on remote living Indigenous people and ignored urban based Indigenous people, and represented Indigenous peoples and culture as primitive. She also found that people use outdated terminology, and struggle to recognise her as an Indigenous person.

Maybe when you take courses and you say that you're Indigenous and people tell you that you don't look Indigenous and your like "okay you tell them where you're from but I've never been back to [place] and they get this funny look on their faces like "you've never been home before, you've been in [city] all your life and you don't look Black" but you are. I think that as much as I try to ignore that, it's something that sticks with me.

This experience demonstrates how Indigenous identities may not be recognised within classes and can have a detrimental impact on Indigenous students. The ANU Indigenous Twitter account has tweeted anonymous quotes from a meeting of *Nothing About Us, Without Us* which support Jessica and Olivia's experiences. The following quotes reflect some of these concerns:<sup>122</sup>

I don't want people to look at me like I'm the way they teach students here we are like... I work and make a living.

The materials concerned me, the perceptions they might build up that Aboriginal people... Drugs, alcohol, remote...

I want to hear and see contemporary Indigenous voices, not the past, from non Indigenous people all the time.

We should be seen as experts on ourselves. Indigenous Studies and Anthropology at ANU needs Indigenous lecturers full time.

This data speaks to the students' concern on the lack of Indigenous perspectives and misrepresentation of Indigenous people within courses at ANU. The students must thus confront images of Othering in university spaces which are based on stereotypical ideas of the authenticity of Indigenous people.

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<sup>122</sup> ANU Indigenous, Twitter post, September 7 2016, Accessed September 12, 2016  
[https://twitter.com/ANU\\_Indigenous](https://twitter.com/ANU_Indigenous)

Maryann Bin-Sallik applies the concept of cultural safety specifically to tertiary education.

Indigenous students have the added stress of trying to cope with discrimination and racism by teachers and the institutional racism inherent within their host institutions. The derogatory representations and misrepresentations of Indigenous Australians in the classrooms, as well as in the literature, exacerbates this.<sup>123</sup>

She also points out that incorrect, derogatory or dated terminology should not be used to refer to Indigenous people in courses. She suggests that to improve the cultural safety of universities, courses should include Indigenous perspectives, on cultural, historical and contemporary issues. The experiences of some of the students also reflects what Robyn Williams describes as unsafe cultural practice because there is a challenge or denial of a person's identity and because it essentialises Indigenous people.<sup>124</sup> Olivia puts it succinctly, saying that until universities begin "acknowledging the diversity of us, I think there is still going to be a lot of negativity in terms of wellbeing in universities." Essentialising representations of Indigenous people in courses also impacts on the social life of the Indigenous students and I will discuss this further in section 5.3.1.

Robyn Williams includes respect for culture, knowledge and experiences of Indigenous people within the concept of cultural safety.<sup>125</sup> I asked the students if they felt that their knowledge, experiences, identity are valued in their chosen area of study and I received varying responses. Thomas told me of a time when the class was discussing constitutional recognition of Indigenous people which is an ongoing debate in Australia.

It was actually really easy because I thought I was the only Aboriginal person in the room and I don't think anyone really knew I was Aboriginal because it's not like I go around with an Aboriginal flag waving everywhere. [...] they all turned at me and they were like "you're Aboriginal?" and then when that clicked in their brain that I was Aboriginal, they were like "oh, let's listen to him, see what he has to say". Which was really cool cos I felt people were able to put a face to that whole Aboriginal constitutional recognition kind of thing that was good.

He clearly saw it as a positive thing that at least he was there to present his perspective on the topic as an Indigenous person. Jessica was ambivalent in response to the question:

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<sup>123</sup> Bin-Sallik, "Cultural Safety: Let's Name It!," 25.

<sup>124</sup> Williams, "Cultural Safety—What Does It Mean for Our Work Practice?."

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

It's hard to say actually, I've never been given specific feedback about that. I get the feeling that alternate views or perspectives are appreciated but I'm not sure they're valued, I can't say that no.

Jack's response indicated a feeling of value that was internal rather than clearly coming from external sources.

I think they are valued, whether or not I can overtly feel that now, I've come to realise that there is perhaps a lot that I can contribute to this area.

Emily told me that Indigenous affairs is not included in many of her courses.

For me I suppose it doesn't come up as much and when it does it's quite respected.

Sarah had a similar experience, saying that she felt that her knowledge, experiences, and identity as an Indigenous women felt valued. In her courses Indigenous perspectives and knowledge were included and she was often invited to give her view which she felt was respected.

From speaking with the students, who attended different academic schools and colleges, there is a difference in experience of cultural safety depending on the area of study. I spoke with students in the College of Law; College of Arts and Social Sciences; College of Medicine, Biology and the Environment; and the College of Business and Economics. The students from the College of Medicine, Biology and the Environment had the few complaints about content, representation and perspectives. This could be because the topics are not perceived to be political and are not politicised in the same way as law, arts, and economics. Despite the different approaches of the colleges, Sarah mentioned that she feels there is a willingness from the Chancellery to engage with Indigenous students and communities and is pleased that Indigenous students have been included in advisory meetings. I will discuss engagement between students and the university in chapter 6.

Olivia had a strong view that the university colleges should be doing more to support Indigenous students outside of the Tjabal Centre.

I think there is a lot more that each school could work on individually for supporting Indigenous students without having to draw it all back to this one space. [...] But there's still quite a strong blockage and I don't really know where that's coming from. Whether it's some sort of fear that they are going to get stuff wrong. I think there also needs to be communication between the schools, they work separately and there's not much communication at all.

Thomas also mentioned that fear seems to be one reason why Indigenous related topics are not included in many classes. Bin-Sallik mentions that fear of being called racist dissuades the general public, and universities as a microcosm of that, from engaging with Indigenous people.<sup>126</sup> The issue of fear points to the institutional element of cultural safety and raises the question of the responsibility of the academic colleges to address culturally unsafe practice which affects the wellbeing of Indigenous students.

