The influence of Identity, Roles and Expectations on Indigenous students studying at university which impacts on building the Indigenous health workforce

By

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Abstract

The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been problematic since colonisation. At present, Indigenous health has been prioritised nationally in Australia through initiatives such as the Close the Gap policy and many related activities led by Government, non-government, and Indigenous community organisations. There is a strong move toward Indigenous community led responses to promoting better health and wellbeing for our people. A key part of such community led responses is generating a sustainable Indigenous health workforce. This workforce needs to carry not only the knowledge and skills associated with formal mainstream study and qualifications but also the identity, roles, and expectations of Indigenous people, families and communities themselves.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been historically excluded from universities and there remain tensions. The attrition rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in health degrees at Australian universities have been problematic over the past decades. There are many aspects of students’ experiences that can affect their success including institutionalised racism and deficit thinking and the level of academic, cultural, and financial support. Yet, there are deeper aspects of Indigenous students’ cultural identities and associated roles and expectations – extended from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people – that shape their success. In my role as an Indigenous social worker, student support worker, teacher researcher and student over the past 30 years I recognised the need to understand the ways that students’ cultural, community, and family identities intersect with the identities, roles, and expectations sometimes imposed upon them in universities.

The purpose of this study was to explore the significance and effects of identity, roles, and expectations for Indigenous students undertaking health degrees. Indigenous health
students navigate a complex range of identities, roles, and expectations that come from community, family members, university staff and teaching academics. In many cases, the identities, roles, and expectations of and upon Indigenous students in their community and family contexts contrast with those launched upon them in university systems. This adds additional pressures to Indigenous students who are seeking to enter the health workforce. Many teaching academics and university staff are completely unaware of – and hence unresponsive to – Indigenous identities and roles.

My study explores the complex but often inspiring realities of the student experience in navigating their different worlds of community, family, and university. Using an Indigenous Research Methodology, I interviewed 17 Indigenous health students at different stages of their degrees across diverse disciplines including social work, nursing, medicine, psychology and exercise science in one urban university in Australia. I also interviewed 10 non-Indigenous teaching academics at the same university to develop a rounded perspective on the kinds of experiences Indigenous students might have in the health classroom. Staff interviewees were from health disciplines including social work, medicine, nursing, dietetics, and psychology.

I undertook thematic analysis of the interview data to determine key themes relating to identity, roles, and expectations. This process focussed on the Indigenous student experience but also explored teaching academics’ own identities, roles, and expectations and how they may directly or indirectly affect Indigenous students. The sub-themes under identity related to place, kinship, race, colour, and teaching academics’ awareness of student cultural identities. The sub-themes identified under roles were connection to identity, family commitment, community role, transition between community to university, university role, leadership role and health professional role. The sub-themes for expectations included achieving goals, expectations linked
to bettering one’s self; high expectations, student perceptions of how academics see them, how academics saw students, academic expectation the same as other students’, expectations lower for Indigenous students. These major themes have crossover which contributes to the complexity of the research of Indigenous people.

The findings show that Indigenous students and teaching academics need to be aware of the significance of identity when studying at university. The study shows that identity, roles, and expectations are interlinked in shaping student experience, success, and their developing sense of self as both an Indigenous person and health professional. If an academic is unaware of a student’s identity it may lead to problems that affect the student’s sense of self and welcome at the university. Likewise, if a student is still developing their identity as an Indigenous person, being institutionally identified as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person at university and by academics and other students can add extra pressure and stigmatisation to the student’s experience of university. Academics, students, and other staff members hence all have a role to play in making a space for Indigenous students to feel welcome and to succeed at university. This includes being aware of the dual roles and universal responsibility.

If Indigenous students can be supported to reconcile and build strength from their diverse identities and roles, and resist negative and false expectations, they are better placed to complete their studies and succeed as health professionals. If Indigenous students encounter low expectations of their abilities from teaching academics and other students, they may succumb to negative self-expectations and attrition. If universities, teaching academics, staff and other students can make space for Indigenous students to be stable and strong in their identities throughout their studies, we have a far stronger opportunity to build this workforce to also be stable and strong, connected to Country, and people, and contribute to better health in our
communities. This thesis offers some key understandings that will help us and universities to facilitate such spaces for Indigenous health students.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)_________________________________
Name of Student
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Glossary of terms

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander refers to the Indigenous people of Australia.

Aunty/ Aunties refers to a respected older female Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person in the community.

Country refers to ancestral lands of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Elder refers to a respected older Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person in the community.

Indigenous refers to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people of Australia except where referring to Indigenous people from overseas.

Indigenist research refers to a form of social enquiry based on the principles and philosophies of Indigenous peoples, adopted by Indigenous people and designed to be conducted by Indigenous people within their own communities.

Mob refers to a term used to describe your Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander family, extended family and community group.

Murris refers to a broad name of the Aboriginal peoples who live in Queensland.
Uncle/ Uncles refers to an older male Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person in the community.
Chapter 1 - Introduction

Chapter summary

Chapter 1 Introduction outlines the background and rationale for the study including factors such as the history of colonisation, lack of self-determination, lack of cultural safety and contemporary issues affecting poor health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The chapter introduces why an Indigenous health workforce is so important and how Indigenous health students’ experiences at university can shape not only their lives, but the health and well-being of our communities overall. I introduce the study’s core theoretical concepts of identity, roles, and expectations and the study objectives and research questions. I then provide an outline of the research approach which is expanded in Chapter 4 Methodology.

Introduction

This research relates to me and my people. Many of my family have died at a young age from health conditions that were preventable and, if treated appropriately by health professionals, they may have lived longer lives. My mother passed away in hospital at a young age of 46. While it may not be due to having no or very few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff within the hospital system at the time, I always wonder would it have made a difference if we had someone there looking out for her. Would it have made a difference if there was someone there even before that time to help prevent the health condition that she had. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who apply to study or work in health and welfare do so because of a family member’s health condition. I acknowledge that I am doing this research because I have seen the need to discuss and support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that are going through higher education to be health professionals.

In my younger years I was a typical Aboriginal man getting through life with no focus. In my late twenties I started getting my life together and wanted to help other Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander people. In the early 1990’s I started working in the welfare sector as a youth worker in an Aboriginal community-controlled youth organisation. I then worked in a community-controlled health service where I saw that many of the health and welfare professionals were not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. Even though many of us were qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers, it was a challenge for us to go to university to study in the area of health or welfare to become professional social workers, nurses, medical practitioners, psychologists or other types of health professionals. Many of us experienced challenges in getting “qualified” because we were not seen as having the level of education required to go to university.

Because of my work in community-controlled organisations I decided to study a Bachelor of Social Work and then worked in the Australian Government welfare agency Centrelink and eventually returned to the university as a student support worker and lecturer in human services and social work. Both my formal study and work in universities have been a challenge for me as has been the case for many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with issues coming up along the way. A key issue I and others experienced both as students and staff in universities was navigating other peoples’ expectations of us and their limited or limiting understandings of our identities. Frequently, I also encountered overt and covert challenges to the roles that I played in my community in addition to my roles at the university. A lot of us come to university because we already have a role in the community in promoting health and well-being of our people. Our community wants us to come to university to “formalise” and upgrade our skills so that we can become qualified health professionals and return to support our people and communities. These community roles and expectations on us as students were most often not understood or even visible in the university setting.

While I don’t imagine that all Indigenous students come to university with the exact same life experience, motivations, or expectations as me, I know from recruiting and supporting
well over 500 Indigenous health students to attend university that our identities as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People – and their related roles and expectations – are a potentially significant part of whether and how we succeed in our studies. My PhD research hence formally investigates the phenomena I witnessed and experienced over many years working in universities. Specifically, it examined the significance of our Indigenous identities, and their related roles and expectations, on how Indigenous students experience their university study, relationships with academics, and their ultimate success and graduation as health professionals.

**Background to the research**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s health should be a major concern for all people living in Australia. We need to consider the historical factors that have influenced poor health to understand why Indigenous health has deteriorated to where it is today. Before 1788, when the British came to set up a penal colony in Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were living in this country for tens of thousands of years. We had well-established lifestyles, farming, navigation, culture, lore, and different nations with set boundaries all through the land now called Australia. Each nation had their language, laws, stories, family kinship networks, diets, health processes, farming, hunting and fishing practices in place (Corporal, 2007; 2017; Holt 2014; Huggins & Huggins, 1994; Nugent, 2015). There were many different language groups with even more dialects throughout the land with different estimates of Aboriginal people from 300,000 upwards before the arrival of the British (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey & Walker, 2010).

This was not a perfect lifestyle as these groups still had to manage issues within their clan groups and respect each nation’s boundaries. For example, you would need a message stick or permission to pass through another people’s Country (Holt, 2014; Nugent, 2015; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Indigenous society was “communal, led by Elders with strong kinship
bonds” (Holt, 2014, p. 116). Navigating these kinship bonds required deep knowledge of past and present relationships to others and to the land. Indigenous stories have forever explained how the land came to be shaped and inhabited, how to behave and why, and where to find certain foods. For a living culture based on spirit of place, a major part of maintaining culture and therefore caring for place is the continuation of the oral tradition that tells a story (Holt, 2014; Janke, 1998; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003).

The invasion of Australia to establish a penal colony and subsequent stealing and enclosures of land for colonial economic gain through farming and mining contributed to the genocide of many Aboriginal people through organised frontier warfare as well as introduced diseases (Dudgeon et al., 2010; Nugent, 2015). After being forced from their ancestral lands, many Aboriginal people tried to mix in with the colonisers however their cultural understandings were different and led to many becoming fringe dwellers surviving on the scraps of the colonial establishment while fighting to preserve their own cultures. Some Aboriginal people voluntarily adapted to colonial life. Formally we were seen as a “dying race” by the colonial government and this view was manifest in policies of continuing forced displacement, dispersal, assimilation, and so called “protection” of Aboriginal people (Dudgeon et al., 2010).

When Australia became a nation at federation the states and territories were responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the introduction of legislation and policies. These Acts existed in all states and territories of the newly formed Australia such as the Queensland Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (AIATSIS, 2008). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were rounded up and put into reserves and missions run by protectors nominated by the government. These included police and church officials. The aim was to protect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and allow them to die out peacefully. However, when they did not seem to be dying out, the policies shifted to the aim of assimilating them into the wider Australian society. The protectors that were put in
place had complete control over every aspect of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s lives. Once put on the missions or reserves the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were only allowed rations with a minimal amount of traditional foods.

The children were separated from their parents, males and females were separated into dormitories. Once old enough people were sent out to work as domestics or labourers; they were only allowed low education (e.g. grade 4); not allowed to own land; not allowed to buy or sell without permission; not allowed to handle their own money; not allowed to marry without permission; made to stay in poor accommodation and not allowed to travel freely without permission (Corporate 2017; Hegarty, 1999, 2003; Holt, 2001, 2014; Kidd, 1997, 2006; Reynolds, 2000, 2001; Rosser 1978, 1985, 1994). It was a form of cultural genocide that contributed to wiping out kinships, language and cultural processes (Dudgeon et al., 2010; Reynolds 2000, 2001). Throughout the time of these Acts there was a lack of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was not possible for them to access education to provide for their own health care as health professionals. As the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity (2003, p.4) states “without self-determination it is not possible for Indigenous Australians to fully overcome the legacy of colonisation and dispossession”.

**Policy and health service responses**

Historical factors of dispossession, separation, isolation and assimilation contributed significantly to the poor health status and life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that change came about regarding Aboriginal people’s health in Australia at the national level. There was an increase in the number of experts involved with the delivery of health services, lobbying and policy making from the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS). The ACCHS’s were primary health care services controlled by elected boards of management from the local Aboriginal community.
The Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) was established in the 1970s as an urgent response to provide appropriate, accessible health services for the growing and mainly medically uninsured Aboriginal population. The ACCHS created a peak body called the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation (NAIHO) in 1976, which became the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). Many progressive government officials and other health professionals were attracted and joined the fight for better health for Aboriginal people. With this came the issue of the Aboriginal community-controlled health staff from ACCHS’s and NAIHO developing effective working relations with government departments and having access to expert advice with the control of Aboriginal health being with Aboriginal people (NACCHO, 2014). Self-determination is a guiding principle used by Aboriginal people to deal with bureaucratic and occupational relationships that influence how ACCHS’s operate (Anderson, 1999). This quest for self-determination is an ongoing issue for Indigenous people and is seen throughout Indigenous health.

The National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) (1989) highlighted self-determination of Aboriginal people who showed leadership during the bringing together of Indigenous community leaders, representatives from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, health experts and progressive government officers to form the NAHS working party which included two Commonwealth representatives, eight state government representatives and nine Aboriginal Community representatives. The NAHS (1989) was established to bring together information regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health confirming that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and life expectancy was far worse than the rest of the Australian population (NAHS, 1989). Raising the standard of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health to levels equivalent with that of other Australians has been on the agenda for many years.
In order to make improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, the NAHS (1989) made various recommendations such as who should be responsible for Aboriginal health and the roles of State, Commonwealth and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services. In addition, they made recommendations regarding: health services infrastructures; training and education; inter-sectorial collaboration, Health Services in the Torres Straits (specifically health issues: mental health, dental health, sexual health, women’s health; Aboriginal health research) as well as deciding who was responsible for monitoring and evaluating it all (NAHS, 1989). Though there was some progress in cultural awareness training of non-Indigenous staff through training such as Binan Goonj, the NAHS Evaluation (1994) found that little had changed in relation to the aforementioned NAHS (1989) recommendations.

**Health workforce: successful and unsuccessful**

The NAHS (1989) put forward a strong argument that primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be transferred to Community Controlled Health Services. Further, the NAHS recommended that such services be provided with appropriate funding to attract and retain staffing that delivered adequate, appropriate and equitable service provision. NAHS also stressed that non-Indigenous health educators and professionals needed to develop cultural awareness so that emerging generations of Indigenous health workers would have culturally safe training and employment opportunities (NAHS, 1989).

In 2000, the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH) established the Indigenous Nursing Education Working Group (INEWG) to work on a project to increase the number of registered Indigenous nurses and improve the competency of the Australian nursing workforce to deliver appropriate care to Indigenous people. The INEWG consisted of representatives from the Australian Council of Deans of Nursing (ACDON) and the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses (CATSIN). The INEWG released the *Gettin em n keepin em* report in September 2002 and highlighted that Australia’s attempt to
reduce the gap in Indigenous people’s life expectancy was a failure, considering the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was still at least 19 years less than other Australians (INEWG, 2002). The same report points out that the morbidity and mortality rates of Indigenous people in the United States, New Zealand, and Canada have decreased over the past two decades due to investments in Indigenous nurses’ education as well as the establishment of cultural awareness and cultural safety training for all health professionals (INEWG, 2002, p.79).

West, Usher and Foster (2010a) have also found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses have played a crucial role when it comes to role modelling culturally suitable care for non-Indigenous nurses working with Indigenous patients. Ring and Brown (2003) argued that there needs to be an acknowledgement of the contribution made to the health workforce by Indigenous practitioners. These staff are trained primarily in the Western model of healthcare delivery nevertheless the health and medical professions are enriched by their valuable cultural insight and community grounding. Ring and Brown (2003) further suggest that if governments really want to see positive change and progress in Indigenous health, they need to make a cross sectional commitment to do away with barriers of political vagaries, election cycles and racism.

More recently, the ‘Close the Gap’ initiative (2010), Health Workforce Australia (2011) and the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (2008) have reinforced that Australian universities should implement a range of strategies to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the health sector. As of September 2011, there were 153 Indigenous doctors and 218 Indigenous medical students according to the Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand collection of data on Indigenous status from each Australian medical school’s student enrolment forms (AIDA, 2011). During that same year of 2011 there were larger percentages of all employed nurses and midwives (0.8%) who provided their Indigenous status
which may have contributed to the increase to 2,212 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives employed in Australia (AIHW, 2012a; AIHW, 2012b; AIHW, 2012c; AIHW, 2012d). In 2013 AIHW reported that the medical profession still had low numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors with only 0.3% in the total medical workforce in Australia (AIHW, 2013a). Just a note that low numbers have not changed much over the years with only 450 Indigenous doctors in 2019 which is less than 0.5% of the more than 100,000 registered practicing doctors (AIDA, 2019; Scopelianos & Docherty, 2019, April 26).

Furthering on from this there have been two major strategic frameworks that have been introduced to support health policy by the Commonwealth Government in Australia. The first of these is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework (2014), which was introduced to support universities to implement Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health curricula in health programs. It was developed with input and guidance from many Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders around Australia to ensure health profession graduates provide culturally safe health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Australian Department of Health, 2014). Let us hope it will also provide a culturally safe environment for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying as well.

The other major strategic framework that has been introduced is the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework (2016-2023) which is spoken of as “a mechanism to guide national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce policy and planning” (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Working Group, 2017, pg.1). It was developed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Working Group (ATSIHWWG) which included the Health Workforce Principal Committee of the Australian Health Ministers’ Advisory Council with input from key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health stakeholders. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework (2016-2023) has been developed from the
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023 that expects to deliver “clinically appropriate care that is culturally-safe, non-discriminatory and free from racism, high quality, responsive and accessible for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Working Group, 2017, p.2). The intentions of these strategic frameworks are positive, and we look forward to seeing them achieve their goals as they are in line with this research.

**Introducing the key concepts of identity, roles and expectations**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, in my work as a student support officer, social worker, and academic, I observed issues surrounding Indigenous students’ identity, and related roles and expectations, as key factors that affect their success at university. Before undertaking this study, I explored the existing academic literature on identity, roles, and expectations to determine the relevance of a PhD study focused on such elements of the student experience. Chapter 3 explores this literature in detail with reference to existing relevant theory and concepts related to identity, roles, and expectations. I will briefly discuss here, though, what I mean by identity, roles, and expectations and how they relate to Indigenous health student’s success at university.

**Identity**

Identity is different for everyone but is essentially the answer at any given point in time to the question “who am I”? Identity is dynamic and can change over time. It has both personal and public dimensions that are in dialogue with one another (Bell, 1973, 1988; Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2007). We cannot separate our sense of identity from the relationships, roles, and settings we inhabit across various parts of our lives (Bell, 1973, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Youngblood 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Corporal, 2017). Critical race theory also emphasises the political and contested dimensions of our identities as members of stigmatised and systematically excluded social groups (Bell, 1988;
Huggins, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Valencia, 2010). In this way, members of some groups have to fight for “ownership” over their identity amidst powerful external constructions of our identities that are often negative, archetypal, or stereotypical. In my experience, and as will be shown in later chapters, this is certainly the case for Indigenous students at university.

Identity can be a double-edged sword for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It can, for example, provide strength through shared connections to family, community, culture, and Country and support to resist negative experiences and stereotypes. Identity, can, however, be the basis upon which students experience racism, social stigmatisation, stereotyping, exclusion, and other phenomena such as “white fragility” (Green, Russ-Smith, & Tynan, 2018), “white paralysis” (Tolich, 2002), “white possessiveness” of the academic space (Moreton-Robinson, 2015) and low expectations of their intelligence and ability to complete their studies (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Riley, 2019). Huggins and Huggins (1994) suggest that Indigenous people and their world views and contribution to society are invisible in Australia. In Canada, Youngblood (2000) also found that Indigenous students do not see themselves portrayed anywhere. Hence, it is important for us to ask how Indigenous students experience their identities at university and how it effects their studies and lives. Do academics see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the higher education system? Or are they invisible to them because they lack knowledge of their cultural background, where they come from and their history? What effects might this have for Indigenous health students, the Indigenous health workforce, and, ultimately, the health and well-being of our people?

**Roles**

Roles are often related to our identities. Roles determine the ways we interact with others in terms of our behaviour and our self-perceived or imposed social responsibilities. Some roles are structurally and functionally defined and seen as structured or formal, such as the role of “student”, “Elder in residence”, “tutor”, or “Professor” (Biddle 1979; Biddle & Thomas, 1966;
Biddle, 1986; Turner, 2001; Lemay, 1999). Other roles are symbolic interactional roles which are sometimes seen as more non-structural or informal, such as the role of a mentor, supporter, carer, colleague, friend, or devil’s advocate (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Hardy & Conway, 1988). A lot of non-Indigenous people in universities – and outside them – see Indigenous people as having only symbolic interactional roles which appear non-structural or informal such as a “leader”, “supporter”, or “mentor”. Whilst there are many symbolic interactional roles of Indigenous people interacting with people, the environment and place (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Biddle, 2003), many non-Indigenous people do not fully understand the important structural/functional (formal) roles we hold in our cultures, families and communities. In denying these structures and the roles assigned within them, non-Indigenous people are maintaining ignorance, and hence structural invisibility of Indigenous knowledges and related roles, protocols, lore, governance, education, and kinship systems that have developed and survived/thrived over millennia (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, 2015; Rigney, 2001). Students may feel conflict between the Indigenous knowledges they have experienced, and the knowledges being taught to them in university, particularly in cases where Indigenous knowledges are not respected or sometimes even acknowledged at all. At other times, academics can put Indigenous students in the role of “teacher” where they are inappropriately expected to know about and educate others on Indigenous issues, cultures, and knowledges.

Changing or merging roles can be a significant stress point for both Indigenous students and academics in university. There can be a significant conflict or challenge in shifting roles for example from being a respected community health worker to being an undergraduate student (Goffman, 1959). There can also be role strain between existing roles such as parenthood or Elderhood and the workload and politics of being a student who is positioned as being at the bottom of the academic hierarchy of [white] knowledge (Hardy & Conway, 1988; Home, 1999). In undertaking a role as student and “future” professional, students can also experience strain
from family and community members who may accuse the student of being “too good for us”, “big noter”, or a “coconut” (brown on the outside and white on the inside) (Hardy & Conway, 1988; McGraw, 2018. In contrast, some students feel a lot of pressure from their families and communities to be the saviour and role model for others. Indigenous students and academics can also feel pressure to ignore their existing community and family roles and related responsibilities and see them as less important than, for example, getting assignments done on time, doing research, or publishing papers (Hardy & Conway, 1988; Home, 1999; McGraw, 2018). These are all examples of the ways that roles and related responsibilities can really affect Indigenous students’ experiences and success at university.