The inclusion of Indigenous relevant topics, perspectives and representation are central to cultural safety and is important for wellbeing because it adds to the enjoyment of university for students and is relevant to their goals of attending university. A lack of cultural safety affects the wellbeing of Indigenous students, impacting on mental health and learning experiences of students.

## 5.2 Health

There are two health services available on the ANU campus, the medical service and the counselling centre. Only one of the students used these services regularly due to the convenience of proximity and because it is free. It has been difficult for the student to make appointments to see the counsellor or psychiatrist and they have had to wait up to a month to see someone and they suggested that wait times should be sped up.

The long wait time for appointments has an impact on student in need of more urgent help. Thomas has never tried to use the medical or counselling service on campus. The wait time for an appointment deterred him because he thought that they would not be available when he needed the help. When I asked Emily if she used either of the health services on campus, she told me a story about the only occasion she went to seek help from the counselling centre.

I don't, I suffer from anxiety and depression so I use a different psychologist which isn't on campus. I did attempt previously, probably in my first year, I went to try and find out if I could see the psychologist on campus and when I went up there they said sorry but all the appointments are booked for today, you'll have to come back. I thought well if they're not really going to help me out and aren't going to say "sorry we don't have any appointments today but we can book you in tomorrow" then it wasn't really worth my effort and they didn't want to help me at all. So I went and found other resources and found other people I could talk to that were willing to go that extra little bit to make sure that I was ok.

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<sup>126</sup> Bin-Sallik, "Cultural Safety: Let's Name It!," 27.

It is thus important to Emily when accessing counselling services that appointments are readily available and that she feels they want to help her. Three of the students mentioned to me that they preferred to use Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service which is the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation in Canberra and is situated off campus. Sarah told me about why she preferred to go there than the university service.

I haven't, but I know that they're there. I usually go to Winnunga that's why I don't go to the doctor at ANU. Since we were kids mum's told us it's better to support Indigenous medical centres because if you're not using it funding might get taken away from them, so that's why I try and go to Winnunga if I'm sick. One of the Aunties at Tjabal might take me if the bus schedule is not good or pick me up even though it's in Narrabundah.

This suggests that it is important to Sarah when making health decisions to feel that she is supporting an Indigenous space. This suggests that a sense of connection to spaces of health services is important to Sarah. Two of the students spoke to me about how they could feel more welcome within the health spaces of the university. When I asked if there are areas of wellbeing that the university could take more responsibility for, Emily mentioned supporting mental health.

I feel like they should be a bit more responsible for our mental health. A lot of the courses put us under a lot of pressure and they do run a mental health week but sometimes I feel like it doesn't necessarily apply- it isn't appropriate for Indigenous people, it's a little bit hard to connect with it as well. So I don't necessarily engage in those activities, it seems a little bit distant from us and what we need.

Emily suggested that the counselling centre could engage with the Tjabal Centre and that it would be useful for the students to know a face at the counselling centre and someone to approach. Olivia had a similar perspective.

I think that the counselling and health staff, if there was an Indigenous support person there.

The choice of where students seek health services thus depends proximity and ease of access, on feeling welcome, that their needs will be taken seriously and that the service wants to help, and also about having a connection to the service. While the health services at ANU is proximal to students, they are not inclusive spaces for Indigenous students. This reflects Fredericks' research on Indigenous health spaces.<sup>127</sup> A sense of belonging is important, and having an Indigenous face to look for. Unconscious symbols of power were also mentioned by Fredericks,

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<sup>127</sup> Fredericks, "There Is Nothing That 'Identifies Me to That Place': Aboriginal Women's Perceptions of Health Spaces and Places."

but the data I collected during the research is not sufficient to discuss this element of the health service spaces at ANU. Indigenous students' lack of use of university health spaces may be reflected in the quote from a participant in Fredericks' research: "There is nothing which identifies me to that place."<sup>128</sup>

### 5.3 Social Life

Many social events on campus are organised through the Students Association and departments. This includes the orientation weeks, called O-Week in first semester, and Bush Week in second. Other social and sporting events are organised by the various residential and non-residential halls.

The students I spoke with had differing experiences of social life, only two lived in a residential hall on campus. Jack, has different circles of friends that he has made at his residential college as well as at the Tjabal Centre. Thomas on the other hand mentioned feeling socially isolated when first arriving and the struggle of not living in a residential college. He also felt a little separated for coming from outside of Sydney and Melbourne.

All the people who were in my class they lived on college so they already had their week of making friends and getting to know everyone and I was already on the outside, I didn't know anyone there. So that was really hard, seeing everyone else already having friends and just sitting by yourself, I don't know who I can talk to.

Olivia mentioned that most of her friends on campus were people she had met at the Tjabal Centre. Emily told me she felt there were barriers to her becoming involved in the social life at ANU.

Other than going out and partying and getting drunk, there's not a lot of avenues to socially engage with other university students. So I can't really say that I have friends at university other than those people that I see at the Tjabal Centre because I just feel like the things that we want to do and the desires that we have are so different that I can't really connect with them and there aren't very many options at the uni to do anything other than getting drunk and partying.

Jack also mentioned that it was important for his wellbeing that he not get too involved in the party scene. Sarah felt similarly about social life on campus.

And in the sense there is a party scene but you're not pressured to be part of it if you don't want to.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 6.

In Vicki Grieves research abstaining from drugs and alcohol was identified as an element of wellbeing.<sup>129</sup> This is something that the Indigenous students I spoke with valued. That the university social scene revolves around alcohol leads to their exclusion of the Indigenous students from fully participating in the social life of the university.

When I asked if there was information she would like me to include in the research, Emily wanted greater inclusion in social life.

I think it'd be really nice if the university really tried to engage Indigenous people just in activities not per se being Indigenous and not explicitly saying isn't it great we've included Indigenous people in this or we've had so many Indigenous people come to this event. But that we've been invited to things, and that are culturally appropriate as well. I think there's quite a bit of- the university is unsure of where they stand and what's culturally appropriate and what's not. That creates a bit of a tense environment.