**Expectations**

In this thesis, I talk about expectations as a personal and social phenomenon that sets a standard, goal, or template for individual and collective behaviour and achievement. We can have expectations of ourselves or of others but the two are very related. Our expectations of ourselves will be shaped by the social settings and cultures we inhabit over time. An important part of expectations in relation to Indigenous students is that people can have both high and low expectations of you as a student. Expectations of Indigenous students emerge strongly from their families, communities, universities, and society at large. Often, others’ expectations of Indigenous students are falsely informed by deficit and racist thinking (Valencia 2010). Such negative expectations can unfortunately be internalised as stereotype threats and affect Indigenous students’ sense of self-esteem and confidence and expectations for themselves (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Low expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and the resulting internalising of such expectations, have been previously discussed using the concept of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy (SFP) which argues that teachers may base their expectations of certain groups of students on a false statement arising from their own bias, stereotype or racist
view of that student (Merton, 1968; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Riley & Pidgeon, 2019). I explore this further in Chapter 3.

More than potentially any other students, Indigenous students are expected to choose degrees and careers that will directly help their communities. Students may also experience high expectations from family, community members and co-workers to be the first in their family to get a Bachelor, Masters, or PhD degree or to be a role model for other community health workers. Such expectations are often tied to roles as discussed above and the way that history has affected Indigenous families. Sometimes, academics either deliberately, or through ignorance, see Indigenous students as “just like any other student” which also affects expectations upon them.

**Research approach**

**Aims and objectives**

Within the above contexts, the aims of my research are to:

1. Examine the ways that identity, roles and expectations shape the experiences and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students at university;

2. Identify the ways that university lecturers’ knowledge and awareness of Indigenous identities, roles, and expectations shape Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students’ experience, retention, and success;

3. Develop holistic and evidence informed recommendations to promote positive experiences and success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students.

**Research questions**

To achieve the above aims, I answered three core research questions:

1. What do teaching health academics know about cultural identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their classes?
2. How do these students’ roles in their communities relate to their new and emerging roles in the university?

3. What expectations do lecturers have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

**Methodology and methods**

I employed an Indigenous Research Methodology (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Rigney, 2001; Smith, 2013) to conduct the research. This approach privileges Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in research design, data collection, and analysis. Data collection consisted of 27 semi-structured in-depth interviews (17 students, 10 staff) within a Health Faculty at one urban Australian university. I employed Indigenous protocols for engaging with all participants – such as exhibiting respect, yarning, and identifying yourself e.g. culturally and geographically – throughout the research process. Participants were recruited using the purposive sampling method fully outlined in Chapter 4 Methodology. The resulting participants included: Six Indigenous students studying the first year of their degree; Seven Indigenous students studying the final year of their degree; Four Indigenous students who had left their degree prematurely; 10 teaching academics who taught first year courses in health degrees. Participating students were studying social work, nursing, medicine, psychology and exercise science in one urban university in Australia. Staff participants were from social work, medicine, nursing, dietetics, and psychology. Semi structured interview questions were developed from the study’s conceptual-theoretical framework introduced fully in Chapter 3 Theoretical Frameworks and the research questions. I as an Indigenous researcher analysed data thematically using NVIVO 12. A full account of the research methodology is provided in Chapter 4 Methodology.

**Overview of chapters**

Chapter 2 Literature Review gives an overview of current scholarly literature relevant to my research objectives and aims. I review Australian and international literature relating to
Indigenous health, Indigenous health workforce development, experiences and retention of Indigenous students at university, and the nature and impact of interactions between Indigenous students and teaching academics on Indigenous student experience and success. I conclude Chapter 2 with an analysis of the gaps in current literature and how this study can contribute.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Frameworks describes the theoretical framework for the study which involved a new combination and application of identity, roles, and expectations theory and concepts to Indigenous higher education. The application of non-Indigenous theories in combination with Indigenous methodologies has been well established in the literature (Dunbar, 2008; Simonds & Christopher, 2013). I draw on existing literature from all three areas to develop a new, deeper, and more comprehensive way of thinking about and responding to the experiences of Indigenous students undertaking health degrees. In the area of identity, I draw primarily on Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1988; Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2007). In the area of roles, I draw on Role Theory including symbolic interaction and structural roles (Goffman 1959; Biddle, 1979; Mead 1934; Biddle & Thomas, 1966; Biddle, 1986; Turner, 2001). In the area of expectations, I draw primarily on Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Theory (Merton, 1968; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). When combined, the three areas provide a new awareness of issues that are often important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but sometimes invisible to others.

Chapter 4 Methodology outlines the methodology and methods used in the research. I first present Indigenous Research Methodology as the overarching research approach. I then describe the processes of research ethics, participant recruitment and selection, in-depth interview, and thematic data analysis. I conclude the chapter by introducing the structure for the subsequent three data analysis chapters.

Chapter 5 Findings I – Identity is the first of three findings chapters. Each findings chapter describes the major themes and subthemes identified in the data and related to the
overarching theoretical framework of identity, roles, and expectations. The findings chapters privilege participant voices and provide related analysis. The sub-themes under the major theme of identity explored in Chapter 5 relate to: cultural background; place; kinship; racism; colour; and academic awareness of student cultural identities.

Chapter 6 Findings II - Roles is the second of three findings chapters. The sub-themes under the major theme of roles are: connection to identity; family commitment; community roles; transition between community and university; university roles; leadership roles; and health professional roles.

Chapter 7 Findings III - Expectations is the third of three findings chapters. The sub-themes under the major theme of expectations include: achieving goals, bettering yourself, high expectations, students perceptions, academics perceptions, same as others, and low expectations.

Chapter 8 Discussion will synthesise findings and discuss their implications. I begin by briefly reiterating the goal of the research, literature presented, research questions and methodology. I provide an overview of findings by discussing the key meta-themes emerging from the research.

Chapter 9 Conclusion starts off with my personal narrative of the process of this study and why this research was important for me as an Aboriginal male as well as everyone involved in the Indigenous health workforce and education systems in Australia. I summarise key findings and make recommendations for higher education decision makers, Indigenous people and other non-Indigenous people within the Indigenous health workforce and higher education systems. I finish with limitations and concluding remarks.

Conclusion

In conclusion this chapter has established the background and rationale for the study and outlined the need for research and higher education opportunities that support Indigenous workforce development. I outlined my own history of engagement with this topic and my observations
about Indigenous student identity, roles, and expectations arising from over 30 years’ experience as a community based social worker, university student support worker, and teaching academic. The chapter provided an introduction to the study’s key concepts of identity, roles, and expectations and outlined the study objectives and research questions. I also gave an overview of the remaining thesis chapters to provide a good map of the territory you are about to encounter.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Summary

This chapter reviews relevant scholarly and grey literature relating to Indigenous health workforce development in Australia. I focus in particular on Indigenous student experiences at university and, where possible, the specific experiences of Indigenous health students. It is important to include both scholarly and grey literature in this review to map the major developments in Indigenous health workforce development and community voices that may be expressed outside of peer reviewed academic sources.

Introduction

There has been a proliferation of literature on Indigenous health generally and, to a lesser extent, the development of an Indigenous workforce through tertiary education. In this chapter I present the literature review approach used in the study and the key outcomes, learnings, and questions arising from the literature review process.

Literature review approach

In keeping with the dialogic and storytelling aspects of Indigenous Research Methodology, I have conducted ongoing and iterative waves of literature review to support the study. Rather than pre-fabricate a list of strict and often Westernised inclusion and exclusion criteria – as are commonly used in “systematic” literature reviews – I allowed the outcomes, learnings, and
questions arising from each wave of review to guide me to the next important body of knowledge. I also did not pretend that I began the literature search with no knowledge. I have worked and developed knowledge as an Aboriginal social worker, support worker, and lecturer at universities and been a board member of several Aboriginal-led community welfare organisations. In some cases, I have even contributed to the literature I was reviewing. This does not mean that my literature review was improperly subjective, unsystematic, or partial. Rather, it was grounded in my knowledge and allowed me to follow the tracks of others’ stories and contributions: the purpose of my literature review has been to reveal the many and overlapping stories of Indigenous health and health workforce development and allow them to inform my own understanding and this study. Across all of these waves of literature review I focused primarily on Australian sources for two reasons: i) Australian Indigenous peoples’ experiences and our cultural settings are unique, even though we share some “global” experiences of Indigeneity and colonisation with other countries and peoples; ii) there is a massive amount of literature on Indigenous health internationally and it is beyond the scope of this study to review this vast body of knowledge with the respect and care it deserves.

The first wave of literature review looked at the nature of Indigenous health in Australia. Before I could find out what was happening specifically for health students at universities, I had to consider why we want to train Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be health workers in the first place. I hence reviewed literature on the state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. This led me to a bulk of literature on the need to reduce the “gap” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people’s health and accounts of major national health strategies such as the NAHS report described in Chapter 1. The NAHS report specified the need for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and community workers to undertake formal studies to become qualified in Western systems as doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and so on. Such developments expanded the focus on graduating Australian
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors and other health professionals. This literature clearly showed that major Indigenous-led reports recommended development of an Indigenous health workforce to promote culturally safe health care and associated outcomes in Australia. I collected scholarly and grey literature included in this first wave of review from Government websites, the major health professional peak bodies in Australia, and the Griffith University library. Examples of keywords for searches included: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; health; Indigenous health; Indigenous health workforce; Indigenous nursing; Indigenous doctors; and Indigenous allied health.

The second wave of literature review focused on literature specific to what was happening for Indigenous students generally in universities. The existing literature showed that there was limited participation in university by Indigenous people and that issues such as attrition and cultural safety were emerging for students who did participate. I especially looked for literature that documented experiences for Indigenous health students. I also searched the literature to find any mention of the effects of academic staff members’ Indigenous cultural awareness due to the NAHS Report’s previous finding that Indigenous students were experiencing culturally unsafe spaces and at times overt racism in university classrooms which was affecting their participation and success. I found that authors from some disciplines, such as nursing and medicine, were far more vocal in speaking about Indigenous student experiences and success than others such as dentistry or social work.

I located literature for the second wave of review by searching relevant government websites and reports that publish Indigenous student participation rates and success at university. I searched the Griffith library holdings for any scholarly research relating to Indigenous students’ participation and success in higher education. I used Google to find community authored reports or statements that related to Indigenous students’ experiences of university level study. I did not include any articles or reports relating to school level students due to my study’s focus on
university study. I prioritised scholarly and grey literature relating to Indigenous health student higher education and training but did review research about other disciplines when it appeared to be relevant to my study. Examples of keywords used in wave two searching included: higher education; university; Indigenous student(s); participation; retention; recruitment; success; resilience; health disciplines; medicine; nursing; psychology; physiotherapy; allied health; social work; and dentistry.

I conducted the third wave of literature review during the final analysis and write up phases of my study. The purpose of this final wave was to update my understanding of the literature specific to Indigenous health student participation and success factors at Australian universities. I searched for articles published over the past five years to make sure I understood contemporary literature that could work in dialogue with my final analysis and recommendations. I conducted an online search via Griffith University Summon database using the following keywords: Indigenous; students; university; Australia; and health. Articles were filtered to only display those published in the past five years and that included journal articles, books, ebooks, and reports. Search results were displayed in order of relevance and I selected the top relevant sources for detailed review.

**Outcomes, learnings, and questions arising from the literature review**

Outcomes from all three waves of literature review are presented under the headings below.

*The nature of Indigenous health and national responses*

During the 1970’s and 1980’s Indigenous health in Australia became a national priority. Major initiatives such as the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) report discussed in the previous chapter emerged during this time. By the 2000s, Australia had moved toward a national priority to ‘train up’ existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers in terms of formal qualifications and attract more Indigenous young people into the health workforce. In the
higher education sector, strategies have often focused on the retention of Indigenous students at university. To date, it appears that the focus on training and education of the Indigenous health workforce calls for a combination of cultural awareness training of non-Indigenous health professionals, the education and training of Indigenous health workers in their current roles and creating career pathways for Indigenous people to enter university and complete programs in Health especially in Nursing and Medicine. Despite Indigenous people comprising the majority of spaces within these committees, the control of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce National Strategic Framework appears to still be with the government officials. The health and education sectors were encouraged to work closely together to address the Indigenous health workforce by working in collaboration rather than leaving this onerous task with the Indigenous units within the universities. This was proposed to the NATSIHC in 2004 by DEST who went on to say that, “care must be taken not to teach from a cultural deficit model, where it is often presumed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their worldviews are lacking” (p. 9). Instead, cultural understanding models, where teaching for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is the norm, should be encouraged (NATSIHC, 2008).

In 2008, the National Indigenous Health Equality Council (NIHEC) was established and highlighted two key issues that needed addressing in relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical workforce development. First was the undersupply of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors, and second, that all medical graduates learn the skills, knowledge and attributes to provide appropriate health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities (Anderson, Ewen & Knoche, 2009). That same year, one of the infrastructure targets recommended from the “Close the Gap” campaign (National Indigenous Health Equality Summit, 2008) was about building the Indigenous health workforce and including a National Training Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors, nurses, allied health workers, dentists, and Aboriginal Health Workers. Also recommended was recruitment and retention;
training programs for non-Indigenous health workforce; National Network of Health Centres of Excellence for services, teaching and research; and appropriate cultural awareness training programs for non-Indigenous people in the health workforce (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2008). While the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors had slowly grown to 100 medical practitioners and forty medical specialists by 2006, they only represented two percent of the total Australian medical practitioner population. While this increased slightly in 2008 to 125 Indigenous graduates with 125 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students in training, much of the work to increase Indigenous medical practitioners and students had come from the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) collaborating with the Combined Deans of Australian Medical Schools (CDAMS) and the Commonwealth Government (AIHW, 2008a; AIHW, 2009a; AIHW, 2010a; Anderson et al., 2009). In the nursing profession there was a slight drop in 2008 with 1,598 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employed nurses, which may have been due to only 0.6% of nurses identifying their Indigenous status (AIHW, 2010b).

The ‘Close the Gap’ initiative (2010), Health Workforce Australia (2011) and the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (2008) continually reinforced the concept that Australian universities should implement a range of strategies to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the health sector. As of September 2011, there were 153 Indigenous doctors and 218 Indigenous medical students according to the Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand collection of data on Indigenous status from each Australian medical school’s student enrolment forms (AIDA, 2011). During that same year of 2011 there were larger percentages of all employed nurses and midwives (0.8%) who provided their Indigenous status; this may have contributed to the increase to 2,212 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives employed in Australia (AIHW, 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2012d). Despite this, the
medical profession still have low numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors with only 0.3% in the total medical workforce in Australia (AIHW, 2013a).

In 2013, The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework: Queensland Government Report reinforced that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were still significantly under-represented in the health workforce” and noted that, “improving the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in tertiary education for health-related disciplines is critical to increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the health workforce, and creating a workforce better capable of working with Indigenous Australians to improve health” (AIHW, 2013b, p 137).

**Indigenous Health Professional groups support for students**

The Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses & Midwives (CATSIN&M) started in 1996 to help increase the numbers of Indigenous Nurses and Midwives as well as keeping them in the profession. Sally Gould was one of the founding members of this group and nurses are one of the highest numbers of Indigenous single professions in Australia (Indigenous Nursing Education Working Group, 2002; Goold & Liddle, 2015). CATSIN&M have an annual conference to bring together their members as well and many of the student members (Goold & Liddle, 2015).

The Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) started in 1997 in Newcastle when a few Indigenous medical students who graduated came together to support other Indigenous medical students going through the higher education system as there were very few Indigenous students within the schools of medicine at the time (AIDA, 2011). AIDA have a regular conference each year that brings together the Indigenous medical graduates and students. The main focus of bringing them together is to facilitate support of the medical students through the higher education system at each of the universities, encourage them to be strong with their cultural identity and give them direction through the education system for their chosen field of
practice in medicine (AIDA, 2011). Members of AIDA founded a conference called Pacific Region Indigenous Doctors’ Congress (PRIDOC). PRIDOC was started to bring together the Indigenous doctors within the Pacific Region to discuss how they could help their Indigenous people’s health improve and how they can increase the numbers of Indigenous medical practitioners in their countries (AIDA, 2011).

AIDA was also influential in developing the Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) to increase Indigenous curricula within the schools of medicine in Australia and New Zealand as well and setting out the pathways for Indigenous students. The University of Melbourne was used as the base for Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME). The first conference was held in Melbourne and is rotated around Australia and New Zealand every two years. This conference is important as it supports students to maintain their cultural identity and the discussions of pathways helps students understand the transition of roles into medicine. The inclusion of curricula reinforces that Indigenous identity and education should be made more visible within the university system. Further, raising awareness of Indigenous students within the schools of medicine have the tendency to make lecturers more aware of their subliminal expectations of different groups of people including Indigenous students, rather than having the same expectations of all students equally (Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education, 2020).

The Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) was established to increase the Indigenous Allied Health Workforce in Australia. IAHA includes many allied health professions including social work, psychology, occupational therapy (OT), physiotherapist, as well as dentist. IAHA have been working on cultural competency to ensure that all allied health workers are able to provide culturally safe practice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people including the ability to work alongside the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health professionals that graduate and may work with them and in their practice. IAHA have been running the Indigenous Student Fusion Challenge for a couple years to encourage Indigenous
allied health students to continue their studies and network with other Indigenous allied health students throughout Australia building them up to work within teams of interdisciplinary health professionals to address health issues in various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In doing so IAHA is directly contributing to building up the Indigenous Health Workforce and supporting Indigenous health professional students throughout their courses at university (Indigenous Allied Health Australia, 2019).

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers Association (NATSISHWA) was established in 2009 to give a professional recognition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were working in positions within the health services including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health services throughout Australia (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association, 2016). The training of these health workers is usually at certificate level courses at Government TAFE or Registered Training Organisations (RTO’s) established within community organisations. Many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers have gone on to further studies at University to become specialised health professionals including doctors, nurses, dentists, social workers, psychologists, etc (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association, 2016).

The peak bodies of AIDA, CATSIN&M, IAHA and NATSIWA are all working together with both graduates in practice and student members within universities to increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Professionals. Many of their strategies and publications/literature mention that the interaction between academics and Indigenous students is important in areas such as identity, roles and expectations. They talk about how many students have said they have experienced racism or have felt out of place studying at university and that there needed to be more Indigenous content in the curriculum and more Indigenous academics in their schools and faculties (AIDA, 2011; Goold & Liddle, 2015; National
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association; 2016; Indigenous Allied Health Australia, 2019). The peak bodies also recognise that the Indigenous students support units at the universities provide much needed support to the students when they are transitioning from the community to university. This support from the units helps Indigenous people with understanding, transitioning and taking on board the role of being a health professional student within the higher education system. The peak bodies are aware that many academics may have low expectations of students and support how the Indigenous units provide tutoring to Indigenous students to raise the level of academia of the students that may have come in through the Indigenous pathways. This playing catch-up with Indigenous students can add to non-Indigenous academics already low expectations of Indigenous students because of who they are as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Each of the peak bodies have introduced mentorship programs where graduate Indigenous health professionals provide mentoring to Indigenous health students. This provides a culturally appropriate person that the Indigenous health student can identify with to help them increase their academic knowledge and navigate the university system. This takes away any assumptions the student may hold of themselves believing that others may have low expectations of them being from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage (AIDA 2011; Goold & Liddle, 2015; National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association, 2016; Indigenous Allied Health Australia, 2019).

**Indigenous student participation and success rates at Australian universities**

Reports by the Department of Education, Science and Training [DEST] (2004) indicate that Indigenous students continue to have high attrition rates and high rates of failure to complete within the tertiary system (NATSIHC, 2008).

Statistics related specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners in health-related fields revealed that in 2006, nursing was the most common type of health-related course in which Indigenous undergraduate students were enrolled or had completed nationally
(AIHW, 2008b; AIHW, 2008c). It should be noted that while 460 students enrolled, only 48 students were registered as having completed the program (West et al., 2010a). That same year, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) noted that Indigenous students continue to have high attrition rates and high rates of failure when it came to completing programs within the higher education sector. The Council also, noted that in the first year of study, attrition rates amongst Indigenous students are 39% higher than for non-Indigenous students. In 2007, the number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander employed nurses increased to 2,164 employed nurses (AIHW, 2009b). Newcastle University, reported as one of the most successful universities having graduated more than 51 Indigenous medical doctors, also reported having had a 25% non-completion rate during the first 15 years of its program while James Cook University only retained 25 of 29 students using hard line entry processes which selected and nurtured the best students (Lawson et al., 2007). This highlights the difficulty of aiming for high completion rates for Indigenous students within universities.

The background paper by Pechenkina and Anderson (2011) entitled, ‘Indigenous Australian Higher Education: Trends, Initiatives and Policy Implications’ prepared for ‘The Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People’ discussed how, while the number of Indigenous students at universities had increased, the issues of retention remained problematic. Like much of the previous research had already stated, the paper encouraged increasing the numbers of Indigenous staff, including more Indigenous curriculum, and providing more cultural awareness training to non-Indigenous staff as possible initiatives to remedy the problem. The paper also demonstrated that completion numbers and completion rates are two different ways of measuring students and have the tendency to vary according to universities. While some universities recruit and enrol low numbers of students and have high completion rates, other universities have low completion rates but recruit and enrol high numbers of students (Pechenkina & Anderson, 2011). In the paper,
Pechenkina and Anderson (2011, p 9) provide Table 1 below to illustrate that while there was one university with a relatively high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander completion rate, most universities remained below 60 percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Average Indigenous completion rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
<td>80.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>University of Sydney</td>
<td>59.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Monash University</td>
<td>58.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
<td>56.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Australian National University</td>
<td>55.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Macquarie University</td>
<td>51.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Curtin University of Technology</td>
<td>50.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
<td>47.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>University of Technology, Sydney</td>
<td>45.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Flinders University of South Australia</td>
<td>44.68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Top Ten Australian Universities ranked by average Indigenous completion rates 2004-09

Pechenkina, Kowal & Paradies (2011) in (Pechenkina & Anderson, 2011) observe that findings such as this indicate that despite the efforts made by Australian universities, the state of Indigenous education remains in crisis. They note “based on the analysis of Indigenous student data in higher education, Indigenous institutional outcomes can be categorised crudely (with a couple of exceptions) into two categories: those with high enrolment and low completions and those with low enrolments and high completions” (p. 1). In addition, “The IHEAC” highlights that while the retention rate for first year non-Indigenous students is 79.2 percent, Indigenous students are estimated to be only at 67.6 percent. According to this, one in three Indigenous students drop out compared to the one-in-five for all non-Indigenous students (IHEAC, 2011, p. 4). More recently the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy First Annual Report was released highlighting some achievements in relation to increase in Indigenous students’ enrolments and completion rates. However there still needs to be improvements in the Indigenous students’ retention and completions (Australia Universities, 2017; Australia Universities, 2018).
Indigenous student enrolments have more than doubled (102.7 per cent) from 9,490 students in 2008 to 19,237 students in 2017. Despite this growth, the share of Indigenous student enrolments increased more modestly – up from 1.3 per cent in 2008 to 1.8 per cent in 2017 (Figure 2). It remains below population parity of 3.1 per cent.

![Figure 1 Indigenous student enrolments, 2006 to 2017](image)

Source: DET 2018, Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student Data

**Field of education**

Compared to non-Indigenous students, Indigenous students are more likely to enrol in courses related to Society and Culture (33 per cent), Health (22 per cent) and Education (14 per cent) and less likely to enrol in Management and Commerce (10 per cent), Natural and Physical Sciences (6 per cent) and Engineering (3 per cent) (Figure 3).
Indigenous Award Course Completion and Completion Rates

Since 2008, Indigenous award course completions have continued to increase year-on-year, consistent with the growth in Indigenous enrolments. Indigenous undergraduate award course completions increased 78 per cent, from 996 awards in 2008 to 1,774 awards in 2017; while postgraduate award course completions rose 89 per cent, from 399 in 2008 to 753 in 2017 (Figure 4).
Nonetheless, bachelor’s degree completion rates for Indigenous students remained poor compared to non-Indigenous students. While Indigenous students typically can take longer to graduate, nine-year completion rates for Indigenous students remains around 47 per cent, significantly below 74 per cent for non-Indigenous students (Australia Universities, 2018).

“However, retention rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, while increasing (up from 69 per cent in 2009 to 71.2 per cent in 2014) remain well below all domestic students (79.9 per cent in 2014)” (Universities Australia, 2017, p.25).

The Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy have identified common responses to surveys that try to address completion and retention rates. Their discussion indicates there needs to be “strong partnerships with local Elders and community; outreach programs; enabling courses; dedicated Indigenous centres; fostering culturally safe environments; dedicated tutorial assistance; pastoral care and access to specialist advice; and scholarship support” (Universities Australia, 2018, p22).
**Indigenous health students’ experiences at university**

Toombs and Gorman (2010) found that Indigenous people have many additional obstacles to overcome in comparison to their non-Indigenous peers when studying at university. Such obstacles include Indigenous historical and cultural issues of missing Country and family, historical family separations, health issues, and sorry business. Without understanding and support from university staff, Indigenous students have to overcome these difficulties alone (p. 15). When universities fail to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners in tertiary courses, learners are more likely to drop out and, as a result, are more likely to experience financial problems, poor health, isolation from others of a similar culture, racist attitudes, stereotyping, and insufficient support (West et al., 2010a, p.126). In addition, non-Indigenous students may also suffer when Indigenous peers leave programs early. West et al. (2010a) argue that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses have played a crucial role when it comes to role modelling culturally suitable care for non-Indigenous nurses working with Indigenous patients (p.128).

Over the last decade there have been programs set up in health faculties to work alongside Indigenous units within universities. One strategy that has been used to increase the number of Indigenous students is the implementation of “Indigenous pathways”. Indigenous pathway strategies have been used over the last couple of decades to assess students’ ability through a range of criteria. Criteria may include: a short essay on why the student wants to study medicine; an account of whether they want to work in their community; an outline of what work have they done in community; references from Elders in community; rather than reliance on academic scores alone (MDANZ & AIDA, 2012). Another strategy has been the use of personal contact establishing collaborative relationships and understanding between support and academic
staff towards the students. The understanding is that since Indigenous students are sometimes confronted with personal, family, and community matters that may impact their academic performance, and these are not always fully recognised or understood by academic staff, yet academic staff are also concerned that academic standards be maintained, a collaborative and understanding approach is necessary to reconcile these different viewpoints (AIDA National Medical Education Review, 2012).

**Significance of academic staff in shaping Indigenous student experience and success**

The significance of academic staff is of the utmost importance in shaping the experience and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the first year of studies and throughout until completion (AIDA National Medical Education Review, 2012). Many of these academics are non-Indigenous people who are from a white Anglo-Australian culture that dominates the Western biomedical model of care which is usually the invisible norm shaping the lives of all Australians (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). All academics teaching health related courses have the responsibility of educating the future health care workforce and ensuring graduates have the capacity to work effectively and respectfully in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health contexts (Universities Australia, 2017; Grote, 2008). The recent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework 2014 was developed to ensure that curricula are changed to be culturally safe for future health professionals engaged in Indigenous health (Department of Health, 2014). Nevertheless, the delivery of this curricula by non-Indigenous academics may not be culturally safe when teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students if racism is still present. Racism is a significant contributor to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ physical and mental health (Kelaher, Ferdinand & Paradies, 2014; Larson et al., 2007).

**Gaps in the current literature and how my study can contribute**

The aforementioned literature highlights that creating a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce is crucial when it comes to providing for the various health needs of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The literature also illustrates how universities play a major role when it comes to the education and training of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce particularly in disciplines such as nursing and medicine. Changes over the past three decades, however, have been insignificant in their impact on Indigenous health and its workforce.

There desperately needs to be more research to determine what practical strategies might be employed to increase and retain Indigenous learners. This is why a more nuanced understanding of precisely how academics (and the universities they represent), engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (and the communities they represent) is of utmost importance. The three areas that appeared throughout the literature were that of the importance of identity as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, the transition of the role in community to the role at university and the expectations of students by academics.

Identity was important because connection to family and community can be seen to provide support to a student’s sense of self, while negative stereotypes and racist attitudes within the university can be seen to negatively impact upon a student’s experience of identity. Roles were evidenced as important through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being seen as role models for other health professionals. In addition, transition pathways were important to ensure that students who have a certain role in the community were able to continue into a similar health professional career that enhanced that role, rather than discouraging them by not providing direction and support or enhancing the criteria to enter that particular health profession. The building up of collaborative relationships between support and academic staff to assist students suggests that academic staff may have had different viewpoints or expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students which disadvantaged the students or discouraged them from continuing studies. These are the three important issues of identity, roles and
expectations that were explored in this research regarding the interaction between the Indigenous students and academics.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion the Literature Review provided an overview of current scholarly literature relevant to my research objectives and aims. I reviewed literature relating to Indigenous health workforce development, Indigenous students’ retention and experiences at university, and support provided to Indigenous health students. I concluded the chapter with an analysis of the gaps in current literature and how this study can contribute.
Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework

Summary

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for the study, which draws on concepts of identity, roles and expectations toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. When combined, these three ideas provide a more holistic picture of issues that may be important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying at university. This study has sought to identify how students’ and academics’ experiences and knowledge of the identity, roles, and expectations held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may shape attrition, retention, and overall success. Adapting Western based theory in combination with Indigenous methods has been well established in the literature (See Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Although an area of contention amongst some writers it is acknowledged as legitimate and appropriate standpoint. This thesis does so through a critical theory lens as advocated by Dunbar (2008) when discussing the relevance and application of Critical Race Theory to Indigenous methodologies. The chapter draws on Critical Race Theory (Identity), Role Theory (Roles) and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy (Expectations) given the understanding that one single theory or philosophy cannot capture or respond to the complexity of issues and experiences facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today (Paradies, 2005).

Introduction

As indicated in Chapter 1, my focus on identity, roles, and expectations emerged from my professional experience as an Aboriginal social worker, student support worker, and academic in universities over more than 20 years. I had the privilege of working directly with more than 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who were undertaking professional health degrees in Australia. Given this experience, and indeed reflecting upon my own undergraduate and postgraduate study at university, I observed that identity, roles, and expectations were significant
factors that appeared to affect Indigenous students’ success and experiences at university. In some cases, these factors seemed to directly influence student attrition and retention either through a “critical incident” that occurred for a student or an accumulation of experiences over time.

For example, a psychology student I supported through work recalled to me attending a lecture that discussed the Cherbourg Aboriginal mission located north of Brisbane, Queensland. The student relayed that the lecturer and other students in the classroom were speaking in a deficit way about Cherbourg community members. Upset, the student I supported left the lecture thinking, “They’re talking about my family”. She expressed to me that her experience in this classroom greatly affected her decision to discontinue her study. Through this research, I wanted to explore how such experiences affect Indigenous students and the degree to which the actions and behaviours of academic teaching staff may influence the learning experiences of Indigenous students.

I have drawn on established critical race theorists (Bell, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Youngblood 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2000) and role theorists (Goffman 1959; Biddle, 1979; Mead 1934; Biddle & Thomas, 1966; Biddle, 1986; Turner, 2001) to highlight why this issue is important. I have also drawn upon research in relation to teachers’ expectations and self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1968; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Jussim & Eccles, 1995; Rubie-Davies, 2018) to further explore how academic’s perceptions of Indigenous students may influence Indigenous learners’ sense of belonging within a university environment. Various research studies in Australia and internationally have noted that deficit perceptions of Indigenous peoples can lead to lower expectations of Indigenous learners (Riley & Ungerleider, 2009; 2012; Steele, 2007; Riley, 2019; Rubie-Davies, 2018.)

In addition, I have used role theory in relation to Indigenous education for this study. This has been particularly important for understanding the transition between community and
university for Indigenous students. There are many roles that Indigenous people have in communities that are invisible, misunderstood, or undervalued in a mainstream university setting. This has been my observation of my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ experiences as well as my own. Given this, I applied Goffman’s (1959) role theory to delineate further and identify the complexities of how such role divergences might affect Indigenous student experience and success.

I found it was essential to include all three concepts for the thesis to account for the complex experiences many Indigenous students navigate between community and university settings. When you enter the university as an Indigenous student, you already have roles in your community and are the subject of expectations from your community, family, and the wider society. These expectations can be both positive (e.g. being a family or community role model) and negative (e.g. the racist myth such as “you’ve gotten into university ‘easy’ because you’re Aboriginal”). Upon entering the university, you take on new roles in the university and community. These can include the roles of student, a future professional, as well as a community role model. If you identify yourself as Indigenous to others in the university setting, there can be an automatic lesser or different expectation of you based on broader societal racist, deficit, welfare, or “white privileged” ways of seeing Indigenous people (Huggins 1998, 1994; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Sarra, 2011). For example, Sarra (2011) noted in his study of white perceptions of Indigenous peoples that the perceptions are particularly deficit thinking oriented that establish a self-fulfilling prophecy dynamic which is explored later in this chapter. In self-fulfilling prophecy Indigenous students take on what they think other peoples’ expectations are of them as Indigenous people that further reinforces the negative stereotypes of deficit thinking of non-Indigenous people.

In this chapter I first introduce my understanding of identity drawing on critical race theory. I then discuss role theory in relation to Indigenous student’s experiences at university.
Finally, I examine theory that is concerned with the expectations of Indigenous students with a focus on self-fulfilling prophecy.

**Identity - Critical Race Theory**

In this section I will present Critical Race Theory (CRT) which guided my inquiry around identity. I will start by defining what CRT is and where it originated and who are the main theorists relevant to education. I then discuss how CRT was used in this research to ask questions about what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and academics know about the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within their university.

**Definition**

The key ingredients in racism are power and prejudice, which include overt and covert acts of exploitation and oppression of individuals in institutions and society to exclude or devalue them due to appearance, culture and language (Quinn, 2003). Many countries around the world that are colonised by white European people are socially constructed as white societies which privilege and enforce the superiority of whiteness (Youngblood, 2000). Scheurich and Young (1997) argue that all forms of racism are atrocious, yet they may not always be seen. People may behave in ways that are racist or discriminatory without knowledge or intention because they are unaware of the biases they hold. Dominelli (2000) states that, “racism is product of social relations which are organized on the basis of the imputed superiority of one race over another with the presumption that the allegedly superior race can dominate or otherwise oppress the other” (p.142).

Critical Race Theory has been defined by many theorists and researchers over the years. The early definition of CRT by Bell (1988) and Delgado (1989) identifies that race differences do exist, and it usually benefits the white races in western society. Ladson-Billings (1998) affirms that CRT is a social justice framework that can be used to critically identify and
analyse racial assumptions often embedded in mainstream views of education. In recent years the same definition has continued with Milner (2007) talking about how CRT examines how culture or race is overlooked in favour of the dominant European or western culture. CRT is important when doing research in relation to race and culture within perceived homogeneous or white societies because it emphasises the importance of acknowledging one’s biases, views, and perspectives while providing and giving voice to silenced, misinterpreted, misrepresented and marginalised people (Milner, 2007).

**Origins of Critical Race Theory**

CRT came into being as a theory in the USA during the 1970s when the advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had slowed down, and there was a recognition that new approaches to address racism were required. African American legal scholars argued that discussions of race and racism within American society was left out of legal studies’ critiques and needed to be included in order to provide different outcomes (Crenshaw, 1988). Critics of the legal system argued that while cases were following the usual legal power authorities that were in place in the USA, they were not giving a much-needed diversity of outcomes to Black Americans. In response, African American scholars such as Bell (1992) came up with a plan to “focus more on a much narrower challenge to the principle of racial equality” through the development of a “legal and social mechanism on which blacks can rely to have their voice and outrage heard” (p.364). CRT was developed as a result to help theorise the debates and discussions around race and racism. Bell (1992; 2008) referred to CRT as ‘Racial Realism’ with the notion that racial equality is difficult to achieve because society has been based upon a foundation that privileges white people and western ways of knowing. Feminist scholars and activists also contributed to CRT through identifying power relationships within social role construction and different forms of dominance through societal forms and traditions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).
CRT theorists such as Bell (1988) and Delgado (1989) argued that racism cannot be easily eliminated because it is an entrenched societal issue rather than an isolated individual experience and that racism in America was deeply engrained and institutionalised in legal and other social systems (Harris, 1993). Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) a famous Black African American academic and activist describes the power of institutionalised and dominant western white ways of seeing that dominate black lives in terms of identity, roles, and expectations with the following recollection:

One of the nice perks that comes with these lecture “gigs” is a decent hotel. This one was no exception. My accommodations were on the hotel’s VIP rooms equipped with special elevator access key and private lounge on the top floor overlooking the city. As I stepped into the elevator, I decided to go into the VIP lounge, read the newspaper, and have a drink. I arrived early, just before the happy hour, and no one else was in the lounge. I took a seat on one of the couches and began catching up on the day’s news. Shortly after I sat down comfortably with my newspaper, a White man peeked his head into the lounge, looked at me sitting there in my best (and conservative) “dress for success” outfit with high heels and all and said with a pronounced Southern accent, “What time are y’ all gonna be servin’ ? (p. 8).

Ladson-Billings retells this story to demonstrate how storytelling in and of itself is an aspect of critical race theory and because, as she later reflects, “this particular story underscores an important point within the critical race theoretical paradigm, i.e. race [still] matters” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 8).

Kitchen, Cherubini, Trudeau and Hodson (2010) state that a version of CRT called Tribal Critical Race Theory developed by Brayboy (2005) has been used within higher education. Tribal Critical Race Theory offers Indigenous people culturally appropriate methods of identifying as Aboriginal people and telling their stories while critiquing the approaches that
were used to belittle and assimilate them into western society (Brayboy, 2005). This is especially helpful for Indigenous people worldwide whose identity and voices have often been overshadowed by colonisation.

**CRT in Australia**

Theorists such as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000, 2004, 2007, 2015) and Jackie Huggins (1994, 1998) have applied CRT to research the ways that Australian Aboriginal people have been negatively portrayed in education and other social institutions. They identify in particular how white people have gained and maintained dominance from this portrayal. Moreton-Robinson and Huggins observe that in colonial versions of Australia’s history, Aboriginal people are often positioned as ‘other’ in relation to the European people who colonised Australia. Such positioning was intentional to secure the colonisers’ position of dominance within the Country.

As indicated in Chapter 1 Introduction, there is a long history to the deficit positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia based on conceptions of race. Early European visitors to this continent failed to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were “one of the most longstanding and successful civilisations in the world history” (Sculthorpe, Bolton, & Coates, 2015, p. 13). Perhaps because it was completely different to European cultures of that time, Settlers found it difficult to understand. Sculthorpe et al. (2015) note that, “Equating civilisation based on buildings, writing and metals, these visitors failed to appreciate a civilisation based on skilled land management techniques with profoundly philosophical religion and rich artistic and ceremonial life” (p. 13). This sustainable way of life so closely attuned to the land and sea was impacted when the British prison system became overcrowded and the British were no longer able to send people to North America (Sculthorpe, 2015).

Influenced by a sense of superiority arising from Social Darwinism, the British colonisers who were sent to set up a penal colony at Botany Bay in 1788 believed that the
Indigenous people were not as human as the settlers themselves and had no prior system of ownership or governance within Australia (Gilbert, 2001; Ritter, 2009). The land was seen as *Terra Nullius* or “no man’s land”, which could be colonised and used, as they wanted (Connor 2005; Ritter, 2009). This view was so engrained in the European thinking of settlers that colonies soon spread all over Australia without consideration of the Indigenous people (Sculthorpe, et al, 2015).

Pearson (1996) argues that racism towards Indigenous peoples originated from the notion of Social Darwinism, which supported the idea that Indigenous people were not “developed” as were other people, thus the myth of *terra nullius* (Best, 2018). From the settlers’ arrival, British policies were contradictory towards Indigenous people. While colonisers were advised to treat people with amity in relation to their land, the settlers made no provision to buy land. The policies of protection turned to punitive expeditions and martial law towards Indigenous Australians (Connor 2005; Ritter, 2009; Reynolds, 1996; Wilson, Thomson & McMahon, 1996; Nugent, 2015; Sculthorpe, Bolton, & Coates, 2015).

**Race and CRT in educational institutions**

Today, the universities that were first introduced during the time of segregation and The White Australian Party, continue to have low numbers of Indigenous lecturers. Youngblood (2000) likens such institutional racism and invisibility to the theory of “diffusionism”. Diffusionism is part of Eurocentric ideology that falsely divides the world into two categories: European and non-European. Based on this false binary, diffusionism assumes that all worthwhile, creative, innovative, and ‘superior’ ideas, practices, and goods come from European origins and that non-European “others” can only be passive recipients of such “gifts” from European sources (Battiste, 2005, p. 124). Diffusionist thought does not recognise the value and history of non-European cultures and peoples, which is a key element in the devaluation of First peoples’ knowledge, science, and history. Nakata (2002) challenges the idea of the European-Non-
European dualism using the concept of cultural interface. Cultural interface refers to the intersection of Indigenous and Western domains, a place where Indigenous people live at the interface of both domains. Indigenous people bring traditional knowledges with them from before European contact to inform how to think, act and do western ways. The cultural interface is thus a complex intersection that many find difficult to navigate (Nakata, 2002).

Despite the work of Indigenous scholars, white superiority and dominance continues to be shaped by Eurocentric and diffusionist ideology. As Youngblood (2000) states, “When professors describe the world, they describe artificial Eurocentric contexts and ignore Aboriginal world views, knowledge and thought. For most Aboriginal students, the realisation of their invisibility is similar to looking into a still lake and not seeing their image” (p. 76). Critical Race Theory (CRT) has hence been utilised to relocate the Indigenous voice and identity in the higher education system since it has been previously overlooked in favour of the dominant Eurocentric voice.

**Relationship to study**

International research continues to show the importance of having Aboriginal students, faculty, and staff see themselves in the curriculum, policies, and practices of an institution in terms of recruitment and retention (see for example, Archibald, Pidgeon & Hawkey, 2009; Archibald & Bowman, 1995; Pidgeon, 2008a; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Pidgeon, 2008b, p. 10). Extending on such research which has been at the macro level, I apply CRT at a more personal micro level to explore the ways in which academics view the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the university in comparison to the non-Indigenous students. In addition, I spoke to Indigenous health students to determine how they view their own identity and how they perceive the university academics see the identity of Indigenous health students.
Roles – Role Theory

In this section I provide a definition of role theory, provide historical background on role theory, and present the different components of role theory that apply to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

**Definition**

Role theory has emerged as a sociological perspective that theorises how people act at individual and collective levels within society and communities. There are five main perspectives on role theory, which are functional, symbolic interactionist, structural, organizational, and cognitive role theory (Biddle, 2003). In this research project I focus on two of the main perspectives of role theory: symbolic interactional and structural role theory. Structural or functional roles are viewed as fixed positions or structured roles in society with certain expectations and requirements that may be positively or negatively enforced by sanctions (Stryker, 1980; Cornwell et al., 2016; Turner, 2017). Symbolic interactional roles are seen as the role a person has when interacting with other people, the environment, and place (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Hardy & Conway, 1988; Goffman, 1959). Symbolic interactional roles are non-structured roles where people respond to people, environment, and place in ways that they understand what is being interacted to them (Blumer, 1969; Biddle 2003). These symbolic interactional roles are viewed as being non-structured within western society as opposed to structured/functional roles which are seen as structured as they as viewed as being part of a recognised structure or function. The health roles that Indigenous people perform in their communities is many times not recognised as structured or formal by western society but more seen as symbolic interactional or non-structural or informal (Rose, 2014; Corporal Sunderland, O’Leary & Riley, 2020).