Emily would thus like to be included without feeling that it is tokenistic and recognises the lack of cultural understanding of university event organisers. Barriers for Indigenous students involvement in the social life of the university thus relates partially to cultural barriers and where they come from, and where they live.

### 5.3.1 Exclusion

Feelings of social exclusion were given as impacting on wellbeing of the students. When I asked Sarah for a story about what wellbeing meant to her she told me that wellbeing meant being able to overcome feelings of racism.

I feel like there is less blatant racism at home, it feels so comfortable that this is where I'm from. And then when you come here, if people stare at you [...] sometimes you can kind of think is that cos of racism you know. I don't let it get to me too much because I know where I'm from so you know whatever.

Sarah has learned to cope with these experiences but she describes experiences having to think about whether she is experiencing a form of social exclusion. Jack told me that the Tjabal Centre was a safe space for him. When I asked what that meant to him he said:

There's a cultural difference between being Indigenous and non-Indigenous and having struggled with identity I know I can go to the Tjabal Centre and have another blackfella there and to me it feels a lot more conducive and more at home than anywhere else. Even just the smallest thing like lingo or language, being able to just throw something out in good fun, a joke that only black fellas would get. That's a safe space in itself that is culturally aware that

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<sup>129</sup> Grieves, "Indigenous Wellbeing: A Framework for Governments' Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities," 47.



my nuances. [...] you don't even know it just feels safe. Seeing someone else with black skin feels safe.

It is clear that looking different has impacted on how Jack and Sarah feel in Canberra and at ANU more specifically. Thomas has had a different experience:

And I know there's people worse off than me so I don't tend to look at myself and say I'm disadvantaged. And especially cos I don't specifically appear Aboriginal, I have quite fair skin so I'm not really going to face any of the racist remarks about being black or whatever.

As discussed earlier, Indigenous students at ANU feel that Indigenous people have been misrepresented within courses. This impacts on the social life and wellbeing of the students by teaching their classmates how to view them. When Indigenous people are only represented as remote and dysfunctional, the non-Indigenous classmates are taught how to view Indigenous people and by extension Indigenous students. Olivia told me that being at university has impacted on her wellbeing in a negative way were first year Indigenous studies courses which misrepresented Indigenous people:

[...] maybe because I'm so angry at the people who don't acknowledge that I am Black, I feel like I should really push that and not so much the other side, because that's already what they see in me. I think that also definitely contributes negatively to my wellbeing.

Olivia became very emotional while speaking with me and it was clear that this had a great impact on her wellbeing at university. This story shows that the representation of Indigenous people in class impact on how Indigenous students are viewed by their fellow students while at university. As well as creating an environment with a lack of cultural safety as discussed earlier, this also reflects the how the institution becomes racialised and university spaces occupied.

Sarah Ahmed's work on occupied and racialised space helps to understand these experiences of the students.<sup>130</sup> Universities are spaces which are defined by actions - studying, reading, writing, teaching - which are enacted by bodies. The ANU can be considered an institutional space which is racialised, a space for white bodies into which Indigenous bodies enter. It becomes racialised by positioning Indigenous bodies as out of place, and lacking belonging. The experiences of racism and lack of belonging of some of the students reflects the racialised space, that Indigenous bodies do not belong in the university. However, there are clearly different experiences of being an Indigenous student at ANU depending on skin colour. Whiteness is also reproduced by failing to recognise the identity of 'fair skinned' Indigenous

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<sup>130</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 51-63, .

people, rendering them invisible by conferring whiteness on them. This dynamic begins in spaces of tutorial rooms and lecture theatres and are extended into social spaces at university as non-Indigenous students carry these representations of Indigeneity with them. University spaces thus become racialised, reproducing whiteness and excluding Indigenous students. I will continue this discussion in chapter 6.

#### 5.4 Chapter Summary

The main source of academic support for the students comes from the Tjabal Centre, with students using it as a place to study and accessing the tutoring services. The students enjoy most the course content which they can relate to and see that it is useful and relevant to Indigenous people. They have had different experiences of cultural safety within courses depending on the academic college and specific course. In some courses there has been culturally unsafe practice in the form of misrepresentation and failing to recognise identity which has had an impact on students' wellbeing. Few of the students utilise the medical and counselling services available on campus. A lack of inclusion and few available appointments have led them to find alternative services. The social life at university for the students has been mixed with varying degrees of social exclusion due to spaces being occupied and racialised. This exclusion affects the mental health and social life of the students and also creates a feeling of not belonging which is fundamental to their wellbeing.

## 6 Creating Space for Indigenous Wellbeing

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I suppose at the start of my degree I still remember my first day I came and I remember sitting down and calling my mum and saying I don't fit in here and I was balling my eyes out and I didn't know where I belonged but then luckily I found the Tjabal Centre and found I fit in a little bit better and stuck with it and I don't think I would have been quite as successful and if I would have been able to stick through it because you kind of feel a little bit out of place so it kind of helped to keep me grounded and keep me feeling safe.

Emily

In this chapter I will discuss how Indigenous students at ANU take on the responsibility of create space for wellbeing, both individual as well as a community. First, I will address how the Tjabal Centre is a space for belonging, focusing on everyday ways of doing. I will draw on the concept of cultural safety and Lefebvre's concepts of differentiated space and everyday actions in analysing how space for Indigenous wellbeing is created.<sup>131</sup> Second, I will use de Certeau's concept of tactics to analyse how students are extending the space for wellbeing beyond the space of the Tjabal Centre. I will discuss two tactics; engagement with the university, and the student organisation of meetings called *Nothing About Us, Without Us*. I will reference earlier discussions in this thesis relating to conceptualising wellbeing and cultural safety throughout this chapter.