Further aspects of role theory drawn upon in this research and related to structural and symbolic interaction are role stress and role strain. Role stress is seen as being related to tension, distress, poor job performance and limited organisation involvement (Hardy & Conway
1988; Home, 1999) whereas role strain is when an individual struggles in their ability to meet all of their work obligations and perform at full capacity in more than one role (Hardy & Conway 1988, McGraw, 2018). I feel that these are the most relevant aspects to focus upon when considering what roles Indigenous people have within their communities and within the university itself because they usually have to juggle the roles such as cultural, parental and employment roles that they have in the community with the student role required at university. While this is true for all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, western society values university in the context of “getting ahead” as an individual which may put pressure on them to defer their role as a parent or employee for the period of study (Apple, & Apple, 2018; Anyon, 2006; Corporal, et al, 2020). Within Aboriginal communities, the role of student is often taken on for the “good of the community” rather than the individual. Therefore, the role of student is not valued more highly than the role of community member.

**Origins of role theory**

The term roles originated from the phrase “to roll” which referred to the process of rolling up paper scripts for actors in theatre plays. Different “roles” were then allocated to different actors within the play (Goffman 1959; Biddle, 1986; Turner, 2001). Actors would perform a “role” before an audience, meaning that they would act in a certain way in a certain situation with other actors who were also playing other roles outside of personal character. Role theory has evolved from being seen as roles on a stage to early theorists researching “the ways we interact with others in terms of our behaviour and our self-perceived or imposed social responsibilities” ( Corporal, Sunderland, O’Leary & Riley, 2020, p. 3).

George Herbert Mead (1934) is seen as one of the founders of symbolic interaction and viewed roles as the coping strategies that individuals enact as they interact with other persons. He spoke of the need for understanding others’ perspectives (‘‘role taking’’) as a requisite for effective social interaction. Mead (1934) argued that in order to communicate
effectively, people must be able to anticipate how their symbolic gestures (including physical behaviours) will be interpreted by others. Mead observed that people were not independent by themselves but interacted with other people, objects, and places and that this then led to people having a social role within society.

While Mead (1934) started the discussion about role theory, Blumer (1969) was the theorist that classified the interactions between individuals and other people and the environment as “symbolic interaction” (Carter & Fuller, 2015). Goffman (1959) also plays a prominent role in the development of “role theory”. One of his ideas is that of a “dramaturgical analogy” of the stage play which uses the analogy of theatre to describe how people may see themselves in everyday life and how their interactions may shift with other people depending upon whether they are ‘backstage’ at home or are ‘front stage’ at work (Goffman, 1959).

The structural/functionalism perspective of role theory had its beginnings with theorists such as Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Merton and Parsons (Cornwell et al., 2016; Turner, 2017). Structural/functionalism as described by Durkheim considered that roles and statuses are like organic parts of a body that are characteristics of the division of labour, meaning that you are described by the role or status you play as a part of an institution or society (Hardy & Conway 1988). As described by Parsons structural roles are assigned to individuals as part of a social system where there is interaction between actors who have certain structured roles that are associated with specific actions (Cornwell et al., 2016). This reinforces how structural role theory focuses more on the individual’s place within a social structure than how the individual interacts or behaves with others (Turner, 2001; Cornwell et al., 2016).

The origins of role theory also include the origins of role strain and role stress which have been mentioned by many of the founding research such as Mead (1948), Goffman (1959), Blumer (1969), Goode (1960), Biddle (1979),and Hardy & Conway(1988). McGraw (2018) defines role strain as individuals having difficulties fulfilling their roles and role stress results
caused by such stressors as time pressure, heavy workloads, and relationships that are related to the individual’s role. In recent years Home (1997) and McGraw (2018) have researched role strain and role stress in relation to university students highlighting the relevance of these elements to this study.

Roles in Australia

Before the arrival of the British to set up a penal colony, the roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were developed over many generations and were entwined with their cultural identity and specific expectations due to protocols and world view (Holt, 2014; Nugent, 2015; Corporal, 2017). Many of these roles have included Indigenous people in health and leadership such as traditional healers who provided for the health care needs of their cultural groups (Holt, 2014; Nugent, 2015; Corporal, 2017). However, many of the traditional roles that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have played within their communities have shifted since colonisation. Colonising policies (e.g. Assimilation Policy; White Australia Policy) have subjected Indigenous people to removals, segregation, and isolation, as Indigenous peoples were often labelled as the "other" (a term used to imply people were less human). In addition, Indigenous peoples were often steered towards the Eurocentric education system which only allowed them to go up to grade 4, meaning that the only labour positions available were subservient roles such as the maid, cleaner, labourer and yardmen (Huggins & Huggins, 1996, Rosser, 1997, Hegarty, 1999; 2003, Holt, 2001; 2014; Kidd, 1997; 2006). Any roles outside of low-skilled occupations were deemed only for non-Indigenous people.

Various research documents pertaining to the social determinants of health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (i.e. Fisher, Battams, McDermott, Baum & MacDougall, 2019) continue to report that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still more likely to have low education and lower employment than their non-Indigenous peers (Walter & Saggers, 2007; Hunter & Daly, 2018). Some researchers (Hunter, & Daly, 2018;
Altman, & Hunter, 2018) argue that the education and employment roles that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have within Australia are still on the lower end of skills and education levels due to the various advantages non-Indigenous peoples have accumulated over the years since colonisation due to (white) privilege and institutional racism (Paradies, 2007; Larkin, 2014). This has resulted in the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are seen as having mainly symbolic higher-level interactional roles within their communities yet having no structured higher-level roles within wider society (Larkin, 2014; Lahn, 2018).

**Roles in Educational Institutions**

Often universities tend to cater to a certain type of student. These are students within society that are often regarded within the school as highly academic (Wolff, 1992; Apple, & Apple, 2018). They are often trained by people familiar with university norms and values who assess them as being the “right type” of person to be a health professional (Wolff, 1992; Apple, & Apple, 2018). University academics and administrators may be unfamiliar with Indigenous forms of health care because they have only been taught, trained, and assessed through a Eurocentric framework (Taylor & Guerin, 2019; Rogers, 2019). In addition, Nakata (2000) points out that while there are ways of doing things within the western system that have originated from Indigenous ways of knowing, they are not always acknowledged so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students have limited opportunities to see themselves reflected in their studies. The roles are seen as symbolic interaction by non-Indigenous people and they only see the roles as structured/function roles within western society after the person has gone through the education or training within a western educational institution. Hardy and Conway (1988) define the differences between the two role perspectives as symbolic interactional being the individual having a mostly non-structural or informal role that interacts with others and the environment while the structural/functional role is the individual being part of a mostly formal structure or being functional as part of a structure.
In a university environment, the roles that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students play are usually regarded in much the same way as other students. The role of the student is to attend lectures and tutorials, complete readings, pass courses, and hopefully complete the degree once the basic requirements are fulfilled. However, when taking a more nuanced look at the multiple roles that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have in their lives, one can envision where tensions could arise as students attempt to navigate their multiple roles. For example, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are faced with the additional pressure of having to enact as role models for other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their families and communities while also potentially juggling between being parents and carers for their families. This may particularly be an issue in health professions such as nursing which have higher rates of women who often take on the carer role within their families and communities (McGraw, 2018). Their role as a mother is important as family responsibilities are seen as a priority in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Home, 1999; McGraw, 2018).

While this juggling of roles may be seen as similar to other non-Indigenous people, the issues related to the colonial history and white privilege disallowing opportunities in education leaves many playing catch up with less access to suitable education (see Moreton-Robinson, 2015). The combination of roles that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students play may lead to role strain and role stress (Hardy & Conway, 1988). Academics who have a better understanding of the different roles that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have at university, in their families and their communities may be able to accommodate and support their adjustment towards university life and studies.

Many Indigenous people struggle going from the roles in the community to the university because the colonial education system was not designed for Indigenous people to go onto higher studies but only do menial roles in society (Hegarty, 1999, 2003; Kidd, 1997; 2006).
Sarra (2012) argued that mainstream Australia have a negative stereotype perspective of Indigenous people which he experienced firsthand when he was trying to establish and change the low expectations and deficit thinking of teachers who taught Indigenous children at schools in Australia. Sarra (2012) set out to change the Cherbourg State school to build up the expectations of the community for children to get ahead in their studies by encouraging them to be stronger and smarter. The low expectations and deficit thinking of the community at the time were related to only seeing non-Indigenous people in higher roles and the consequent belief that ‘you didn’t need a proper education to do the menial roles in society’ (Huggins & Huggins, 1996). What Sarra saw was that the children were influenced by the teachers’ deficit thinking of them and he wanted to change this. Sarra (2012) also unpacks the notion of “crab in the bucket” that happened to him when he was trying to better the Cherbourg State school, he felt he was being pulled back into the bucket by other Indigenous people (Sarra, 2012, p.238). Deficit perceptions of the roles Indigenous students have may relate back to the menial roles that Indigenous people were given in society (Hegarty, 1999, 2003; Kidd, 1997; 2006; Rosser, 1997; Holt, 2001, 2014; Sarra, 2012). The roles that Indigenous people try to achieve through the education system will have these struggles of transitioning from the community to the university. As Sarra (2012) presents many of the people in the community have not had the access to the level of education required to complete the qualifications to be a recognised health professional in the community.

**Relationship to study**

Role Theory is used in this study to guide questions that relate to transitioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ roles from within their communities and families to that of the university sector. Many non-Indigenous people only see the roles Indigenous people have in the community as individual non-structural or informal roles of interacting with others and the environment around them as defined as symbolic interactional roles by role theorists (Goffman,
1959; Blumer, 1969; Rose, 2014). Nevertheless, many of these symbolic interactional roles (non-structural or informal) are considered important health roles in the community (Rose, 2014). These roles that Indigenous people play in the community will often only be seen as structured/functional roles or formal roles within the structure of western society (i.e. Doctor, Nurse, etc.) when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people go through the western university system (Hardy & Conway 1988; Rose, 2014). Because many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not see themselves reflected in the university system (Youngblood, 2000), this may impede upon their ability to obtain a role as a health professional. Role theory provides a foundation for the questions to further explore the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students view themselves and the roles they play and whether or not academics recognise the complexity of these roles within their teaching.

**Expectations – Expectations Theory**

In this section, I will present expectation theory which guided my inquiry around expectations in relation to the study. I will begin by defining expectations, where the theory originated and the relevant theorists. I will discuss how expectations are viewed in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian and education context. Finally, I explain how expectation is related to this study research.

**Definition**

The definitions of expectation that relate to this study include “Pygmalion”, meaning if someone believes something strongly enough it becomes true in their minds (Chang, 2011); “self-fulfilling prophecy” being a false statement about a situation or a group of people which conjures new behaviours that creates the false statement to become real (Merton, 1948, Riley & Ungerleider, 2012); and finally “stereotype threat” which is a situation where an individual has a fear that
their behaviour is at risk of confirming the negative stereotypes of their collective group (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, 1997).

**Origins of Expectation Theory**

The history of expectations in relation to self-fulfilling prophecy was first called the Pygmalion effect on the basis of a Greek myth which tells a story of a sculpture artist who created a female sculpture that was so beautiful that he wanted her to come alive. Because his belief was so strong, she eventually did just that (Chang, 2011). In short, “the Pygmalion effect” describes when a false situation is made true through the power of belief.

In 1948, American sociologist, Robert Merton renamed the Pygmalion effect as “self-fulfilling prophecy” which he described as a “false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come true” (Merton, 1968, p. 477). Merton (1968) explained the use of this theory with a fictional run on banks which means many people raced to withdraw their saving deposits because they heard falsely that the banks were going into solvency. Merton’s example illustrates how individuals can make fictional scenarios into reality given their perceptions or beliefs. Merton noted the role that “self-fulfilling prophecy” could potentially play towards the creation of inequitable societies as he observed that deficit statements made about certain groups of people could create a situation where the situation was actualised if only due to the groups not receiving the additional support, resources, or opportunities because of these deficit perceptions (Merton, 1968; Riley & Ungerleider, 2008).

An early study of self-fulfilling prophecy in relation to education is Rosenthal and Jacobson’s (1968) experiment on teacher expectations in the classroom. Rosenthal and Jacobson administered an IQ test to elementary school children and informed teachers that the test would be a reliable predictor of which children would ‘bloom’ (demonstrate rapid intelligent development in near future). The teachers were given the names of twenty learners anticipated to be bloomers. These twenty names were randomly selected and there were no actual IQ
differences between bloomers and non-bloomers. Despite that, the “bloomers” outperformed the “non-bloomers” indicating the power of perception. The Rosenthal study have provided the foundation for numerous studies regarding how one’s expectations may influence and/or change a person’s behaviour.

Brophy and Good (1970) completed a study of four first grade teachers’ class behaviour towards low and high achievers in their classrooms. This study did not find any difference in the time teachers spent with low and high achievers. Nevertheless, the study suggested that during this time teachers engaged less with students perceived as low achieving than with high achieving students. This ensured that high achievers continued to achieve high success and low achievers continued to struggle slowly to progress through their studies (Brophy & Good, 1970). They noted that, “teachers’ expectations affect the way they [teachers] treat their students and over time the way they treat their students affects the amount the students learn” (p 67).

Jussim and Eccles (1992; 1995) are more recent theorists who have conducted many research studies that included self-fulfilling prophecies and stereotypes in the education system. A study by Jussim and Eccles (1992) used longitudinal data relating 98 6th Grade mathematics teachers' expectations of 1,731 students' performance. This study’s findings highlighted teachers’ expectations may influence students’ performance and the teachers own judgement of the students’ performance. There was also gender bias in the findings of teachers perceiving males were better at maths however females were perceived as trying harder. The findings show the connection between expectations and stereotyping in education (Jussim & Eccles, 1992). Another study of Jussim and Eccles (1995) analysed data of 100 teachers and 2,600 students from the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions Project, relating to social, psychological, demographic, and achievement-related variables. The teachers perceived females perform slightly higher and try harder than males even though both were evaluated the same as
having natural talent in maths. Middle class students’ performance, talent, and effort were perceived more favourable than lower class students by teachers. There were mixed results about ethnicity with white students being perceived more favourably in integrated districts by teachers. Nevertheless, there were no perceived differences between African American students and White students in the segregated districts seen by teachers (Jussim & Eccles, 1995). Teacher expectations may predict student achievement because they correspond to actual differences amongst the groups of students however, there are implied stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies (Jussim & Eccles, 1995).

More recently in New Zealand, theorist Rubie-Davies (2018) has been researching expectations in education and has found that a student’s ethnic background may influence a teacher’s expectations that in turn may affect the student’s achievements. Some of Rubie-Davies early research was conducted at schools in Auckland, New Zealand. The participants were made up of 21 primary school teachers and 540 students from different cultural backgrounds of 261 New Zealand Europeans, 88 Maoris, 97 Pacific Islanders and 94 Asians. The results revealed that teachers’ expectations for student reading was higher for all the groups except for Maori students. The Maori students’ reading was the same as other students at the start of the year but had made minimum gains by the end of the year. The teachers were seen as having lower expectations of the Maori students’ achievement in reading than other ethnic groups. Studies such as this provide some indication that teachers’ expectations of achievement may be based upon factors such as a student’s race or ethnicity (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006).

Similar studies have also taken place within Australia. For example, an Australian study of 55 experienced teachers, 144 training teachers and 516 school students by Dandy, Durkin, Barber, and Houghton (2015) revealed that expectations of Aboriginal students was lower than non-Indigenous students for ability and effort in maths and English. Another study by Riley (2019) that included 46 teachers in Queensland, Australia found that some teachers were
surprised when Indigenous students exceeded expectations in their studies. The research also found that some teachers were hesitant to place Aboriginal students into advanced classes because of negative assumptions regarding the students’ life circumstances or lack of family support. Such studies indicate how teachers’ perceptions, assumptions, and stereotypes, may limit the opportunities of Aboriginal students.

*Expectations in Australia*

Historical factors require consideration in relation to the formation of the expectations people have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Since the European invasion of Australia, non-Indigenous people have had expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that were largely informed by Social Darwinism that “provided support for the notion that some races and cultures were superior, while others were inferior” (almost non-human) (Nugent, 2015; Corporal, 2017). The prevailing belief in racial ‘survival of the fittest’ was widespread, and many people believed that Aboriginal people were ‘the missing link’ and would soon die out” (Best, 2018, p. 120). While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were provided opportunities for low-paying menial work, they were denied opportunities or access into positions that would involve intellectual work or leadership and management roles within society (Rosser, 1985; Huggins 1998; Hegarty, 1999; Huggins & Huggins, 2008; Kidd, 1997, 2006; Nugent, 2015). While perhaps not as overt, the lower expectations European invaders once had of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ identity and roles continues to infiltrate into contemporary society as indicated by various educational research studies (Sarra, 2012; Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2000; Dandy, Durkin, Barber, & Houghton, 2015; Riley & Pidgeon, 2019; Riley, 2019).

Such studies indicate that educators, even with the best of intentions, may make decisions that negatively impact their Indigenous learners based on false beliefs about ability, effort, life circumstances, and family background. In addition, discussions regarding authenticity
and legitimacy can rear their ugly head in surprising and unexpected ways. For example, there remains the notion that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be dark in order to be considered “authentic”. There are derogatory claims that Indigenous peoples only identify for “benefits” which leads towards some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students not receiving the resources, support, and funding they may need for fear of being labelled as “taking advantage of the system”. Some students may not want to receive assistance because they feel it is being forced upon and that it is being given in a condescending or patronising manner (Steele, 1997; Plater, 2013, Riley, 2019). The expectations academics hold of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the expectations these students hold of themselves is linked to their identity and the roles that they play.

**Expectations in educational institutions**

Reports (Hall & Wilkes, 2015; Jacob, Raymond, Jones, Jacob, Drysdale, & Isaacs, 2016; Trudgett, 2009; 2011) have found that some Indigenous students felt more culturally safe within the Indigenous units as they provided them a place that they would not have to deal with issues regarding their cultural identity, the complexities of the roles they have within the university and their community, and the expectations held about themselves from lecturers, peers, and themselves. While there is a lot of pressure for Indigenous students to progress through university, research has demonstrated that there also can be lower expectations that impede upon their success.

Perceptions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are lacking in ability or have various background issues to overcome are all factors Indigenous people may have to routinely navigate. Mainstream stereotypes such as notions that Indigenous peoples are welfare recipients who have low skills and education and are lazy and unclean, may lead towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feeling apprehensive about the perceptions held by their lecturers and non-Indigenous peers of Indigenous peoples (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012).
This can result in “stereotype threat”, situations where people have fears that their behaviours risk appearing to confirm the negative stereotypes of their particular group (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Given this, it is clear that the expectations of others about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or even more simply the perception Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have of others’ perceptions of themselves, can either make them or break them. How strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ self-perceptions may be will often relate to their identity and roles they play within their community, family, and university environment (Riley & Pidgeon, 2019). Aboriginal people are largely a communal group (Fejo-King, 2013: Corporal et al., 2020) and the expectations they hold of themselves may feasibly relate to the group or community from which they are from and whether or not they are following in the footsteps of that group or trying to rise up from that group and be a role model for other community members.

Indigenous people tend to benefit from mentor relationships where they can rely on the teacher or the person in authority to show them the way (Sarra, 2012). If the expectation appears low, the student may feel like they have failed or they may feel shamed (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Dunstan, Hewitt & Tomaszewski, 2017; Riley, 2019). If the person acting as a mentor or educator does not recognise this, or has unchecked biases in relation to Indigenous peoples’ ability or background, or takes a “colour blind” approach towards education, they may risk giving the student the impression that they don’t belong in a university environment. There needs to be efficient processes for addressing stereotyping of students in the classrooms by ensuring academics are aware of decisions they are making regarding students, and that these decisions are not discriminatory or racist (Gillborn, 2006).
**Relationship to study**

The concept of “self-fulfilling prophecy” and expectation theory in my research was used as a way to question how the perceptions of university health faculty academics may influence Indigenous students’ achievement as well as their behaviours within the classroom. The concept of “stereotype threat” was also used to consider how mainstream perceptions of Indigenous peoples may influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ perceptions of their ability to achieve within a university context. Finally, they were used as a further catalyst to investigate how lecturers understanding (or lack of understanding) of Indigenous ways of knowing may influence their expectations of and behaviour towards Indigenous students.

**Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the theoretical framework for the study which draws together three concepts of identity, roles, and expectations to form a holistic picture of Indigenous students’ experiences at university. These theoretical concepts are allied to the epistemology of Indigenous Research Methods. Together this has shaped the research methodology for the study.
Chapter 4 - Methods

Summary

This chapter details methods, including participant recruitment and selection and data collection processes. The overarching research methodology was Indigenous Research Methodology which enabled me to develop rapport with participants and employ Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in my research. I discuss ethical considerations of the study at the conclusion of the chapter.

Introduction

Existing research indicates that historical factors have contributed to the health issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There is clear evidence that colonisation and discrimination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has contributed to a paternalistic history of their employment and education as health professionals. There is also a clear call from both governments and communities that more people are needed in the Indigenous Health Work Force to ensure the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are met. Successive health reviews and policies have indicated that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be trained as health professionals in medicine, nursing and allied health professions. Existing research, however, shows that the attrition rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners have been high within universities and that while universities have attempted to confront this through the establishment of Indigenous units, more work needs to be done.

The literature review for this study indicated that more research is needed to determine strategies to increase and retain Indigenous student enrolments. The means to avoid reproducing institutional racism and dominance of western white ways of seeing, being, and doing in education is discussed in the Theoretical Framework proposed in Chapter 3. We need to
employ research methodologies that privilege Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Hence, my study employs an Indigenous Research Methodological approach. This chapter presents an overview and rationale for the research methodology and design. The chapter outlines the ethics, participant criteria, data collection process and data analysis.

**Indigenous Research Methodology**

The study was guided by Indigenous methodologies as a proper protocol of engagement with the majority of participants who were Indigenous (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). As an Indigenous researcher this is of the utmost importance because Indigenous people have been left out or not considered or not had their voices heard throughout previous research, when they have been consistently treated as the objects of research (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). Indigenous people’s voices and their culture were central to this research and as an Aboriginal researcher I wanted their voices to be heard. The cultural safety and cultural humility aspects of using Indigenous methodological protocols combined with the overlapping of western and Indigenous knowledges provided a safe space for the non-Indigenous participants within the interviews (Morseu-Diop, 2010; Martin, Nakata, Nakata, & Day, 2017; Nakata, 2002).

In keeping with the Eurocentric and diffusionist ideology discussed in Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework, most social theories and theorists were seen as universal and were perceived as such with no critique up until the 1970s. All but few of these theorists were of western European origin and male. This one-sided view of the world was ignorant of who the actual knowledge producers were and are internationally. The theorists whose work is taught in most western universities are essentially all white middle and upper class European or North American males (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). These western perspectives employ a deficit model especially with groups that are not white (Valencia, 2010). Hence, much research conducted in universities has taken a dominant Eurocentric and diffusionist standpoint which further devalues and “invisibilises” Indigenous and others’ (e.g. Asian and African)
epistemologies and ontologies (Rigney, 2001). In North America, Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) proposed the four R’s of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility as guides in whose purpose research may serve. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold different ontological understandings of the nature of reality than dominant western researchers and their western norms (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Rigney, 2001).

Indigenous researchers in Australia and elsewhere (see for example Battiste, Youngblood, & Henderson, 2005; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Rigney, 2001) have highlighted that Indigenous people have been over researched by non-Indigenous researchers as part of the colonising processes to control, create deviance and dehumanise the Indigenous people as the ‘other’. The concept of the ‘other’ refers to Aboriginal people in Australia and other colonised countries that are presented to the white world by researchers as the black ‘other’ or objects of research. In addition, throughout history, research has been conducted about Indigenous by non-Indigenous researchers who have neglected to consult with communities first in order to determine if their research is either necessary or respectful.

Some researchers (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2005; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 1997; Smith, 2013) argue that research need not only be for social scientific exploration. These researchers suggest that there should also be meaning or purpose behind the research and that the research should be conducted with the intention of an outcome that will benefit society, particularly those being researched.

The aforementioned researchers go on to suggest that non-Indigenous or Eurocentric research methods need to be consistently challenged and changed by Indigenous people researching Indigenous people through the use of Indigenous methodologies. As an Indigenous researcher I am aware that I need to be respectful, responsible and relevant to each different Indigenous individual, family and community. I need to show humility and patience as well as
let people know of my connection to place and Country. This is showing that I am not just doing research for research sake in an over researched area of Indigenous studies, as stated by Smith (2013), but allowing the voices of the invisible people to be heard and their ontology to be respected.

According to Rigney (1999), Indigenous methodology advocates that, “Indigenous peoples’ interests, knowledge and experiences must be at the centre of research methodologies and construction of knowledge about Indigenous peoples” (p. 119). Researchers working with Indigenous peoples and communities are expected to be culturally respectful in that they are willing to understand and learn more about the communities they are working within as well as acknowledging and respecting the Indigenous peoples within that communities’ ways of viewing the world. As an Indigenous researcher, I have ensured that my research was guided by the following principles of relevance, respect and responsibility, patience and humility and connection to place.

**Relevance, respect and responsibility**

Porsanger (2004) states that, “the main aim of Indigenous methodologies is to ensure that research on Indigenous issues can be carried out in a more respectful, ethical, correct, sympathetic, useful and beneficial fashion, seen from the point of view of Indigenous peoples” (p. 105). For example, Martin & Mirraboopa (2003) suggested the concept of “Booran Mirraboopa” (Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being, and Ways of Doing). She suggested that when researching Indigenous issues, the researcher needs to be sensitive, understanding and respectful of the Indigenous worldview and the protocols associated with that worldview such as, acknowledging traditional ownership and engaging in relationships with the particular community members or committee that you are researching.
Patience and humility

Morseu-Diop (2010) notes that respect, humility, and patience are three key elements that underpin Indigenous research methodologies. She highlights that patience is necessary when using Indigenous research methodologies because at “times you will feel like you are just treading water” (2010, p. 92). While you may want the process to speed up, it is essential to show perseverance such as when engaging with Indigenous people and community while also ensuring that feedback is provided to them. As an Aboriginal researcher, I still have to follow the protocols required when introducing myself to Elders, community members, and Indigenous students and staff within the university. Respectful interactions using culturally appropriate ways may help to strengthen my relationships with my Indigenous participants. This is important considering many Indigenous people suffer research apathy because of having been over researched in the past as objects to be studied rather than as individuals to be respected for the wealth of information they bring.

Morseu-Diop (2010) advises that humility is critical when engaging with Indigenous people and states that while “helping out with community tasks and activities may seem menial and of no value to you as an academic and researcher but it will speak volumes to Elders, leaders and grassroots people in the community of your research” (p. 100). Having worked in the Aboriginal community in Brisbane for many years before entering the university environment, I can understand the reasons why showing humility would be so necessary when engaging with the community. I have learned through experience that many Indigenous people will gauge how much they can trust you to talk about important issues in their lives and by seeing how willing you are to participate in community activities. This was important for me to consider given that I was working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from within our communities who were transitioning to university. In some cases, I already knew their families and it was important to remember that I needed to abide by Indigenous methodologies and protocols of
engagement such as respect, humility and patience. These practices are integral to Indigenist research and must be part of the process.

**Connection to Place**

Gorreng Gorreng and Boonthmurra Aboriginal researcher Odette Best (2011) notes the importance of identifying her connection with place by engaging and working with Indigenous participants while encouraging them to tell their stories. I drew from Best’s approach and my own understanding of place as an Aboriginal man to make space for participants’ connections to place in the study. For example, I relate to place through my traditional homelands of Eastern Arrernte desert people, extended family of the coastal Bundjalung people, and historical home with the Jagera people. These cultural and relational connections to Country shape my standpoint in the study as a researcher. By sharing stories and questions about place, I acknowledged my located interpretive standpoint while encouraging both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants to connect in an Indigenist way with places that are significant to them.

**The cultural interface in Indigenous Research Methodology**

All of the Indigenous Research Methodology processes can be successfully combined with western theories and research techniques and may help to further validate the use of Indigenous methodologies within the university. The adjusting western theories and combining them with Indigenous methods is has been well known in academic literature (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Even though it has been critiqued by some academics it is acknowledged as legitimate and appropriate standpoint. The importance and usage of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to Indigenous methodologies in this thesis does so through a critical theory lens as advocated by Dunbar (2008). Uncle Norm Sheehan (2004), a respected Australian Aboriginal researcher, agrees that there are parts of mainstream academic practice such as qualitative research methodologies, critical social theory, postcolonial theory, experiential learning and conflict resolution that have interacted with Indigenous methodologies. I used Indigenous research
methodologies in conjunction with Indigenous and non-Indigenous theories of identity, roles, and expectations in this research. I also used mainstream data analysis coding and theming techniques which are explained further.

As introduced in Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework, Nakata’s concept of cultural interface can also be useful in conceptualising the connection and potential overlap between Indigenist and western research methodologies and approaches. Here, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous theories and methodologies are not seen as binary opposites but, rather, as potentially overlapping, and complementary in some areas (Martin, Nakata, Nakata, & Day 2017; Nakata 2002).

Research Questions

The research methodology was used to answer these research questions:

1. What do academics know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ cultural background and identity when teaching in health faculty courses at university?
2. How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students change their roles from community to their roles in university health faculty courses?
3. What expectations do lecturers have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

Participant recruitment and selection

Data was collected in one multi-campus urban university in Australia. Participants included 17 current Indigenous health students and ten academic staff members. Participant selection and recruitment for each group is discussed below.

Student participant selection and recruitment

Student participant selection was designed to get a diverse range of views and experiences. Criteria for selecting student participants included gender, age, discipline of study, and year of study. In the criterion relating to year of study I endeavoured to recruit students who could
represent first year of study, final year of study, and those who had withdrawn from study experiences. All students shared the same “faculty” of study (ie. health) however studied at four different campuses. Two campuses were inner-suburban, one was outer-urban, and one was a coastal-urban campus. I endeavoured to recruit both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students because their cultural and related experiences of identity can be quite different. The study overlooked whether the students were on-campus or online, full time or part-time students. These may be variables to consider further in the future. Rationale for key selection criteria is discussed below.

I chose to interview first year Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health faculty students before they got to know the academics. By doing so, I would have a better understanding of how they initially viewed their identity, roles and expectations at the university before potentially being affected by academics’ perceptions of them. I focused on interviewing final year students in order to gain a better understanding of how identity, roles and expectations might be different for students who have been at university for some time. Finally, I interviewed students who previously left the university but later returned to understand if their experiences of identity, roles and expectations had influenced their decision to leave their health studies. My supervisors and I discussed how it would require sensitivity to approach students who had previously withdrawn because there may be ongoing disputes or grievances associated with their withdrawal. Hence, when approaching students who had withdrawn, I took extra caution to speak with them about where they would feel most comfortable and culturally safe to be interviewed.

The timing and location of the interviews with students was dependent upon their availability for interviewing and level of comfort with the research process. The interviews took place between January and October 2015. It is important to be flexible with timing when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. It is important to be aware that cultural events such as sorry business and community meetings may mean that
students might not always be available therefore, flexibility and consideration was necessary (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). I planned to interview Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health faculty students at the Indigenous student support unit within the university to ensure cultural safety to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who chose to leave university were offered interviews at the Indigenous Support Unit or, at a location of their choice to ensure their comfort and travelling time is minimised. The majority of students chose to be interviewed at the student support unit with six deciding to be interviewed in a private office outside of the student support unit.

The process I used to recruit students was to build relationships using Indigenous methods. This methodology involved following protocols of introducing myself to the heads of the Indigenous student support unit, offering information on my study, seeking their permission to recruit students from the unit, then waiting to be invited to engage with them. This required face-to-face contact with people within the student support unit over several weeks. This was done at all campuses of the University where health students were located. This recruitment process follows Aboriginal cultural protocols of introduction and seeking permission and invitation to enter spaces with the endorsement and welcome of the Elders and leaders of that place.

Once I had permission to enter the Indigenous student support units, I put up student recruitment sheets (see Appendix A) and spoke with the staff at each of the campus’ units. Staff then introduced me to health students studying at each campus. I was invited to orientation events at the support units for first year commencing students. During these events we sat around in a yarning circle during which I let some of the new students know about the study and offered information about ways they could be involved. During these circles and meetings, I told students about myself, including where I am from, and listened to their stories as per Aboriginal cultural protocols of introduction (Best, 2011; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Morseu-Diop, 2010).
Relationship building is important both before and after researchers are invited into a space. These relationships start with proper processes of introduction and being humble in the space as Morseu-Diop (2010) has described. Relationships are also developed through listening. I used the process of listening to the Indigenous Elders, Indigenous community members, Indigenous staff members and Indigenous students when engaging with them in all aspects of conversation. By doing so, I was able to guide the direction of the research questions and this strengthened the research data gathered. This process of listening to Indigenous people and their responses can greatly benefit all future research and this was supported further when engaging with students from the Indigenous unit.

Ongoing relationships with leaders of the space, and with participants, are important. For example, my first interview was with a student who had previously dropped out of studies in health. This interview came about via relationship building and networking with Indigenous students through the student support unit. The student heard about the research project during a conversation with me at the student support unit and wanted to participate. This student has gone on to postgraduate studies since the interview. Following the interview, we maintained contact regarding topics the student had spoken about during the interview and I continue to feedback information on the progress on the study, as Martin & Mirraboopa (2003) recommends. I share regular updates in person with the student support unit leaders and members of an Indigenous researcher network at my university. I have presented preliminary results from the study to Indigenous students and staff at the student support unit and at postgraduate student conferences at my university. When I have had periods of doubt about the study overall, or this thesis, it is these relationships with the students and staff that have kept me going. I feel accountable to the people who shared their stories with me and want to honour their contribution. During the research process several Elders passed away. These Elders contributed to my research by
encouraging me to reflect on the purpose and importance of completing this research. Hence, my research was influenced by sorry business of loss and grief.

**Academic staff participant selection and recruitment**

Academic staff who taught in first year health courses were selected for the study. I aimed to recruit these staff from across the different schools within the Health Faculty at the University in order to get representation across disciplines. I chose to recruit staff who taught into first year courses and who would be interacting with first year Indigenous students. This would allow me to uncover the potential relationship between academics’ knowledge and expectations of Indigenous people and the students’ experiences of university study. I was not interested in tracking development between years of teaching for academic staff hence I did not deliberately recruit academics who taught in final year courses. Despite not deliberately recruiting for this, several of the participating academics taught across two or all years of study.

Academics were recruited following Indigenous research methodology protocols. I first approached the heads of each school in the Health faculty to seek their approval and permission to invite staff in their school to participate. Several heads of school suggested that I contact the first-year coordinators who then advised me which academic staff members were teaching first year courses. First-year coordinators advised me where I could place Academic recruitment sheets (see Appendix B) on notice boards for teaching staff. I then emailed the first year coordinators the full participant recruitment and ethical consent package which they distributed to first year teaching staff for consideration. Interested first year teaching academics then contacted me directly via email to express interest in participating.

On one occasion, a known ally to Indigenous social justice efforts who was employed in the School of Medicine contacted first year teaching academics in her school and encouraged them to participate. I had not asked this ally to do this however she saw the invitation to participate and took action to encourage her colleagues to get involved. I believe this ally’s
advocacy within the School of Medicine, combined with my flyers and the first year coordinator’s emails, led to a total of six academic staff approaching me to be interviewed. I selected only three of this group who taught first year courses. I thanked the other staff who were not selected to participate and advised them that we had reached enough participants for that school. I advised those staff that I would contact them again regarding any future relevant research regarding Indigenous students.

I offered participating academics an option to meet on campus or at a location outside of the University if they preferred. All academic staff chose to be interviewed face-to-face in private office spaces at the campus where they were primarily employed. The timing of recruitment for academics was important in this research. Even though I sent recruitment sheets to first year lecturers and placed recruitment sheets on notice boards around each school, it was not until the semester started that I was able to engage with the academics. These participants were recruited through emails that were sent out from myself, first year coordinators and administration staff. A couple of academic participants were also recruited through other academics via ‘word-of-mouth’. The engagement of academics was more successful when academic staff were on campus at the beginning of the semester as opposed to the end of the year when they were marking papers, attending graduation ceremonies, attending conferences and during semester break. Also, before semester starts is a busy time when academics are preparing courses and participating in orientation. For this reason, recruitment took place during the first semester.

Following the Indigenous methodology protocols of engagement had the effect of gathering quality data from the participants because they were willing to share more openly about their experiences. Non-Indigenous academics were willing to share their experiences and information more freely due to the building of relationships with them through the sharing of
information about myself and asking permission through the appropriate channels of the heads of the Faculty and Schools.

**Resulting participants**

The first-year students interviewed were undertaking studies in midwifery, social work, nursing, exercise science and medicine from various campuses. The students that had left university consisted of social work, nursing, psychology and public health from the aforementioned campuses. Final year students came from social work psychology, exercise science and nursing from various campuses. First year lecturers recruited taught in psychology, nursing, child and family services, social work, biomedicine, dietetics and nutrition and medicine at two main campuses. Further information regarding participants is summarised in Table 1 below.
### Table 2 Participant summary

#### Indigenous Student participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number</th>
<th>Genders</th>
<th>Disciplines</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male (n = 7)</td>
<td>Social Work (n = 5)</td>
<td>Age range 19- 50</td>
<td>First year (n = 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female (n= 10)</td>
<td>Nursing (n = 5)</td>
<td>Average age 28</td>
<td>Withdrawn (n=4)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other (n= 0)</td>
<td>Exercise Science (n = 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Final year (n = 7)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Psychology (n=2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Midwifery (n = 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Public Health (n=1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medicine (n =1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Academic staff participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Genders</th>
<th>Course Teaching</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Year Teaching In</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male (n = 5)</td>
<td>Medicine (n = 3)</td>
<td>Age range 31- 62</td>
<td>First year (n =10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female (n= 5)</td>
<td>Psychology (n=2)</td>
<td>Average age 45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Other (n= 0)</td>
<td>Social Work (n=1)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nursing (n=1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family and Child Studies (n=1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dietetics Nutrition (n=1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chemistry (n =1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### All Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Genders</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Male (n = 12)</td>
<td>Human Services and Social Work (n = 7)</td>
<td>Age range 19- 62</td>
<td>Campus 1 (n = 16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female (n= 15)</td>
<td>Nursing and Midwifery (n = 7)</td>
<td>Average age 35</td>
<td>Campus 2 (n = 10)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other (n= 0)</td>
<td>Medicine (n =6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Campus 3 (n = 1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Psychology (n = 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Allied Health (n = 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bio Med (n = 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews

Bryman (2012) states that the use of semi-structured interviewing is “where the researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topic to be covered” but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply and may allow further questions to be “asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by the interviewees” (p.471). After we agreed on a time and location to conduct the interview, I ensured the Indigenous student or academic staff member was comfortable with transport and place by following up with an email or phone call. We met at the location that we had agreed on whether it was my office or the office of their choosing mainly ensuring that the participant was in a private room so that we could have confidentiality and privacy. I asked if they felt comfortable with the place for the interview and I also offered the participant a glass of water before we began the process.

I put the Information sheet (see Appendix C) and Consent Form (see Appendix D) on the table and asked the participant to read through the forms. I allowed the participant time to read the information sheet then I gave a verbal overview of the research project. I read out the consent form for them and I asked the participant if they needed me to clarify any of what was written down so that they understood the consent before they signed it. I explained that the interview usually takes between 20 to 30 minutes depending on how much information the participant wanted to provide as answers to the questions.

Once the consent form was signed, I advised the participant that I was recording the interview and would transcribe and deidentify the data in accordance with my approved research ethics protocol (explained further below). I explained that I will be using an Interview Guide for the interview process. The Interview Guide (Appendix E) was the same for each of the Indigenous students and different for the academics. During this process, I introduced myself and where I was from and asked the participant to do the same. The use of the Interview Guide allowed the interview to flow freely and suited semi structured interviews.
**Interview questions**

Open-ended interview questions were used to collect the data. This allowed flexibility for the interview to flow freely between the researcher and participants. Questions were formulated to answer the overall research questions of the study.

The interview process started with these general questions:

1. Can you please tell me a little about yourself?
2. What is your name please?
3. How old are you?
4. What is your gender?
5. Who are your people/where are you from?
6. Which degree course are you studying/lecturing in?

Following these questions, I explained that I was going to ask about identity, roles and expectations.

The guiding interview questions for Indigenous students were as follows:

**Identity**

1. How do you see yourself?
2. How do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person?
3. How do you identify yourself? Why?
4. How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in the health faculty feel their identity is perceived by academics? Why?

**Roles**

1. What role do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in your community?
2. What role do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in the university and Why?

3. What do you think about the transition of this role for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person from community to university? Why?

Expectations

1. What expectations do you have of yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student? Why?

2. What expectations do you think the lecturer has of you as a student? Why?

The guiding interview questions for academics were as follows:

Identity

1. How do you see yourself?

2. How do you identify yourself?

3. How do you see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples identity? Why?

4. What do you know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Roles

1. What role do you see Indigenous people having in their community?

2. What role do you see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having in University as students? Why?

3. What do you think about the transition of this role for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person from community to university? Why?

Expectations

1. What expectations do you have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at University? Why?
2. What expectations do you think the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students think you have of them as a student? Why?

The final questions I asked of all participants were as follows:

1. What factors do you think affect dropout rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at university? Why?
2. Do you have any other thoughts or comments you would like to share?

To conclude the interview, I thanked the participant and ended the interview.

**Data transcription and storage**

All 27 interviews were transcribed by me using an HTC mobile phone and then typing them out on a computer. Interview recordings and transcripts were stored on a password protected server at my university. Signed consent forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet at my university.

**Data Analysis**

**Data transcription**

I transcribed the interviews from each of the participants into separate word documents that were then stored in confidential files. I ensured that all the 27 recorded interviews were on different word documents so that I could file them into separate folders of academics, student in first year, students in final year and students who have dropped out. This was the start of the coding process as I wanted to see if these academics and groups of students had similar or a variety of views on identity, roles and expectations. This process of dividing the participants into these groups was decided at the start of the interview process however it was also used for triangulation (cross checking data from multiple of sources) of the data gathered from different groups (Neuman, 2013). The 27 interviews were entered into the data analysis program NVivo 11 and 12. NVivo software was used to assist qualitative data analysis. This computer software is
considered one of the accepted and appropriate programs used for qualitative data (Edhlund & McDougall, 2019). NVivo provides a technological aid to the researcher who still needs to apply their own skills and epistemological approach to the methodology. Other Indigenous researchers have used this approach within the bounds of an Indigenous methodology (see Carter, Laurs, Chant, & Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2018).

**Thematic analysis using NVivo**

Thematic data analysis was conducted using data- and theory-driven coding in NVivo 11 and 12 (Brooks, Bee, & Rogers, 2018; DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The theories were present in the data to the extent that interview questions had already been framed by identity, roles, and expectations as outlined earlier in this chapter. As recommended by DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2011), I conducted several waves of coding and analysis and refined an NVivo project codebook over time. I began with data-driven coding to allow the participants’ voices to be “heard” as much as possible and to avoid limiting the analysis to only things that sat neatly within my theoretical framework. That type of “open” or “inductive” coding alongside theory-driven coding is recommended by Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 94) who said that over-use of theory-driven analysis “can inhibit the forming of fresh ideas and the making of surprising connections”.