### 6.1 The Tjabal Centre: Producing a Space for Belonging

Henri Lefebvre describes spatial production through how space is used, how it is understood through signs and symbols, and how it is planned. Belonging and connection were articulated by the students as central to their wellbeing. The students use the Tjabal Centre as a space to come together, to study, and to socialise. All the students I spoke with described the importance of the space for their wellbeing, often describing it as a safe space. Sarah told me that it was safe for her because it is somewhere she is able to go where she feels welcome. It was important for her to be around other Indigenous people because she felt she could be her real self, and did not have to prove herself. As mentioned earlier Jack uses the Tjabal as a safe space where he can see other Indigenous faces and be in a space that recognises his nuances and identity. Jessica mentioned how the Tjabal Centre provided support for student wellbeing.

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<sup>131</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Williams, "Cultural Safety—What Does It Mean for Our Work Practice?."

The biggest one is that sense of community and we are like a melting pot of Indigenous peoples from around the country. I think the peer support is really beneficial and if you didn't have Tjabal there wouldn't be that meeting place for them. There wouldn't be chance occurrences where Indigenous people cross paths here at the university.

Jessica thus uses the space as a place to meet with and interact with other students. Emily uses the Tjabal Centre similarly.

Quite often I come in here and it's nice to have other Indigenous people who are experiencing much the same pressures from family and also the university and trying to fumble their way through as well and be able to seek advice from each other, that's very important.

She uses the space of the Tjabal Centre as a space where she can speak with other Indigenous students about their struggles and where she can give and receive support. Sarah mentioned that the Tjabal community is important because it feels like family, they joke around and enjoy spending time together. For Sarah it is a space to socialise with other students as well as a space to study. The Tjabal Centre is used by the students as a culturally safe space where they feel their identities are recognised and they are not judged and where they are also able to draw on common experiences and socialise together. This is particularly important in relation to the social exclusion mentioned in chapter 5.

The Tjabal Centre is recognisable as a space for Indigenous belonging through the use of signage and symbology. Figure 2 shows the Tjabal Centre from the outside with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags flown in front of the building. This is in contrast to many official buildings, such as the ANU Chancellery building, where these two flags are flown alongside the Australian flag. Even when the wind is not blowing the colours of the flags distinguish the two Indigenous flags from the Australian flag so that the Tjabal Centre is immediately recognisable as an Indigenous space. Signage also signifies that one is entering an Indigenous space. Figure 3 shows the sign at the entrance of the Tjabal Centre which shows the name of the Tjabal Centre, an Indigenous word meaning "large assembly of groups from widely separated areas."<sup>132</sup> The logo of the centre is also pictured and uses Indigenous symbology to depict the paths of the students travelling from different places to meet at the Tjabal Centre at ANU and move out again to the six different academic colleges on campus.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> "Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre," accessed April 26, 2017  
<http://www.anu.edu.au/students/contacts/tjabal-indigenous-higher-education-centre>.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.



Figure 2: Entrance to the Tjabal Centre



Figure 3: Sign at entrance to the Tjabal Centre

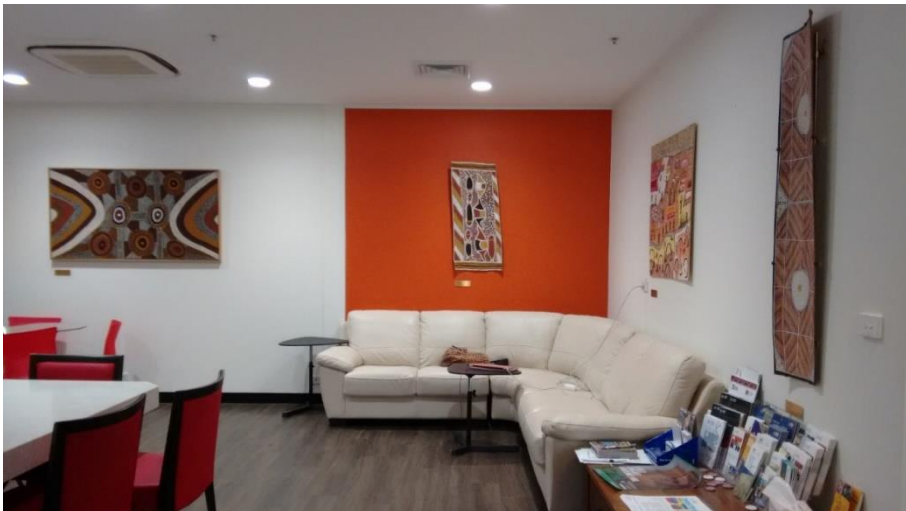


Figure 4: Indigenous art in the kitchen-lounge area

Inside the Tjabal Centre, Indigenous art is displayed throughout the space and can be seen in Figure 4. The presence of the artwork inside the centre creates a space of belonging for the students. These symbols serve to produce an inclusive space for Indigenous students entering the Tjabal Centre. This finding reflects research done by Bronwyn Fredericks which found that Indigenous organisations in urban areas use signs, symbols and representations to produce spaces of belonging, attachment and identity.<sup>134</sup>

The space in the Tjabal Centre was renovated by Aunty Anne Martin, director of the Tjabal Centre. She told me that the works of art created a healthy environment and tell the stories of different parts of Australia. The diversity of the paintings reflects the diversity of the Indigenous student body. Aunty Anne also planned the space so that in the middle is a kitchen with a large table that people can sit around. Figure 5 shows the table in the kitchen area. In providing support for the students and creating the space of the Tjabal Centre she wanted to “provide a place that has a sense of familiarity and comfort that’s probably kind of replicated from their family homes.”



Figure 5: The kitchen located in the middle of the Tjabal Centre

Lefebvre’s conceptual triad for producing space is useful in understanding how the space of the Tjabal Centre is produced. It is created through spatial practice, representational space and conceptualised space. The Tjabal Centre is conceived to be a space for Indigenous students, where their academic success and community is supported. Indigenous students use the space as a meeting place for community, while signs and symbols represent belonging and signify that it is an Indigenous space.

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<sup>134</sup> Fredericks, "We Don't Leave Our Identities at the City Limits': Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Living in Urban Localities."

The Tjabal Centre is design for students to feel at home and become a place of belonging for the Indigenous students. In contrast to what I in the previous chapter describe as culturally unsafe spaces, the Tjabal Centre, for the students in my material are recognized as a culturally safe space. I will argue that this is due to the Tjabal Centre is thus a space where Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing are enacted, and where the multiplicity of indigeneity can be performed. It is a space where diversity is celebrated, as are the difference in needs of Indigenous students. This relates to Lefebvre's argument relating to the right to be different, which he contends can only be realised through everyday action creating differentiated space.

### 6.1.1 Everyday Ways of Doing

The Tjabal Centre is designed as a differentiated space on the ANU campus, a space that has been created to foster a community amongst Indigenous students and to support their educational success. It is constructed through a variety of everyday actions of the students and Indigenous staff at the Tjabal Centre. Jessica told me that Indigenous ways of doing things are important in the Tjabal Centre.

And that's about acknowledging that diversity, there is so much diversity now amongst our people. But I think sometimes Indigenous ways of doing things are good too. We have yarning [talking] circles and we refer back to the way our mob do things as often as possible.

She recognises that although Indigenous students at ANU are diverse, there are common values and ways of doing. Muller presents a theory of Indigenous ways of doing health and human service work in which she includes a set of principles informs practice. Aunty Anne spoke to me about the approach to service delivery at the Tjabal Centre which is not top down. Instead through the way the space has been planned, these communicate as well as facilitate equal engagement between staff and students. I believe this approach is symbolised in the desk chairs for students at the centre. The same chair design is used for director, staff, and students as pictured in figure 6.

This can be contrasted with findings in Bronwyn Fredericks' research into Indigenous women's inclusion in health spaces. She discussed unconscious symbols of power between doctors and patients and gave the example of seating. Doctors and staff had larger and more comfortable chairs while patients had smaller, less comfortable ones. This indicates a higherarchical relationship between staff and client.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Fredericks, "There Is Nothing That 'Identifies Me to That Place': Aboriginal Women's Perceptions of Health Spaces and Places," 9.

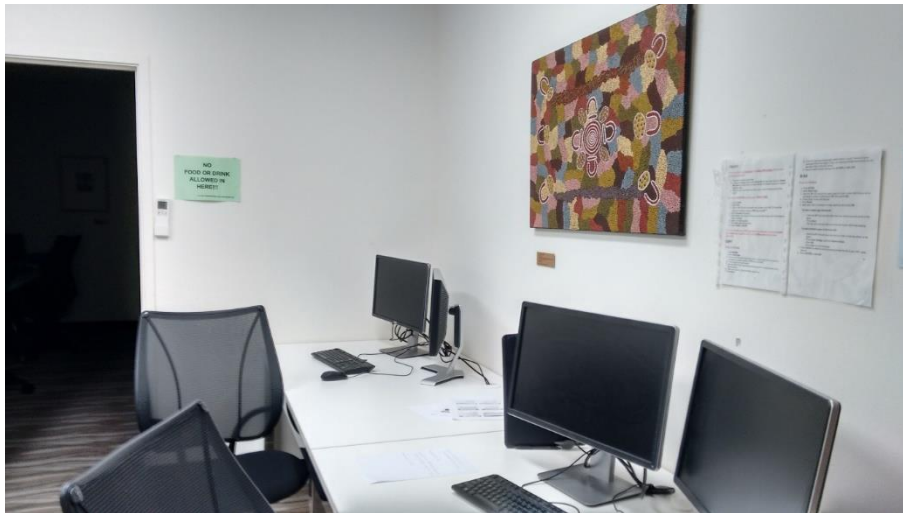


Figure 6: Computer lab in the Tjabal Centre

The relationship between the Tjabal Centre and students was also spoken about by the students. Sarah mentioned how she related to the Tjabal Centre

I try to support different events that happen, if it's a BBQ for students or a luncheon to meet other Indigenous visitors on campus that they're hosting.

Jack also wanted to contribute to events at the Tjabal Centre.

I was going if there was an event on and I know it's on, with emails, I will go to that and help out whatever it's on, if NAIDOC events are on or reconciliation.

Relationship between Tjabal Centre and students is not what the centre can provide for students but a reciprocal relationship. In Muller's research equality and reciprocity were values which were embedded in Indigenous ways of doing health and human service work. In the Tjabal Centre the value of equality is symbolised in the desk chairs which are the same for students and staff. This symbol shows a more equal relationship than many non-Indigenous services where staff have larger and more comfortable chairs. Reciprocity is evident in the everyday practice of students and staff at the Tjabal Centre. Students do not merely 'use' the services of the centre. Rather they contribute back to it supporting the formation of a community by attending events and giving back to the centre. Other values mentioned by Grieves are not clearly reflected in my data because these cultural values are often intangible and difficult to articulate. They are lived values and not explicitly taught or spoken about. Aunty Anne spoke to me about this when I asked how staff at the Tjabal Centre supports students.

It's probably not a thing that's really tangible in the way that we do it. It's kind of an innate understanding of what we need to do for each individual student.



[...] without even doing something that was a conscious thing, because it's just about our intrinsic knowledge about what we need to do to provide support for our students, this has had a balloon effect across the university.

The space of the Tjabal Centre is produced through everyday actions and interactions between students and staff. It is a space which provides cultural safety and belonging; it is a space for wellbeing. The everyday actions of the Tjabal Centre are based in Indigenous epistemologies and ways of doing which are difficult to articulate and often intangible. The Tjabal Centre is thus produced by, and in turn allows for, Indigenous ways of doing and conceiving wellbeing to be enacted.