I hence first formed data-driven (inductive) sub-themes that related to participants’ individual stories. This meant opening each individual interview transcript and creating nodes (sub-themes) by going through and looking for repeated or common experiences across participants or experiences that were really intense and important for one or two participants (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I continued with this wave of data-driven coding across all transcripts until no new sub-themes emerged. I made sure that when a new sub-theme emerged, I looked back across all transcripts for evidence of that theme and coded it. When I saw words or phrases – such as “community” – that came up frequently in the interview transcripts I did a text search
query using NVivo and looked through the results to code any relevant data to specific nodes. This was useful in making connections across the interviews and identifying new themes. Theming was not mutually exclusive: each participant brought their own story that did not sit neatly within a single theme or sub-theme. Thus, this data analysis was complex requiring an Indigenous lens to appreciate the heterogeneity. For example, a student’s role in the community may also be a role in the university and beyond.

I next reviewed my entire code book and merged or deleted sub-themes as needed. For example, if there were only a small number of references in a sub-theme, I considered whether to remove it from the code book (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011). If a sub-theme had been replicated in a similar sub-theme, I merged them together and removed duplicate quotations. I then categorised and resorted all of the data-driven sub-themes under the overarching themes of identity, roles, and expectations discussed in Chapter 3. Following that, I conducted “data cleaning” (data was examined for its adaptability to be used for analysis) and checked that every interview quotation included in each sub-theme was a true reflection of that sub-theme and the over-arching theory driven theme (Kaiser, 2012; McCrudden & Marchand, 2020). As an Aboriginal researcher this was an important process to ensure the Indigenous voices and proper Indigenous methodology were maintained (see Carter, Laurs, Chant, & Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2018). The findings chapters in this thesis were developed from each major theme and discuss the sub-themes derived through analysis.

**Validating and verifying**

Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) suggest that the data analysis process is often influenced by the world view of the researcher. As an Indigenous researcher, I felt it was correct protocol to pay my respect to the people who have told their stories by allowing them to interpret the patterns within the stories they have told. Throughout analysing the data, I engaged with the participants and wider Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals and community through formal and
informal processes to verify and validate the data that was collected. During those processes, I reconnected with the participating students and university lecturers in person and via email to provide them with an opportunity to validate my interpretation of their narratives. If participants added new information, or said I hadn’t interpreted them correctly, I took that into consideration in the next waves of analysis and data cleaning. Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) said this has less to do with drawing conclusions or truth but more about bringing people together to claim and celebrate the patterns revealed. I also presented at many Indigenous community and health conferences and forums on the data and was encouraged by the feedback from many Indigenous community people and health professionals that the data was of a standard related to the doctorate. As well as my voice and lens as an Aboriginal researcher I felt it was important that the Indigenous lens and voices were heard from the participants as well as from Elders and other Indigenous people in the communities. To show proper process the voices of the non-Indigenous participants and if when approached during presentations was also taken into consideration. Throughout the verification and validating process, I engaged with my principal supervisor and co-supervisors regularly in robust discussions and over a few many years in relation to the data to develop the findings chapters of Identity, Roles and Expectations.

**Ethics**

**Griffith University Ethical Clearance**

This study received ethical approval from Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee to interview the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and academics at a university. This required me to lodge an online Expedited Ethical Review Checklist application to the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee. I originally lodged the Ethics Application on 25 September 2014 and was granted ethical clearance for my research project (GU Ref No: HSV/29/14/HREC) on 7 November 2014 (See Attached). The extended ethical clearance process was necessary because as I had to ensure that I was ethically prepared to
conduct research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the university system. That required me to provide additional responses to the ethics review committee before I could proceed with the research. Most questions were around the process of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students which required further clarification of my methodology. The ethical clearance process also required the research team to develop an ethically approved Academic Recruitment Sheet, Student Recruitment Sheet, Research Consent Form, Research Information Sheet and Research Questionnaire Guide Sheet. (See Appendices A - E)

Indigenous Ethics

While approved for Ethical Clearance through the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee, Martin and Mirraboo (2003) note that, “[f]or the Indigenous researchers, acting in a culturally safe manner is a twenty-four hour per day situation. We are accountable to ourselves, our people and Country and also the research or educational institutions of which we are also a part” (p. 213). While university ethics is important, it is equally important for universities to acknowledge, utilize, and respect the ethical practices that are the foundation of Indigenous methodologies. As an Indigenous researcher, I understand and ensure ethical accountability to the Indigenous community for example through respecting and understanding protocols and engaging with other Indigenous people in a culturally safe manner. To provide a space where Indigenous participants felt culturally safe to engage in the interview process, I built relationships with participants and was transparent about the purpose of the research. Providing feedback to participants and seeking their feedback on my analysis was encouraged through both the mainstream university and, more importantly, by Indigenous people and communities participating in the research. Undertaking those measures safeguarded my research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a manner that offered cultural safety, respectability, responsibility and was of high quality.
Methodological limitations

Because this research used purposive sampling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students and academics from a single institution, the results cannot be generalised to the broader population. Second, this study is limited by sample and context. Also, the study relies on a relatively small number of key informants and therefore, does not elicit the views of other service users. Potential future research could longitudinally track academic and student development over time. For example, studies could recruit students in first year and re-interview them in their final year of study. Likewise, studies could interview staff in their first year of employment to teach and then at set intervals in their career. Administration staff and senior leadership in universities could also be interviewed in future research. Broader study limitations are discussed more fully in Chapter 9 Conclusion.

Conclusion

This methodology chapter summarised a culturally safe Indigenous methodology that allowed rich data to be gathered from Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants regarding the experiences and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students at university. The use of Indigenous methodologies and the theoretical framework to guide qualitative semi structured interviews allowed the participants to provide the high quality data for this research. Data was coded according to data-driven and theory driven themes over several waves of analysis. Research ethics adhered to mainstream requirements and Indigenous research protocols.
Chapter 5 - Identity

Chapter Summary
This is the first of three findings chapters that present the outcomes of the analysis of student and academic interviews and focuses on the issue of identity. As outlined in the methodology and theory chapters, the findings chapters are presented in relation to the three key theories guiding the research (i.e. Critical Race Theory (CRT), Role Theory and Self-fulfilling Prophecy). I then draw together learnings from across the three findings chapters in Chapter 8 Discussion. This identity chapter is guided by critical race theory (CRT) focuses on student and academic perceptions and experiences of ‘identity’ in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples studying at university and academics’ perceptions of their own cultural and other identities. Thematic analysis identified the following sub-themes associated with identity: Cultural background; Place; Kinship; Colour; Racism and Academic Awareness. In keeping with Indigenous research methodology, I present each sub-theme by foregrounding participants’ own voices in the form of quotations that reflect each of the sub-themes. I then relate the participants’ voices and experiences to broader theory and scholarly literature. By combining participant voices with broader theory and literature, the chapter draws together key learnings around elements of identity that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Introduction
Identity is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when studying at university. The identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is part of who they are as a people and their connections to the land as well as the historical factors that have disadvantaged them and shaped where they are today. Historically in Australia, the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been constructed negatively with many paternalistic and racist views of their identity, and often these have been, and remain, invisible to the wider society. This is
highlighted in the higher education system where low numbers of people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are completing studies in health professions due to the policies of the past which have kept people out of universities and are continuing to influence experiences within the universities. To explore how identity is seen within the higher education system, I interviewed 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and 10 non-Indigenous academics to ask them about their perceptions of the identity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a health faculty of an Australian university. This chapter presents key findings in relation to identity and concludes with a discussion on these findings.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was introduced in Chapter 3 to locate the voice and identity of the Indigenous students in the higher education system because the Indigenous voice and identity tends to be overlooked in favour of the dominant Eurocentric voice and western view of othering Indigenous people. Early CRT theorists such as Ladson-Billings (1998) suggest that the identity and voice of the people who were marginalised were often not seen, heard or included in western society and were usually overlooked in favour of a Eurocentric view of the world. When applied in Australia, CRT highlights how the identity and voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have either been portrayed negatively or overshadowed throughout a history of colonisation (Huggins 1998; Moreton-Robinson 2000). Given that schools and universities continue to fail their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, there is an urgent need to focus on the significant role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and voice has in relation to retention and attrition within a higher education system in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity tends to be disregarded (Moran, 2003; Morgan, Slade & Morgan, 1997; Morgan, 2001, Nakata, 2002; Nakata, Nakata & Chin, 2008). I have hence presented the themes below in a way that I believe foregrounds the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involved in my research and the teaching academics who also consented to be interviewed.
Sub-themes related to Identity

My analysis of identity in the interview data revealed experiences that both lend strength to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at university and challenge that strength. The sub-themes under the major theme of Identity include: Cultural background; Place; Kinship; Colour; Racism and Academic Awareness. I will discuss the sub-themes below by drawing on participant quotations.

Cultural Background

Students and academics interviewed in this research showed varying degrees of awareness regarding both their own and others’ cultural background. Cultural background is a significant issue for many of the students interviewed because it provides them with a sense of belonging within a cultural framework that was previously not allowed or acknowledged within the higher education system and was often seen as negative through the othering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Andersen, Bunda & Walter, 2011; Battiste, 2005; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Riley & Pidgeon, 2019). Cultural background is important to Indigenous people as it is part of their world view or ontology which identifies them to each other and other Indigenous people. While Indigenous worldviews and cultures are today incorporated into higher education experiences and systems to a greater degree than in previous centuries and decades in Australia (Bunda, 2006; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Nakata 2002), the student experiences documented in this study indicate an ongoing, perhaps subtler and more informal, challenging of Indigenous identity and culture in higher education. This is shaped by many factors that are potentially both individual and systemic in nature.

Students

Notably, first year Indigenous students included in the research indicated that they were less comfortable about their identity compared to second and final year students. This can be an
interesting time of adjustment for all students at university but particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who sometimes formally identify as Indigenous for the first time when they come to university. There were a number of factors that fed into a lack of comfort around identity for the first year and other students in relation to cultural background. The first factor was the dislocation from family and Country when students moved to a different city to attend university:

“Um, I’m because I don’t actually live with my family down in Port Macquarie anymore, but I really struggle when I identify as an Aboriginal man. It’s something I’m really proud of, um and even though it’s not something like I go around flaunting like ‘Aboriginal, Aboriginal, Aboriginal’ would be a strange thing to do” … “it’s something I hold as part of being me and I would … yeah” (Interviewee 013).

For this participant there is a struggle around his sense of pride in being Aboriginal and how to present that to others – or not – in the university context. The student is no longer identified by and with his family as a member of the Aboriginal community in a smaller regional town and hence often has choice over whether to discuss his cultural identity with others who are likely to be strangers in the university setting. The choice over whether to voluntarily discuss or proclaim one’s Aboriginality can be particularly affected by the student’s physical appearance which I discuss in more detail later in the chapter.

Another factor that affected students was being wary of other people’s opinions about their cultural identity:

“That’s not the kind of person I am, I don’t want to be subject to
people’s opinions about it if they don’t really know me and they’re not really educated on Indigenous people either, yeah I get a bit frustrated.”

(Interviewee003).

In this case the student was justifiably operating in a mode of self-protection to protect herself from unwanted inquiries or judgements about her cultural identity. The quotation also makes it clear that students can internalise or experience a “trickledown effect” of broader ideologies and ignorance around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures when they attend university.

Likewise, non-Indigenous students who often innocently reproduce ignorant views of Indigenous peoples or racist ideologies are also experiencing the “trickledown effect” and legacies of those same limiting ideologies.

A third factor that influenced students’ experiences was their ongoing journey of coming to know about their cultural background. A first-year participant noted that while she now shares her cultural identity with her children there was a time when she was only just learning about her identity herself and was therefore not as confident when it came to opening up:

“I try to embrace my culture and the things I do know about it umm when it comes to spiritual story time and that I try to bring a bit of that into my kids, food and stuff like that but generally I live a white life. [...] Generally, only because I haven’t had that heritage sort of instilled in me that since I was a kid. I haven’t ... I’ve always been in the Aboriginal groups and stuff like that at school ... with the dark girls I would go and hang out with Mrs S for dinner and stuff, and always done that, and always socially accepted, but, um, actually knowing my history and stuff and bringing that into my life ... that’s what I don’t know about.” (Interviewee008).
It is a reality for many of us that we have not been given an opportunity to learn about our cultural heritage and background and, sometimes, even who our closest family members are. This is due to many complex factors relating to, for example, the stolen generations (see Huggins 1998; Corporal 2017), the deliberate attempts to eradicate Indigenous cultures through colonial practices of cultural genocide (see Dudgeon, et. al, 2010; Moreton-Robinson, 2015), and ongoing pervasive removals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from their families and communities in the name of child protection.

For first year students, the sharing of one’s cultural background may have first been encouraged when starting university particularly as it is one of the requirements in relation to support. Given that reality, many incoming students may be apprehensive when it comes to sharing their identity due to internalised racism, stereotype threat, or fear in relation to how people may respond or react particularly as many of them may be new to studying. We still experience many students and academics in universities who have been taught in cultural “competence” classes to ask an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person “where’s your mob from?” This is actually a very culturally unsafe process for many of us who do not, and cannot know, the answers to that question. Again, these are the kinds of realities and complexities, shaped by history, that are affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students interviewed for the research.

Some student participants reported being deliberately excluded from knowing about their cultural background by other family members. For example, this student explains that their family would not allow them to talk or learn about their cultural background in relation to their Aboriginal identity,

“Yeah even at 30 I am still going through it […] yes, ‘Hands Up’” was a good transition and that’s also helping me transition to find where I fit with everyone in my culture, it’s all part of that journey for me. It’s um, I don’t
know, I see that as knowing a bit more happy with it and understanding where you sit within the culture whereas I just, I don’t know not quite there yet, see I can get there [… ] I think so, yeah, it wasn’t that wasn’t the intent when I set out, but it seems to be that’s part of what’s happening and I am liking it, it’s good [… ] as now I’m proud to identify as an Aboriginal whereas before, due to family … not really constraints but pressures…family pressures…I wasn’t confident or comfortable to proudly identify.” (Interviewee 006).

Experiences such as those explained above amplify the policies of the past that presented Aboriginal culture as part of your identity, something not to be spoken about and being othered if you were seen as Indigenous.

A fourth dimension of cultural background that affected students interviewed for the research was the concept of kinship. For another student, cultural background was strongly connected with the concept of kinship which included the place and stories of where his parents grew up. Once again, many Indigenous people were dislocated from their homelands and rely on the stories being told to them from their old people as well as memories of playing rugby league with other Indigenous people and how this is important for the family in relation to his identity formation:

“I identify with my culture, my Aboriginality, reckon where my parents, my family and where I grew up at and the stories that my mum and dad pass on to me…where they grew up and, um, I think rugby league as a young fellow playing with a lot of Koori fellows back home and that sort of thing was a big thing for my people where I’m from.” (Interviewee 009).

The stories of where you are from and engaging with other Indigenous people in activities such as rugby league are part of your cultural background and identity as an Indigenous person are
shown by the previous student. The next student who talks about having different cultural backgrounds but consciously identifies as Indigenous. The student who has previously withdrew from studies also talks about not leaving your cultural background at the door of the university. The student highlights the importance of Aboriginal and other cultural backgrounds in his identity:

“I’m a child of two cultures, you know. So, I do see myself as an Aboriginal man, but I also see myself as also the Scottish and Italian grandparents that I have as well. So, they all form part of my identity but now I have made more of a conscious effort. Well, I always have but I identify as an Aboriginal man [...] I now want to like...stand out as an Aboriginal person at university and I want to be, my expectation is to be, I guess a role model to all those other students that are 18 or 19 or 20 that are there going you don’t have to leave your culture at the door that way, you can bring it with you and make the university change, you know? So that sort of my expectation. Yeah, it’s to raise or associate some positivity with Aboriginality at university. You know to change the stereotypes, you know?” (Interviewee 027).

The interviews indicated that final year students may feel more comfortable sharing their cultural background in relation to their identity as they begin to see this as an important defining feature of themselves. This may also suggest that students have had a nourishing experience at the university that has helped them to develop their identity over time. One final year student spoke of how she identified with her Aboriginal cultural background first, even though she has other heritage primarily because she was bought up from within that community. She points out that her identity became noticeable when in the wider community which could be due to a recognition of different cultural protocols in addition to the colour of her skin, her self-identification to others, and their responses to her in relation to that:
“Ahh I’m first and foremost I am a Yidinji Woman…and that’s how I pretty much identify. […] That’s how I identify then, if people really want to know, I identify my Scottish side of the family. My father is Scottish, but I don’t know identity culturally as Scottish, I identity I very much identify very much with my people my Yidinji people. […] Well that is just who I am. I spent a lot of time there when I was growing up in my community…that made me pretty much who I was from a child then, um, when I moved to Canberra outside of my community, I realised that I was very different from other people. Then I realised that’s because I am Yidinji”. (Interviewee 011).

Cultural protocols are mentioned by another student who spoke of having connections with a few different Aboriginal communities and kinship as part of their cultural background. The strong connections to different places could be due to people trying to find and reconnect with family and heritage after the policies that removed and displaced Indigenous people in Australia. As many individuals tried to find family they sometimes managed to connect with other people and communities. One final year student noted that she embraced being from different Aboriginal cultures within Australia as part of their kinship networks, but interestingly suggests that non-Indigenous people find this hard to do:

“My mob come from Borroloola but also live in Alice springs and in Darwin, so it is Larrakia and Binbinka. One from Borroloola but my other cousins they also, um, they’re part of the Arrernte mob. That’s because of my uncle. He went back and join different mob because he couldn’t find anyone, so he got accepted in that community. […] Well, I think that a lot of Australian people…not being racist but don’t have that deep seated cultural practice, you know? Theirs is all uniform one…there is not a lot of room for them to have their different practices” (Interviewee 004).
This understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity is connected to cultural background was shared among several students I interviewed, however there were some students still trying to better understand their connections with community and culture through family even in their final years of study:

“Oh yeah…I don’t know much about my Indigenous background, but I am from Torres Strait from my dad’s pathways.” (Interviewee 014).

Despite still being on this journey of finding out more through their family connections, many final year students already developed a strong sense of identity in relation to their cultural background and were willing to share this with others.

Academics

A significant finding of the research is that two academics interviewed for the research were not readily aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ cultural identities and made generalised statements about Indigenous people at a wider level without understanding the cultural background of students at the individual, local and diverse level. Many of the generalised comments stemmed from deficit views of Indigenous people. For example, this particular academic talks about this generalised view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and mentions he has an endearment towards Indigenous students:

“I have enormous respect for their culture. They are the First People and it’s amazing when you look, and you read and hear about how long they existed on this land and the contributions that they have made and it’s easy for me to relate to this because I have lived in many places where they have had these Indigenous communities…even in Sri Lanka, there has been an Indigenous population. […] I don’t really know much about Indigenous [peoples] or I know lots about racism of ethnic minorities because that’s my area, but all of
them have in common mental illness. It could be anything. What they have in common is that they experience fewer opportunities than other groups and so my soft spot, um, comes from this general understanding that the world is not fair.” (Interviewee025).

That academic’s comments highlight that while they have respect for Indigenous peoples, they are still influenced by a generalised view of the cultural background in relation to identity. Not all academics had this generalised view. The following academic, for example, spoke about their understanding of the Indigenous students’ identity as being connected to cultural background, kinship, and place:

“I think that's probably quite a complex identity because there's a rich tradition of recognising identity, where if you're lucky enough to know who your family is in that culture then you may have different parts of that...so relationships with your mother's people, with your father's people. Identity in terms of your Country...so the particular area, part of your obligations, depending on, you know, your sort of involvement and identity there. Obligations to family, obligations too to Country and land.” (Interviewee 015).

While one academic interviewed showed a lack of understanding of the connection between identity and cultural background of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at a deeper level, the above academic did not. That may be due to engagement with Indigenous people and their communities, previous education, or self-education however I did not specifically ask the interviewees to comment on the source of their knowledge/lack of knowledge. Academics’ source of information and knowledge is potentially something to uncover in future research.
Summary of cultural background

Overall, the sub-theme of cultural identity showed that students are often on a journey to embrace their identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but regard it as an integral part of who they are. There are students who acknowledge their multiple heritages of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and European. There has been a struggle for some students who admit being hesitant when it comes to sharing their identity within the university culture due to constraints by family members. Despite those challenges, students connect their identity to their cultural background which is often linked to their world view, protocols, kinship, role and connection to Country. It is the sense of belonging that makes them who they are as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The two academics gave a mixed view of cultural background in relation to identity. While one academic was able to connect identity back to cultural background and knew of the local Aboriginal group, the other academic spoke about Indigenous peoples in a more generalised manner and openly stated he knew very little about the cultural background of Indigenous people.

Place

Students and academics interviewed in this research showed varying degrees of awareness regarding both their own and others’ identity in relation to place. For Indigenous people, place can provide a sense of belonging and purpose, regardless of whether it is their family’s Country or not. Place is about being connected to Country and a geographically located Indigenous cultural community. Place was seen as important to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student’s identity. Many students considered part of their Indigenous identity and culture as being inseparable to their connection to land and/or community. Knowing where they and their family are from and who they represent when they are at university is very important and often
linked to students’ commitment to go back to their communities after they have finished study. Place provided students with cultural and kinship connection to their identity.

Academics’ lack of understanding regarding the place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are from can be problematic and adversely affect students’ experience of university. While many students may know their place and are strong in this, the journey of finding where they are from and their place can be a rewarding undertaking for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student while at university and beyond. Students have mentioned “being on a journey to finding their place” while at university.