## 6.2 Tactics

Michele de Certeau uses the concept of tactics to describe how groups can manipulate spaces through everyday actions of resistance. Indigenous students at ANU are extending space for wellbeing using two different tactics. These tactics are not mutually exclusive, some students involved in both tactics simultaneously while others are involved in only one. The first is through engagement with the university, with lectures and with non-Indigenous students. The second is organising meetings called *Nothing About Us, Without Us* in which they discussed the problem of a lack of Indigenous perspectives in undergraduate coursework. These meetings aimed to start discussion and create change in indigenous representation and staffing in teaching indigenous studies. It was covered in print by the ANU student media organisation *Woroni*, and anonymous quotes were also reported on the ANU Indigenous Twitter account.<sup>136</sup>

There is some disagreement amongst the students about which tactic should be used. Jessica decided not to take part because she wanted to work with the university to find a solution.

Some might say that nothings been achieved unless it's been through activism. But there are different ways of being an activist. I worry because I feel like there's a lot of movements happen away from the spotlight.

Emily on why she decided not to take part in *Nothing About Us, Without Us*:

I'm not involved in it because I kind of feel like they are trying to create a little bit of an 'us and them' mentality.

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<sup>136</sup> Miguel Galsim, "Footprints Leading to the Future: Bringing Indigenous Perspectives into the Anu," *Woroni* (2016), accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.woroni.com.au/news/footprints-leading-to-the-future-bringing-indigenous-perspectives-into-the-anu/>.

I found amongst all the students in relation to this topic was the respect they had for each other's perspectives and a recognition that there were diverse opinions on the topic whilst not wanting to create conflict.

### 6.2.1 Engagement

Engagement with the university is the tactic of Aunty Anne at the Tjabal Centre who has built relationships with people within the university administration.

It's really just respectful engagement. Because I'm a part of their world, they're a part of my world. We've invited each other in.

This quote exemplifies the engagement tactic of many of the students who are letting non-Indigenous people at university in to spaces and creating spaces for engagement. This was important for all the students I spoke to, many of them expressing that they wanted to avoid an 'us vs them' relationship with non-Indigenous people at the university. Thomas told me about the openness of the Tjabal Centre and made the distinction between the Tjabal Centre and other safe spaces on campus such as the Rapunzel Room of the Women's department which is an exclusive space.

Anyone can come in and have a chat to Aunty Anne, come chat to the students, we have had students, especially international students seem to be the most interested. There was one girl from Singapore or Malaysia and she was in a class with [another Indigenous student] and she literally just wandered in one day and I'd never seen her before and I introduced myself, and she said she was doing a course in Indigenous studies and heard about the Tjabal Centre and thought she would come down and see what it's like. I was like cool no worries, if you want to come to any of our events, just come along its all good.

I had similar experiences visiting the Tjabal Centre during my time in Australia. On two occasions when I entered the centre I witnessed Indigenous students or staff members speaking with students who had visited spontaneously out of curiosity. Another of the students told me about an occasion when non-Indigenous students who had been sitting outside the centre were invited in by Aunty Anne to share lunch. These interactions are important because they allow the Indigenous students to represent themselves. Thomas told me why this was important.

There's students from everywhere, we're all different shades and come in different sizes and different shapes. That's a really good opportunity for other people to come into Tjabal and be like you know what, these are all Indigenous students and they're not all dark skinned.

By showing the diversity of Indigenous students to outsiders, the students are challenging derogatory representations and misrepresentations of Indigenous people.

The students are also engaging in student politics of the ANU Students Association (ANUSA) and creating their own social events. Prior to 2016 there were only two people in the Indigenous Student department committee; the Indigenous Officer who is an elected representative to sit on the ANUSA board, and the deputy officer. The students have decided to reorganise to include three further roles of social officer, treasurer, and secretary. This allows for more people to be involved and lessens the work of the Indigenous Officer. In doing this they have been able to be active in organising events and engaging with ANUSA. One of the students described an event they organised to me.

We put on a lunch at the end of semester just before exams. We had little stress less packs and that kind of thing for students to come and grab.

However, this engagement in creating events is not always reciprocated.

But it's really good now that we're trying to engage more people, trying to run more events and do all of those kinds of things. But yeah it can be a little bit difficult trying to get some of the colleges to work with us and some of the rest of the university to work with us for events and all of those kinds of things. That's a barrier we're trying to work through at the moment.

By engaging with the university and non-Indigenous students, the Indigenous students are creating space in a way which counters that of culturally unsafe spaces. The students

As mentioned earlier, whiteness is reproduced in some courses which extends racialised space as non-Indigenous students carry representations of Indigeneity with them. Likewise by allowing non-Indigenous students into the Tjabal Centre, they will learn new and diverse representations of what it means to be Indigenous. This new knowledge will then extend beyond the Tjabal Centre into university spaces and challenging the dominant perceptions. Inviting people in is thus a creative everyday tactic which manipulates the space outside of the Tjabal Centre, as diverse Indigenous identities and representations are extended. Engagement is thus a tactic which is an everyday form of resistance for self-representation and against being misrepresented. Representing the self and diverse identities is an act of everyday resistance for the Indigenous students.

### 6.2.2 *Nothing About Us, Without Us*

*Nothing About Us, Without Us* began as informal conversations between students at the Tjabal Centre. The students would discuss their frustrations with the way Indigenous people were represented in some of their courses. They began meeting formally to name the problems and find solutions to them. Jack became involved because he wants to be able to look at

contemporary Indigenous issues such as skin colour and the experiences of being Indigenous but not looking it. He is also interested in LGBTQ Indigenous issues, and mental health and wellbeing and has been disappointed that he didn't have the opportunity to focus on these areas. Following is part of the interview I had with Jack when we spoke about *Nothing About Us, Without Us*.

Maeve: Is that a response to wellbeing? That you guys see a lack in what is being offered in your education so you were like "we want to do this."

Jack: I think it is. Everything for me comes down to closing the gap: education, health, they're all interrelated. Parts of self-determination and us looking into making *Nothing About Us, Without Us* having that sense of connection and ownership of our culture and being the experts. That does come down to wellbeing and self-determination, gives us a sense of connectedness to our mob, our people. It's fulfilling internally and identifying discrepancies between what we know and what we are being taught as well.

For Jack this is clearly a response to a lack of cultural safety. The lack of Indigenous voice in courses and inclusion of Indigenous knowledge was one of the factors which motivated him to get involved. It was also clearly a tactic for him to change the institutional dynamics in relation to his wellbeing.

Following is part of my interview with Olivia:

Olivia: It's been a great space actually to meet people who don't come into the Tjabal Centre. We've met people from NCIS [National Centre for Indigenous Studies] and the college of law that we never knew existed so it's been great in terms of connections. And having these talks with other undergraduate students and researchers which is really great. But I think it's pretty early days.

Maeve: Did you get involved because of this representation stuff in the anthropology courses you did?

Olivia: Yeah, a few of us have been having multiple discussion about things that were disappointing and things that needed to be improved on. And [another student] was just like "great, let's put it out there and see if there are other people outside of the Tjabal Centre that are having these discussions and we can all come together and perhaps push for some change."

Becoming involved in *Nothing About Us, Without Us* for Olivia was directly about trying to change the lack of cultural safety in university spaces. Michel de Certeau's concept of tactics *Nothing About Us, Without Us*; its goals and impacts. The decision for the students to mobilise was clearly conceived from an everyday tactic to address culturally unsafe learning spaces. Through this tactic the students have started a discussion with people outside of the Tjabal

Centre which has extended into the University newspaper.<sup>137</sup> The goal of extending cultural safety in academic and social spaces is thereby to extend spaces for their wellbeing. They have drawn attention to their concerns and created space for debate in the broader university between staff, students, and administrators as reflected in coverage in the student newspaper.

### 6.3 Chapter Summary

The space of the Tjabal Centre is produced through the interaction between spatial practice, representational space and conceptualised space. Students have used the space as a place of community as well as for academic study. Symbols and signs and the planning of the space have also created a recognisable Indigenous space when Indigenous students can feel they belong. The Tjabal Centre is a differentiated space which is also produced through everyday actions. The space allows for enacting Indigenous ways of doing which has created a space for Indigenous student wellbeing.

Students have used to tactics to extend this space for wellbeing. By engaging with the broader university students are representing themselves and challenging dominant representations of Indigenous people. The tactic of organising meetings called *Nothing About Us, Without Us* has opened up space for discussion and debate around the problems in course content in some Indigenous studies courses. The goal of both strategies is creating/manipulating space for wellbeing

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.



## 7 Conclusion

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In this thesis I have aimed to address Indigenous student wellbeing in spaces at the Australian National University. I was inspired by Linda Tuhiwai Smith's research project of representing Indigenous people to counter the dominant story of Indigeneity in Australia. I aimed to highlight the voices of Indigenous students at ANU, their experiences, challenges, and individual and collective agency. Using individual interviews as a method, I spoke with six students to address how the students conceptualise and articulate wellbeing. I used anonymous quotes from the ANU Indigenous twitter account as secondary data alongside the interview data to discuss how the university address the different conceptions and needs of Indigenous students at the ANU. In addressing the production of space for Indigenous student wellbeing I also drew on photographs of the Tjabal Centre space. I also discussed how students are creating space for their wellbeing in everyday life. In this final chapter I will provide a summary of findings of this research. I will then provide recommendations for Australian universities and Indigenous student support units wishing to address Indigenous student wellbeing and academic success. I will end with some concluding remarks and observations.

### 7.1 Summary of Findings

Vicki Grieves presents spirituality and intangible cultural heritage as the foundation for Indigenous wellbeing. In my interviews with the students they articulated a number of elements in how they conceptualised wellbeing. These elements were tangible and intangible including family, community, place and Country, learning, physical and mental health, and standard of living. These factors were interrelated and were based in a sense of belonging which was articulated through connection to place, family, and community. These elements were clearly articulated and relate to Grieves' concept of spirituality, although spirituality was articulated explicitly by only one student. Both wellbeing and spirituality are based in knowledge and understanding which is lived, and often not talked about in the public space, so these questions are difficult to articulate and often not discussed.

Sarah Ahmed's research draw attention to how institutional spaces can be considered 'occupied', in addition to the risk of becoming racialised.<sup>138</sup> I have argue that Indigenous bodies become out of place and seen as not belonging in institutional spaces. As such spaces at ANU

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<sup>138</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*.

have not addressed the differences in Indigenous student wellbeing. Students have had experiences of lack of inclusion in the social life at ANU as well as in accessing the health services on campus. The academic support needs have been addressed by the Tjabal Centre while experiences of cultural safety in courses vary across the academic colleges. Maryann Bin-Sallik and Robyn Williams concept of cultural safety was useful in understanding the experiences of students in institutional spaces.<sup>139</sup> The failure to include Indigenous perspectives in courses and to recognise Indigenous identities that some of the students have experienced in their courses has created spaces on campus that do not feel safe, affecting the wellbeing of students. This has contributed toward the extension of whiteness into racialised spaces which creates experiences of either high visibility or invisibility of Indigenous students based on skin colour. The differences in wellbeing for Indigenous students thus exist within a system where they articulate that they don't feel they belong.

Lefebvre's conceptual triad and discussion of differentiated space is useful for understanding how the Tjabal Centre is produced as a space for Indigenous student wellbeing on the ANU campus. The interaction between spatial practice, representational space and conceptualised space has created space of belonging and community for Indigenous students which has been central to their wellbeing. As well as using the space for academics purposes, Students use the Tjabal Centre to come together and support each other and socialise as a community. Belonging is also expressed through symbols outside and within the centre which mark it as an Indigenous space. By enacting these Indigenous concepts of wellbeing – of belonging to a community and through ways of doing, staff and students are creating a differentiated space. The Tjabal Centre is thus a space on campus where Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies are enacted in ways which are sometimes intangible and difficult to articulate.