Students

The first year students spoke about place as being connected to their identity as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person. Place was spoken about as being significant and came up regularly as connected to culture and kinship as part of the students’ identity. However, there is also an identification with the Indigenous community of which they are now part. The first year students highlighted that many of them are on a pilgrimage to find out more about their identity in relation to place. This is due to the historical factors of Indigenous people being separated, segregated and assimilated through colonisation. Nevertheless, many students have spoken about place being an important part of their identity as an Indigenous person. The following first year student explains how his connection to place gives him an identity as an Aboriginal person and results in a struggle not to live on Country:

“I am from the Biripi people and that kind of extends from Port Macquarie up to Taree and west as far as Wauchope.” (Interviewee013).

He continues by stating the struggles with living away from his family:
“Cause I don’t actually live with my family down in Port Macquarie anymore but I really struggle with [...] I identify as an Aboriginal man [...] it’s something I hold as part of being me [...] yeah cause I’m not really living in my home in my community umm it’s not as, um, I wish I could go back more.” (Interviewee013).

While many students live away from their Country, the next student stated that they were living away and have returned to Country. Another first year student talked about how they knew their identity, how it is connected to place and how they are happy to live on Country, that gives them their identity:

“I’m from Mununjali which is pretty much based in Beaudesert. [...] I’m, I don’t know, I suppose it’s kind of different cause I just moved, ahh, moved, back up from Canberra [...] back up to my actual mob up here umm which I guess in the grand scheme of things I’m still a child or thought of as young in the community. [...] Yeah, it’s like the Gold Coast, all the way to Fingal. Like a lot of my uncles live down at Fingal and that’s where they grew up and that’s where my pop’s from yeah originally from Fingal, so yeah [...] yeah big Country” (Interviewee010).

While there are Indigenous students who may have moved back to the place that gives them their identity which is special to them by living on Country, there are students who are still searching for where they belong. While the next first year student explains that she does not know much about the place she comes from, it still remains important for her and her children’s cultural background:

“I don’t know a lot about my family background. I do know a lot. I know that my mum and my grandmother are from Merriwa in NSW [...] so that’s where
we originate from [...] near Scone about from Sydney [...] Take it back to basics, find out where I am from. First, um, get to know a bit of my mob, try and like interlink with my father’s side of the family as well umm because I have never had that and just so my kids are more well-rounded, so my kids know where they come from” (Interviewee 008).

It is good that this student was able to find out where she was from to connect with her cultural background and place for her children. Other students, such as the one below, really brought to light the historical factors and the impact of removal policies of colonisation in not knowing where they are from:

“Okay well this is a long story. My father is stolen generation, so we have no idea what people we belong to [...] but, I am recognised as Aborigine in the [Name of City] community.” (Interviewee002).

The historical factors of colonisation policies have affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in relation to identity and place. The student usually identifies with the place that they are currently living in, until they can connect the missing historical factors to connect them to their cultural background place which gives them the connection to land and kinship. The students that have previously withdrawn from study expand on the historical factors that could have prevented Indigenous people talking about their place in relation to their identity. The next student, for example, identified her cultural heritage with place but tells the reality of historical factors:

“I am from the Kamilaroi people. [...] It was never spoken about…it just, I don’t know I just was always made to feel shame as a kid if it was brought up [...] which is silly because where I grew up and where I lived it was there, was
a big black fellow population. [...] I spent most of my time in Burren Junction but went to school in Wee Waa.” (Interviewee006).

That student who previously withdrew from studies tells how they were not allowed to talk about their cultural background when younger due to family shame. The student was living at the place which gave them the identity but was not allowed to identify with the cultural heritage of that place. Indigenous people were made to assimilate into the colonial European society and culture especially if they were a lighter skin colour. Many were removed and told to give up their culture, place, Country, and land (Holt, 2015). Another student who previously withdrew from studies showed that he knew about the place that gives him his identity and cultural background but has never lived there:

“My people are Muruwari and Yualwarri. Their mob my people from North West NSW Goodoga, Brewarrina” ... “I identify with my culture, my Aboriginality, reckon where my parents, my family and where I grew up at and the stories that my mum and dad pass on to me. Where they grew up and I think rugby league as a young fellow, playing with a lot of Koori fellows back home and that sort of thing was a big thing for my people, where I’m from” ...

“I was living in Dubbo for the first 14 years of my life” ... “Indigenous people in Dubbo compared to Indigenous people in Tweed Heads was a lot different. I found that sort of hard to adjust to.” ... “I reckon if you don’t have the support there, your family back home and even if your family are going through a lot of difficulties back home, then you feel you got a responsibility to come back and help them out.” (Interviewee009).

The student who previously withdrew from studies identifies with a different place than the one where he grew up. He originally identified with the place he grew up in, then after moving to a
different place, his identity is torn between his traditional land and the historical place where he grew up, while not really identifying with the local place where he now resides for the duration of his studies. This may be related to historical factors of moving people away from their land into towns but highlights the importance of place to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

As with the first year and withdrawn students, the final year students spoke about place as being important to their identity, highlighting that they may not have lived all their lives there however it connects them to their cultural background as an Indigenous person. This final year student amplified that place is important to their identity even when they moved away:

“I’m from the Yidinji people from Atherton tablelands. [...] North Queensland. [...] Well that’s just who I am. I spent a lot of time there when I was growing up in my community that made me pretty much who I was from a child then um when I moved to Canberra outside of my community, I realised that I was very different from other people, then I realised that’s because I am Yidinji.”
(Interviewee011).

She continued:

“I feel that if you really do identify you should always have the community in the back of your mind and what you can do for them, not what they haven’t done for you or what they did to you. You should always have it in your mind if you truly do, ‘cause I feel that is a core part of being Aboriginal or even Torres Strait Islander.” (Interviewee011).

She then posed about the challenges of leaving your community and how other Aboriginal people that live in cities may have an advantage in understanding non-Indigenous people nevertheless, this may also contribute to their isolation as well:
“I think there is a lot of reasons depending on where you come from as an Aboriginal person. If you’re an Aboriginal person who’s grown up in cities and stuff like that and you get on, you find it easy running with mainstream Australia. [...] I think you’ve got that advantage um above Aboriginal people that grow up in their community that are not used to white people in general and then they have to deal with white peoples’ customs and rituals, institutions, rules, judgements. You know, I can imagine the isolation can become a bigger thing for them yeah.” (Interviewee011).

When the student left her Indigenous community, she realised that she was different to other people including other Aboriginal people that lived in the cities. She posed that there were negative implications of being away from place such as being isolated from family and community. She argued that even though Aboriginal people in the cities are used to non-Indigenous people’s society they too may feel a greater sense of isolation. Another point to note is that the student aims not to forget her Indigenous community. She maintains a role in that community, identifies as a member of the community, and feels that giving back to her community is a core part of being Aboriginal.

Notably, some students’ cultural background is from more than one place. The following final year student, for example, stated that she identified with places that both sides of the family are from, and identified more with one location where she grew up:

“I was born in [name of Country town] and then I moved to [a city], but my mum is ... she is Mununjali and my dad’s side is Goreng Goreng and we are South Sea Islander. [...] I’ve grown up in [name of Country town]. [...] I identify with both sides of my family. [...] Mostly I had more contact with my dad’s side of the family. I don’t really know much on my mum’s side, mostly, because we lived where my dad’s family is predominantly.” (Interviewee018).
That final year student highlighted that she has not lived in one of the places where their family heritage is from, however she still identifies as being from there. This is important for academic staff to know, because you cannot assume that even though an Indigenous student is from one place, they will identify with that place. They may have an identity with a different place for their cultural background.

**Academics**

Academic interviewees also identified themselves with places they may have lived, or with places they had been raised with some understanding of their family heritage in connection to place. Sometimes that identity was in relation to a nation, or multiple nations, and sometimes it was in relation to a particular place or town within a nation:

> “I am originally from Sri Lanka. I am Sinhalese and now turned Australian.”  
> (Interviewee023).

That quotation highlights that academics have an understanding of place in relation to identity however their understanding may not be as explicitly linked to a personal cultural and family identity as it was for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students interviewed.

Some academics had a basic understanding of local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander groups linked to places they have lived, but felt that non-Indigenous people didn’t have a similar sense of shared identity linked to place:

> “My parents were both locals of Rockhampton. I would live there until I finished high school, about 17, then I moved to Brisbane for 9 nine years then I’ve been on the Gold Coast since 2002. [...] Well like you said at the start, the people here are the Kombumerri people is that right? The local people. Whereas as white people, we don’t have these, are the Gold Coast people. So, there is no sense of identity around the you know the group of white people here. That’s
the right way to describe it. Whereas to say you know the Kombumerri or the different tribes or groups, I’m not using the wrong terms I think, that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, they probably at least my um perception of it is that you see yourself as more of a community of people or a group of people, as a large family and all. [...] I am thinking is there a difference between like an Aboriginal remote community and verses living in a large city? Umm is there a big difference about the sort of communities in those two types of situations, um I know.” (Interviewee021).

The academic did not talk about their cultural background in relation to place, but that place was important to him. He did say, though, that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ identity is connected to place and cultural background. The academic mentions a difference between urban and rural and remote communities. Another academic gave more detail of place and identity in relation to themselves, which displayed an understanding of Indigenous peoples’ connection to Country and place. Conversely, she continued with the erroneous but popular stereotype that many Indigenous people live in rural and remote areas rather than urban areas:

“I am Australian and Australian nationality passport and my mother was born in Holland and she came over when she was three years old with her parents obviously also Dutch and she met my father who is a fourth generation Australian and prior to that his ancestry lies in Germany. [...] I think a lot of [Indigenous] communities live in areas that aren’t that are not geographically close to universities, so unis tend to be centred around big cities and at certain areas in those cities where it’s a bit more difficult to live in terms of units and houses and cost of living and stuff like that, so that often presents a challenge in terms of needing to move towards and study at those universities” (Interviewee020).
This quotation highlights that the academic may not have an in-depth understanding of where Indigenous people live. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people actually live in cities and may identify with their Country but do not live there (Corporal, 2017).

Summary of Place
The sub-theme of place showed that all students had the same view of place being connected to their identity. Place is important to Indigenous students because it is essential to their cultural background and identity. If you do not have Country, you have no identity. Students spoke about connection to a place where they were historically brought up or the place they moved to for study. Several students were still in search of their place due to historical factors and government policies of removal, assimilation or segregation. Academics do have an understanding of identity being connected to place in relation to their own lives and life histories. While some academics indicated some understanding of the connection between identity and place for Indigenous people, many lacked the full understanding of its importance to the Indigenous students they are teaching.

Kinship
Kinship, like place, is connected to cultural background for Indigenous people. Kinship in this sense refers to the cultural connections and responsibilities between members of an Indigenous cultural community. Indigenous kinship consists of not only bloodlines but also extended family within a particular community and connections to other communities (Corporal, 2017). The students and academics spoke about kinship as a part of their identity throughout the interviews. Elders are seen as leaders in kinship networks. The historical factors of colonisation have broken down many kinship networks through, for example, removing children from families or forcing entire communities off their homelands. That legacy often plays on for Indigenous students interviewed in this research. Kinships are important to Indigenous peoples’ identity.
Students

The first year students spoke about how Elders are important in their kinship network with one first year student talking about values given by them:

“I do have umm I relate a lot of my identity to my mum and my grandma who instilled some really good values in me when I was really quite young and how that has framed me to enable those values and beliefs to be really rock steady and when life has/is throwing things at me um yeah. [...] I suppose it almost an expectation in my family that you support everyone and every other Indigenous person that you know of young person through to the elderly person in your community and that stretches as wide as a setting like this” (Interviewee003).

That student highlighted where they got their values and beliefs from and why they may support other people from an Indigenous background as part of their identity. Getting values and beliefs from Elders was also important for the following first year student who explained that kinship involved showing respect to Elders as teachers:

“...as well so um the Elders I’ll be talking with and Aunties I’ve got are nursing aunties instead of going to talking with all my teachers [...] Even when I look at my mum and my dad or my mum’s family and my dad’s family, dad’s family is nuclear one girl three boys mum and dad straight up you could there’s text books written about that thing they see each other boxing day and may be once through the year whereas mum’s family or the community more so than mum’s family maybe because we don’t have an Indigenous family but mum’s created family shall we say that they’re in your face always what you doing, ah yeah aunty saw you down the street you know, this sort of thing so they’re always yarn yarn yarn whereas with dad’s family it’s more precise what are you
saying, have a chat and then that’s the end of the talk even though we’re still…” (Interviewee007).

As well as learning from Elders, the student spoke about how her mother engages with Indigenous family members who form her identity as an Indigenous person. This importance of kinship from the Indigenous side of the family gives her identity which includes extended kinship networks and being part of a whole network of Indigenous people that are connected through being Indigenous and identifying as such.

Being part of a wider kinship network is important for Indigenous students who are still looking for their family:

“…okay well this is a long story my father is stolen generation, so we have no idea what people we belong […] but, um, I am recognised as, recognised as Aborigine in the [Name of City] community” (Interviewee002).

When asked how she sees herself:

“that’s a hard question because I don’t see the difference in anybody and I’m half caste so for me to see myself I don’t see myself as anyone particular group. [...] Usually I say to people I’m an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander” (Interviewee002).

This shows that even though her Indigenous identity has been broken due to historical factors, the student is connected to the local Indigenous community to retain her identity and wider kinship network.

One of the students who previously withdrew from studies spoke about her family not speaking about her identity as an Aboriginal person and how coming to university opened a discussion about her Indigenous side of the family:
“...yeah and again still finding my feet there the white cohort of my family umm sort of overrode the black side of the family a bit umm and whilst I have always known that even as a child that I was Aboriginal. [...] Um it was never, never, felt that comfortable enough, to be able to grasp it and accept it but now that I am a grown woman and out on my own two feet I see that they were wrong in trying to keep that from me and um I’m ready to grab it again still finding it” (Interviewee006).

She shares how family reacted to her identity

“...even with when I did the hands up program yeah that was all done specifically for us Murris, my grandparents on the white side of the family come and visited while we hands up was on and I previous to that I hadn’t told them that this was all and I was doing this [study] as a Murri and everything and when I did tell her it was just like ah you turning into one of them now and cop that type of thing.” (Interviewee006).

The historical factors that lead to people denying kinship networks that relate to their Indigenous side of the family commonly result from a fear of seeing children removed from families, but they also reinforce Indigenous people being seen as the “other” in a negative view (Corporal, 2017). In my experience it has been encouraging to have students coming out and talking about their Indigenous heritage.

One student who previously withdrew from studies had a more positive experience of his grandmother telling him about his Indigenous identity and cultural background:

“Then of course the other things are that my grandmother told me a [traditional dreaming / story [passed down through Aboriginal family] when I was young, my grandmother was dark, all the other people in the family were not
Aboriginal but I was very close to my grandmother and after my mum, you know my grandmother really took on the role for me and was my psychological mother” (Interviewee001).

The above student’s identity was formed through his Indigenous kinship. Elders are seen as an important part of kinship, one of their roles being to keep the identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people alive and pass it on to younger people. Elders are part of the kinship system and are wider than your immediate family. As one student explained: he is seen as an Elder at an Indigenous unit within university while he has his own Elders back in his community:

“I walk into the [Indigenous Unit] now and people they’re talking to me and they’re 18 or 19, it’s Uncle, you know so, and that automatically switches something on that says like role modelling, you know guidance, help support and I am probably strengthening it more in the community as well you know, I think my job, it was like, in a funny way, because we have so many negative stereotypes in our communities that association where I work which is a really positive Indigenous run thing. [...] I have two very strong Aboriginal grandmothers who umm if we have got one particular Uncle [...] they’re good and they’re Elders” (Interviewee027).

To the students who previously withdrew from studies, the kinship networks are part of their identity which includes Elders and extended community members with many being affected by historical factors that have separated them. The final year students spoke about historical factors affecting their kinships networks however they are still part of the wider Indigenous community which has influenced them as allied health professionals:

“I’m an Aunty and a Great Aunty now. [...] Yeah it’s shit growing up in poverty and it’s shit growing up in starving it’s shit watching a lot of your family
having drug and alcohol problems it’s shit watching violence and if you can get out of that and change that and show other people in your family how to change that” (Interviewee011).

This student wants to make a difference for her family because she is connected through her identity as an Indigenous person to the wider community. Another final year student further highlights that they may not know the immediate connections, but they connected to the wider Indigenous kinship network:

“I’m not sure who my people are […] Oh yeah, I don’t know much about my…Indigenous background but I am from Torres Straits, from my dad’s pathways” (Interviewee014).

This student highlighted that their kinship networks are unclear however it does relate back to their identity and cultural background, this may indicate that they were quiet about their background due to historical factors of separation or removal or it may be that these things were not spoken about within their families.

Academics

While some academics interviewed did not identify themselves with a cultural group, or feel particularly connected to a cultural community, they recognised kinship ties in Indigenous communities:

“I don’t identify with a cultural group or a group of people so much whereas I see a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do really identify themselves with their community. […] I think that they Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people they probably at least my perception of it is that you see yourself as more of a community of people or a group of people as a large family and all” (Interviewee021).
In not being a part of their own cultural communities or kinship groups, non-Indigenous academics find it hard to deeply understand or respect identity related to kinship for Indigenous people. Yet, it is encouraging to know that academics do have some understanding of Indigenous kinships as part of their identity. Another academic demonstrated an understanding of Indigenous kinships by stating that Elders have a key role:

“I think that they would have their roles as a family member you know their roles of mother husband, wife, child, friend, type Elder or Aunty or, those sorts of roles would be key” (Interviewee022).

That quotation reiterates earlier student comments that Elders are important in Indigenous kinship networks and that the Indigenous community is wider than a nuclear family. The following academic also expressed some understanding of Elders and kinship in relation to Indigenous identity:

“[Elders are] leaders absolutely in their communities, they're a leader and those strong aunties and uncles are very much the mothers and fathers are the matriarchs or the patriarchs of the community who guide and revisit some of their old the stories umm who share their identity support their identity. [...] Sometimes it is of course that they got a lot of family responsibility which means looking after family or parents or children numbers of them, I know one I recall from last year she was the main carer she was young but the main carer of the family” (Interviewee016).

The academics quoted above highlight that the link between kinship and identity is strong with Elders seen as leaders which is often different to non-Indigenous kinship. Elders may speak for the whole community rather than just one family. It was positive that academics picked up on the connection between kinship and identity such as students honouring Elders.
Summary of Kinship

Students spoke about kinship as part of their identity as an Indigenous person. Kinship gave them values, beliefs, and shaped cultural protocols such as respect for Elders whether they were blood relatives or not. The other part of kinship that came through strongly from students was that many of the kinship networks were broken down due to historical factors of assimilation, separation and segregation. The academics indicated that they knew about the link between identity and kinships and this was particularly strong with Elders being mentioned. One academic suggested that due to kinship some Indigenous people may not be able to work in different communities. Kinship is seen as part of the Indigenous person’s identity and should be considered when academics are engaging with them at university. Overall, academics appeared to have a much stronger sense of the importance of kinship for Indigenous students than they did of the importance of place. It would be interesting to find out in future what has shaped that understanding of kinship.

Racism

A sub-theme that challenged both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and academics was racism. Racism was mentioned in interviews with students and was directly related to their Indigenous identity. Academics interviewed also acknowledged that racism was a factor that affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Students’ experiences of racism continued throughout their studies. Racism is when one race or culture is overlooked in favour of the dominant culture in this case the European or colonial or western culture. The voice of the people being dominated is usually silenced, misinterpreted, misrepresented and marginalised.

Students

This is a story from a first year student of white/fair skin appearance who describes in detail an experience she and another Indigenous student of white/fair skin appearance had in the first weeks at university:
“...well I noticed it yesterday at for an example we were doing a clinical lab and me and [student name] [both were fair skinned in appearance] were in there and we were teamed up with two other white girls umm and we were just talking about stuff and [student name] and I were just saying oh we will go back to [Name of Indigenous Unit] and we will print off some stuff and the socially acceptedness when the other girls realised what we were talking about you saw them like ah like we got friggen leprosy or something they their perception changed which then made us go ooohh stuff this we’ll stick together even more I think so that socially acceptedness where you can say it it’s alright there is nothing wrong with us but I sort of noticed their faces changed and their attitude and stuff you could see them change like physically them like ahhh where they going they’re not going to the library like the rest of us they’re going to their own that’s how I felt about it yeah [...] Might be jealousy (laugh) they know that we’re down there having a good time...cups of tea an stuff [...] I think so because you’re not feeling then that you are part of the first year nursing group. [...] They’re looking at you like you’re part of the first year nursing group with [Name of Indigenous Unit] like it was a separate that’s how I felt like a segregation like it felt like they sort of the way they changed made me felt like I wasn’t in part of their group anymore. [...] The [Name of Indigenous Unit] girls were a separate group and that’s not, I haven’t seen that for a long time...so that sort of made me sit back and sort of evaluate it and went home to talk to my partner about it and I was like it really fucking weird. [...] I found it bizarre I haven’t come across that before. [...] I think it’s more on them than me umm doesn’t matter I’m I always um it doesn’t matter where you come from and who you are, we’re all the same we’re all
human we all bleed the same colour [...] Hmmm, I think that’s the only thing I can think of that socially acceptedness...and that’s it’s not so taboo to talk about its not a big issue. [...] Yeah and they physically moved away and they physically like...physically pulled away and Sue and I were sort of like oh it was like about you know we were in the group of four and we had to split up into two groups so obviously I’m sort like oh I’ll go with you and we’re on one side of the bed and the other two were on the other side, I was ahh well I’ll go with you know this other girl and Sue you go with that one and then they sort of stood back and they wanted to team up together and so then Sue and I sort of went off to do it together and it felt like a segregation that’s what it felt like, whether it was intentional or unintentional on their behalf I don’t know but that’s how it came across so I think if, if, you have just got one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girl and that happened and they would go shit I don’t want to go back in class cause I’m feeling I don’t fit in or something then end up dropping out because of that” (Interviewee008).