Students are also acting in ways which extend space for wellbeing beyond the Tjabal Centre. Michele de Certeau's concept of tactics can assist in understanding how students are manipulating space through everyday actions of quiet resistance. The tactic of engaging with the university in opening up their world to other students and staff members and creating events, Indigenous students become representation of the Indigenous Other, where diversity is not seen. This challenges representations of them as Other in university spaces and the act of self-representation becomes an act of everyday resistance. The tactic of organising meetings called *Nothing About Us, Without Us* is a more overt form of resistance. In this tactic students assert

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<sup>139</sup> Bin-Sallik, "Cultural Safety: Let's Name It!."; Williams, "Cultural Safety—What Does It Mean for Our Work Practice?."



themselves in discussing their concerns with the representation of Indigenous people within Indigenous studies and their concerns about staffing. They have drawn attention to their concerns and created space for debate in the broader university between staff, students, and administrators. Both tactics extend space for Indigenous wellbeing beyond the Tjabal Centre into occupied spaces through Individual agency and Collective organisation. They are thus manipulating university spaces to make university safer and more responsive to their wellbeing.

## 7.2 Recommendations

The Redfern Statement is a manifesto released by leading Indigenous advocacy groups which calls for a just approach to Indigenous affairs. It calls for greater engagement between government and Indigenous organisations, funding Indigenous led solutions and for greater presence of Indigenous voices in decision making. It also asks government to recognise that Indigenous people are the experts in making decisions for their futures.<sup>140</sup>

This thesis shows Indigenous students are the experts in their own wellbeing and universities should take a similar approach to that put forward in the Redfern Statement. In this research project it became obvious that Indigenous students wanted to engage with the university. On the part of the university, willingness to engage is mixed from enthusiastic to reluctant. I recommend all levels and spaces to engage with Indigenous student community as diverse communities, still with some common knowledge on the relationship between academic institution and wellbeing. Bringing Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing into different spaces on university campuses not only in support units but also spaces of health services, social spaces and academic spaces.

In academic spaces lecturers and tutors should aim to include more Indigenous knowledge content. This could mean upgrading curricula to reflect these recommendations. I recommend that lecturers and tutors engage with Indigenous students in their class and/or undertake training to be able to provide a culturally safe learning environment. Courses should include respectful representation of Indigenous peoples, cultures, experiences, and identities. Universities should provide funding for university health services to have short wait times for appointments and increase accessibility. These services could engage with Indigenous support units to provide an inclusive space, and/or designate a contact person for Indigenous students so that students feel

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<sup>140</sup> National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations Unite: The Redfern Statement," accessed April 26, 2017 [http://nationalcongress.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Redfern-Statement-9-June-\\_Final.pdf](http://nationalcongress.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Redfern-Statement-9-June-_Final.pdf).

welcome in the space. Organisers of social events could also engage with Indigenous student bodies such as Indigenous students support units or representative bodies. Doing so could make events more inclusive. An effort should be made to organise alcohol free events.

### 7.3 Concluding Remarks

There are a number of themes which are referenced throughout this thesis. The first is in conceptualising wellbeing and discussing Indigenous epistemologies. I have drawn on Grieves' concepts of interconnected and intangible wellbeing which relate closely with the concept of holism. Mark Lock criticises holistic health for not being operational and for essentialising Indigenous people.<sup>141</sup> My work shows what wellbeing means to Indigenous people who are students at a major university. Lock's critique can be addressed by focusing on the elements of wellbeing important to local groups and acknowledging Indigenous people as experts with solutions to localised challenges. Further, developing indicators in cross cultural settings must involve reductionism.<sup>142</sup> I have argued that this implies loss of intangible elements of wellbeing which are central to Indigenous student wellbeing. This raises a number of further questions for future research. Within policy contexts what are the implications for Indigenous wellbeing when intangible elements are excluded? How important are these elements? Is it policy makers or local Indigenous communities and organisations making these decisions?

Representation was a central theme in this thesis. It was an element of my research goal of aiming to represent the complexities and strengths of Indigenous people and their experiences. It was important in student wellbeing when students felt they were misrepresented in courses and that their diversity was not recognised. Finally it was relevant to my discussion around student action in relation to engaging with the university and decision making processes. This raises questions for further research; how does the Tjabal Centre represent and address multiple of understandings of wellbeing? Why is it that some Indigenous students do not utilise the centre and how could the Tjabal Centre be more open to those students?

Community is another recurring theme in this thesis. Community was central to the wellbeing of Indigenous students at ANU, provided sense of belonging and created space for wellbeing. More research is needed to be done which recognition of the importance of diversity in and between Indigenous communities. The complexities of community are not recognised in the

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<sup>141</sup> Mark Lock, "Aboriginal Holistic Health: A Critical Review," in *Discussion Paper no. 2* (Darwin, Australia: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2007), 21.

<sup>142</sup> John Taylor, "Indigenous Peoples and Indicators of Well-Being: Australian Perspectives on United Nations Global Frameworks," *Social Indicators Research* 87, no. 1 (2008).

research guidelines and greater understanding of these complexities could inform how research is done in urban settings. This thesis has not addressed the political underpinnings of the use of the term community. Dudgeon and Fielder have pointed to performing a collective identity, building pride and belonging and creating a sense of difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is a tactic of resistance for gaining power in non-Indigenous spaces.<sup>143</sup>

This relates to the final theme of individual and collective agency of Indigenous people. In this thesis I have discussed how students have used tactic to engage with university structures and organise to resist those structures. This dynamic has been raised by Larissa Behrendt in her discussion about Indigenous peoples' involvement in creating solutions for the future. She characterises it as either visible resistance or through working within the system.<sup>144</sup> Future research could look in greater depth at the tactics Indigenous people use to create change, transform spaces to allow for supporting and strengthening wellbeing in urban settings.

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<sup>143</sup> Dudgeon and Fielder, "Third Spaces within Tertiary Places: Indigenous Australian Studies."

<sup>144</sup> Larissa Behrendt, "Who's Afraid of the Indigenous Middle Class?," *The Guardian* (2015), accessed February 12, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/09/whos-afraid-of-the-indigenous-middle-class>.



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