It was fortunate that these Indigenous students supported each other through this situation. This first year student highlights that racism or stereotyping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was presented to her and a fellow student in their first few weeks of starting university and it came as a surprise to her as it was the first time that she saw herself as “othered” from the rest of society and the other students in her class. While it is not the academics themselves, they still need to plan how academics would approach this situation at university and in their classrooms. A final year student relates further about feeling racism in the classroom and defending yourself:

“...academics oh pretty much the same as the whole of Australia that if they’re not poor sick or uneducated we’re not really Aboriginal [stereotype]or we’re
not traditional Aboriginal [archetype – black skin – not fair skin] as they like to put it or that’s how everybody in general identifies in Australia. [...] Because that’s the image their umm with if they can see Aboriginal people in that light then they can keep Aboriginal people below Australians then keep Aboriginal people in their place so basically, I see that it shows it is a pretty racist country. [...] I think I feel it’s the same as umm anywhere in society because I’m a minority and so as in social work Aboriginal topics are always high on the agenda so it’s like spoken about a lot more often. [...] The issues going on in Aboriginal communities and as the only Aboriginal in the class you’re expected to get up and let your experiences be known but that’s been your whole life from your time as a child kind of thing so your grown up very weary of doing that (laughs) because you are one person in a class of 30 to 60 and if you’ve been through that all your life you learn quickly that those situations aren’t a good situation and when you’re the only one in it, you’re the only one who understands when all those people turn and just to say something racist and they all agree or you so emotionally offended you can’t talk to defend yourself or whatever then it’s just getting its just getting attacked so lecturers in the university expect you to have they want your input they want to hear your experience but they don’t understand the pressure that that comes with what it takes to do that” … “because they have not had to grow up like, like that because I been expected as a child always talk and share my experiences as an Aboriginal person and I don’t know why and I’ve been, I heard really racist stuff from teachers and lecturers. [...] I think because they don’t have to grow up in those similar circumstances because yeah everyone wants to hear of everyone’s experiences in life it gives for a more fairer
discussion but understand the western is still very racist nation who wants to
deny a lot of the history that non-Aboriginal people have done to Aboriginal
people, they don’t want to hear it or they want us to get over it or and they
haven’t grown up with the umm so when non-Aboriginal people say why
should I say sorry because I didn’t do that well it didn’t happen to me but all
my family are affected by it and I have had to bear witness and umm all the
damage that was caused to my Elders and that again come down to us the
children the repercussions and stuff like that so lecturers, so when you don’t
grow up like that you don’t understand. [...] Its easier from Aboriginal people
to understand each other because we all grow up in similar kind of
circumstances but people who aren’t Aboriginal will never understand that so
that’s why it’s a bit tiring too to get up and always be giving your experiences
as an Aboriginal person” (Interviewee011).

This student suggested that Australian society as a whole is racist and at university the
Indigenous issues are presented in deficit language and concepts that can create or add to the
stereotypes which fuel racism, because many of the people presenting don’t know or have never
been part of the Indigenous communities to know. My experience is that, as an Indigenous
person you are always looked at to justify why things happen in the community when you are in
some of these classes. This appears to be part of ‘othering’ the Indigenous students in the class
rather than it being inclusive and hearing about positive things happening in the Indigenous
communities.

Racism toward Indigenous students is not a new thing and ‘othering’ of Indigenous
people has even influenced non-Indigenous family members. This is outlined by a withdrawn
student who was confronted with this at an Indigenous pre-orientation program:
“...even with when I did the [name of student orientation program] program yeah that was all done specifically for us Murris, my grandparents on the white side of the family come and visited while we [name of program] was on and I previous to that I hadn’t told them that this was all and I was doing this as a Murri and everything and when I did tell her it was just like ah you turning into one of them now and cop that type of thing [...] It’s, it’s racist!!! [...] as far as they are concerned all black fellows are bad or you know don’t work hard or that is just wrong, that is part of why I had that shame growing up and didn’t want to acknowledge it or embrace it or, that’s the environment that I was in. [...] Yeah but I’m not ashamed I don’t feel shamed for it anymore I love it, I think it’s great and that they were wrong to keep that from me”

(Interviewee006).

This student is talking about how an older family member was racist having been influenced by how Australian society saw Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the past and when the student attended the Indigenous orientation program at university this came out. This highlights the struggles many Indigenous people have in a society where being Indigenous is seen as negative. This is a part of “othering” where Indigenous people are made to be viewed as someone different than the rest of society. It was sad that this could happen but the pressure from society even affected a family member.

When Indigenous students come into university, they don’t want “othering” reinforced by academics who are there to teach and support them. Another withdrawn student reinforced that academics may not know much about Indigenous people before they got to know him, and they only had knowledge of what was in the media. Also, the Indigenous entry pathway made the student feel they were being thought of as being specially let into university and were not good enough:
“...good question too, because I wouldn’t know how they would perceive as an Indigenous person umm I guess if they are a non-Indigenous person they really don’t have much to do with Indigenous people before they had more of a surface understanding of who I am as an Indigenous person. [...] Just what is depicted in the media and stereotype and that sort of thing. [...] Cause I got in with a mark that other people wouldn’t get in you know what I mean. [...] And I was constantly measuring myself comparing myself to other people...so I guess from that experience I always felt that and the academic staff know that’s how I got in and how those Indigenous students come through [...] Maybe they would have thought that they were lesser or inferior to the other students or not as smart or intelligent” (Interviewee009).

This speaks of the racism that is associated with being an Indigenous person and how you may feel when coming into university, like you are being gauged and watched all the time as people think that you are not good enough to be there. Academics need to be aware of this because they could reinforce this racism and stereotyping. The students noticed racism connected to their Indigenous identity from the start and throughout their studies. This impacted upon their sense of ‘belonging’ and of ‘being able to succeed’ in this environment.

Academics

Academics recognised that some staff may be saying racist things inadvertently. Some academics appeared to be stuck in deficit ways of seeing Indigenous students. This is also a racist way of seeing them (i.e., as less than other students). Academics indicated they try to support Indigenous students but admitted that they [academics] could do better:

“And I think you know we all as academic staff and as staff of the university moreover need to convey to students that we’re here to try and help them and
to make them aware of those things [academic support] so that it's not shameful or saying something bad about you to seek those things out to but it actually make sense to do that. And I think that we also probably could do a lot better” (Interviewee015).

In this quotation, the academic sets an image of the Indigenous students as “needing help” which reinforces a deficit and potentially paternalistic way of seeing them. This could imply that negative words have been spoken to Indigenous students before which were stereotyping of Indigenous students. However, the academic has indicated that they want to do better with Indigenous students which is encouraging.

Summary of Racism

The four students stated that racism is directly related to their identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and this was brought to their attention throughout their studies starting from when they first started and engaged with other students and academics until the final years of study. Racism appeared through stereotyping of the Indigenous students’ identity through colour of their skin or trying to justify Indigenous people to other people when Indigenous issues are presented in class and when they enter the university through Indigenous pathways. Students stated that their identity as Indigenous is seen as bad or a deficit which is “othering” and problematising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Academics state they could do better and that students should engage with them. They want the Indigenous students to engage with them without being anxious about them using negative stereotypes. Yet, the language they use when talking about the Indigenous students is one of deficit and othering. The issue of racism has been seen to raise its head when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, regardless of skin pigmentation or socioeconomic background, identify themselves as Indigenous people. The academics need to be aware of the racism associated with identity especially in the
first years as this first impression may influence Indigenous students’ decisions to continue studies.

**Colour**

Skin colour was raised by students and academics in relation to identity. Skin colour can be an issue that is a concern because students are challenged on their identity due to the colour of their skin. This can begin when they start university and are asked about their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity to access Indigenous Support Services. When the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students prove their Indigenous identity and self-identify people may treat them differently.

**Students**

The challenging of Indigenous identity on the basis of colour starts in the first year of study:

“...the first thing that they’ll say is like oh are you Aboriginal, yeah I’m Aboriginal like what percentage are you what, it’s like their way of asking why are you white, it’s, it’s, like they’re saying why are you black”

(Interviewee013).

This challenging of identity because of colour as stated by this student is also repeated by another first year student who argues it may be because of services provided to Indigenous students:

“...my identity I’ve always felt very conflicted about because I look white, but I don’t feel white. [...] A lot of people will take me as joking if I say I am Indigenous or a lot of Indigenous don’t see me as Indigenous they see me as white so I’ve always got I always feel I have to verify who I am and more confirm as opposed to just being, with in my own family structure I call myself the white sheep because I’m the educated one I’m the one that’s always
working I’m the one that’s helping my parents you know I don’t look Indigenous or talk Indigenous like my sisters do. […] I’ll always be on the defence about Indigenous people when I hear stuff said around me because of me looking white a lot of the stuff gets said around me […] I get comments like oh I don’t think it’s fair that you got [name of Indigenous Unit] and that you’re getting food and printing like, why all the white kids should get that too. […] I pretty much have to verbalise it because I don’t look it. […] So, unless people already know I like being physically in the [name of Indigenous Unit] unit no one is going to question it there” (Interviewee007).

This student’s experience suggests that, in order to be considered a ‘real Indigenous person’ and entitled to Indigenous accessed resources, you need to be a certain colour. If you have pale skin, the expectation is that you should be treated the same as other Australians. This reflects a misunderstanding of what it means to be Indigenous, and to identify as such. It harks back to the classification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through Social Darwinism. When Indigenous students do self-identify to other people, they experience racism or stereotyping. Sometimes students self-identify early to avoid being assumed to be non-Indigenous and as a way of preventing racist comments around them:

“…because I am white I just want people to understand that when I am getting to know somebody that I am of Aboriginal descent, it just stops a lot of any sort of racist comment that I might hear that might get upset me” (Interviewee002).

The sharing of your identity as an Indigenous person may be a defensive response and may empower the Indigenous students. This may have been something a final year student has learnt to do while studying:
“I see myself as a proud person, I say that to people I don’t feel embarrassed at all, I tell friends or even anyone that I haven’t even met or that I am Indigenous despite being paler skin colour, I am quite happy and proud to say that I got Indigenous blood where I’m from” (Interviewee012).

The student may have learnt that this is what you have to do for self-protection against racism. All of this self-protection requires effort and energy from Indigenous students that is on top of the effort and energy to undertake their actual studies. Another thing that students reported was that after they’d had a conversation with people about their skin colour and Indigenous identity, others sometimes felt entitled to unload their racism about other Indigenous people. A final year student presented this about the racism directed at her:

“...well I’ve had people say like ask like Italian people, oh are you Aboriginal? cause you got dark skin and I’m like well that’s not what it’s about. [...] It does my head in. [...] People think just because I know this sounds bad because I am fairer like my sister is darker than me but because I’m fairer they think that they can throw all this hate at me and I am not going to do anything about it but as someone who is you know who is darker they wouldn’t dare to they think that it is less important to the couple of generations you go down” (Interviewee026).

That student raised the issue of colour associated with Indigenous identity within family members and how the fairer you are, the less you might identify with the darker family members. A withdrawn student talked about how one side of the family was seen to privilege over the other side of the family:

“...still finding my feet there the white cohort of my family sort of overrode the black side of the family a bit and whilst I have always known that even as a
child that I was Aboriginal [...] they just got this mindset that black fellows are shit really, they don’t, yes, they have had bad experiences there’s with some bad bunches of black fellows, there’s bad bunches of white fellows as well” (Interviewee006).

She continued,

“...the black side of the family yeah but we don’t look black even dad’s not that dark, he's a bit darker than me but not as dark not even dark as you but even you’re not that dark” (Interviewee006).

“treat me the same don’t treat me different because I am black” (Interviewee006).

This demonstrates that Indigenous students wanting to identify may not have full support from family when identifying as it may appear to give up privilege of being seen as a white Australian. However, a withdrawn student suggested that it may even be harder for Indigenous students to get through university as soon as you identify no matter what colour you are:

“...for someone who identifies no matter what colour of their skin, soon as they do so, actually there is a longer distance for them to walk to have that opportunity to access that opportunity [...] so this the issue it’s not about how dark the skin is it’s about a shift in the socio economic shift, socio political shift and it’s also a psychological shift that the individual has to go through you see than for other people non-Indigenous Australians” (Interviewee001).

The student mentioned colour but is saying that it is about identifying as Indigenous that will affect your studying at university. As soon as students self-identify as Indigenous, they become vulnerable to experiencing racism at university. The issues about skin colour put students in a
position where they have to defend their identity, and their family’s history, to people who may not really understand Indigenous identity outside of racialised conceptions of cosmetic appearance.

Academics

Academics reported that they use skin colour and appearance to identify Indigenous students in their classes. One academic told a story that, based on skin colour alone, they did not realise two of their students were Indigenous until they saw them in the Indigenous Student Support Unit:

“...the only time I got to walk through the [Name of Indigenous Unit] centre and I saw at least two other students from my course in there and so it was like ahhhh right so it got to making that connection so okay now I can see that you are an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and you are in my course whereas a lot of the time I work in big spreadsheets and so I have no idea what the student looks like I just see a name and a student number so putting a face and a name and umm I think yeah I could probably do more of that but would I treat them any differently I’m not sure” (Interviewee021).

The academic is alluding to the fact that they did not recognise the students due to cosmetic appearance and even weighing up whether to treat them differently. Instead of assuming automatically that there are likely to be Indigenous students in every class – a better strategy for promoting cultural safety – the academics appeared to want students to self-identify so that they can identify them and engage with them:

“I actually don’t know of any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in our degree that have openly acknowledged that that’s their background” (Interview022).

The academic tried to unpack this further:
“I don’t actually, I am not familiar with too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identifying people, not to say that they are not there, but they haven’t made that obvious, but I would like to think that if I did have a new student come through who was very strongly associating with that background that they would be able to communicate with me” (Interview022).

It is concerning that academics don’t know which students are in their classes by basing the student’s Indigenous identity on colour and wanting them to self-identify to receive assistance. That puts pressure on the Indigenous students consistently to “come out” as Indigenous, often repeatedly across courses in their degrees, rather than putting the onus on academics to create culturally safe and inclusive learning environments.

Summary of Colour

The students raised many aspects of colour in relation to identity including: what percentage of Indigenous they are; being conflicted as feeling too white; defending themselves; defending support received; racism from other students; academics not recognising them; self-identification to not hear racist words; being proud; and coming from community to a white institution and wanting academics to treat them no differently than other people once they know they are Indigenous. The colour issue for students appears to be a concern because it connects to self-identification but when this happens, some are treated differently. Academics have mentioned colour as a way of referring to themselves or how they identify the Indigenous students and they rely on self-identification to know who the students in their courses are. The issue of colour is crucial in relation to identity because it indicates the university is still viewing Indigenous identity as defined by colour – and false scientific ideas about race – instead of cultural background, kinship, and connection to Country. All of the students interviewed viewed colour as a problematic dynamic that added to their experiences of stereotyping and racism at university.
**Academic awareness**

Academics’ awareness of Indigenous students emerged as a sub-theme related to identity. While this sub-theme overlaps a bit with the previous sub-theme of Colour, it is also broader than colour. There are various statements from students and academics around academic awareness – or lack thereof – of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within their courses and classes. They reported that, for various reasons, Indigenous students can be “invisible” to academics in the classroom. For example, students and academics indicated that large classes at university may hinder relationship building and academics’ awareness of Indigenous students in their classes. Students reported that they were often not acknowledged as Indigenous people in classes. More broadly, academics displayed a lack of awareness of Indigenous communities generally and the aspects of cultural identity, kinships, Country and other issues that may be important for Indigenous students.

**Students**

Academics’ awareness of Indigenous students is vitally important especially in the first years of study. A first year student talked about being accepted and but not acknowledged, and he was hoping that this may be changing with a Welcome from Elders:

“...in terms of how me and other Aboriginal students here feel towards the academics its quite umm it’s quite like accepted even if it’s not always acknowledged [...] yeah I could extend of it though um for example the first year med the very, very, first person to talk to whole cohort was Uncle {Elders name} and that was like I thought the really, really, good ahh starting point for everyone in med like not just the Aboriginal students it’s kind of like acknowledging that there are first peoples here” (Interviewee013).
This shows that identity is related to awareness of Indigenous students and the university is trying to do something about it. However, at an individual level it may not be happening as another first year student stated they have not engaged with academics at a one on one level as yet:

“…yeah, we were talking about that, so far so good we haven’t had much one on one interaction with them either to be able to answer that entirely”
(Interviewee008).

This highlights that students do not engage with academics one on one in the first year until there are reasons to engage with them. Another student further explained that academics are perceived as not to engage with Indigenous students as they are busy and have big classes:

“…myself I don’t think that I have come across any of the academics outside of you know here um would even know that I am an Indigenous student at university so I guess I haven’t really had any sort of circumstance where it would even bought up or even close to being bought up so they don’t view me any different than any other student [...] yeah because 9 times out of 10 they wouldn’t even know that you were an Indigenous student [...] unless something came up [...] to me they seem so busy that they wouldn’t even have the time to be worried about going through students files and who’s good and who’s bad and that kind of stuff [...] which is completely different from a high school or something like that you know what I mean [...] especially in health when they got 900 students or something” (Interviewee010).

A point to note here is that academics are perceived to not aware of Indigenous students in their large classes, they are too busy and do not have time to check if there are Indigenous students. Alternatively, they don’t see them due to stereotyping of what an Indigenous student may look
like. The student’s reported experiences suggest that it is important for academics to know who their students are in the first-year classes, as this will make them feel part of the class and university. That awareness can be gained by looking up statistical information typically available to all academics.

Continuing from this an academic may appear racist if they don’t have awareness of the students in their class. A previously withdrawn student talked about being invisible and seen the same as other students because the academic is just doing their job:

“I think there is a, by my experience and I’ve been here nearly three years, I think the faculty just sees you as another student like they don’t see you as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or an international student and I think from their point of view I think the same rules apply when their teaching and until they are either confronted or forced or approached maybe with an issue that might be relevant to an Aboriginal person then that forces them to change their view. […] I am pretty good at reading the you know the mannerism of the lecturer and knowing whether they’re approachable or not and some of them are friendly and some just you know they are just doing their lecture because they have to” (Interviewee027).

That student shows, again, the additional effort that Indigenous students often have to go to manage lack of awareness or cultural safety in their interactions with academics. To manage potential lack of awareness, the student is actively “reading” academics to get a sense of whether they are “safe” to approach.

This invisibility of Indigenous students in university classes may be due to colour, racism or the academics just not having much engagement with Indigenous people:

“I wouldn’t know how they would perceive as an Indigenous person umm I guess if they are a non-Indigenous person they really don’t have much to do with
Indigenous people before they had more of a surface understanding of who I am as an Indigenous person. [...] Might have something to do with limited experiences with our Indigenous people” (Interviewee009).

Students being invisible or the academic not knowing who is in their class becomes noticeable when course content on Indigenous people is in the curriculum and presented in class in a clumsy unprofessional manner. Each time Indigenous topics are discussed in class the Indigenous students are potentially at risk of being stereotyped or experiencing racism. One student described attempts to present Indigenous topics in class that reinforced the invisibility and “othering” of Indigenous students in the class and showed the non-Indigenous academics’ lack of knowledge and insight:

“There is one thing that I would say is that when Indigenous subjects are discussed in lectures or tutorials it’s always been cool for the ‘other’ person the academic to be aware that instead of just talking about the ‘other’ interesting the exotic that you don’t have a connection with actually there could be people in the class and when you talk about those things you shouldn’t be making wide sweeping terms. [...] You know they would really feel like that is a personal attack or they process it as more trauma you see so I think academics play a big role” (Interviewee001).

In this example, the student was negatively affected by the fact that academics were talking about Indigenous people as if there were no Indigenous people in the room. The final year students also reinforce that awareness could be related to colour pigmentation with stating that the academics may not see them due to colour of skin:

“No, I have never been questioned or asked or anything I’m not sure whether it’s because they don’t realise that I’m Indigenous or anything yeah I’m not sure if it’s not anything to do with my pigment colour that they would think that
I don’t think up their level that they should be judging anyway no matter what gender or race you are” (Interviewee012).

The issue of colour in relation to identification comes up often and does appear to be part of the awareness of Indigenous students in the classrooms. It is concerning that a final year student mentioned this after being at university for a few years, so it was not a new thing for them. Another final year student talked about academics not being aware because they may not have grown up with Indigenous people. The student directly overheard an academic making racist remarks:

“because they have not had to grow up like, like that because I been expected as a child always talk and share my experiences as an Aboriginal person and I don’t know why, and I’ve been, I heard really racist stuff from teachers and lecturers” (Interviewee011).

It is concerning that a final year student heard racist remarks from academics and felt that many have no history of engaging with Indigenous people to develop lived experiences and awareness. In contrast, another final year student stated they had a positive experience with a lecturer who was aware of them as an Indigenous student:

“I had some really [good] lecturers like my first year lecturers there was one she was really good she, cause I used to sit at the front and she would come over and make sure I had stuff printed out she’d ask me if I got umm, first I didn’t know how to find her but then I felt like I could approach her and so I went up a couple of times and I would ask her questions in her room and yeah little things like that and then I got I connected like I got engaged in that subject yeah” (Interviewee018).
That student’s experience highlights how academics’ awareness and acknowledgment of Indigenous students can ensure the student is connected to the class and course. What is not mentioned is the awareness in relation to colour, however the student shows that they fully engaged with the academic as well.

Another final year student said that academics initially weren’t aware of Indigenous students, but they still had good experiences with academics:

“I guess sometimes initially some academics aren’t always aware that some students are Indigenous, which is interesting to see, if they act if umm not aware but they’re usually in lectures and stuff quite considerate and sensitive, in my experience anyway. [...] I’ve personally had great experiences with um the academics here at [Name of University] and [Name of campus] campus, um they’re usually great usually don’t you know don’t treat you differently I think it’s sometimes they just cause its social work a lot of the topics they do go through issues with Indigenous people so they try to be as sensitive as they can and acknowledge that we do had Indigenous students in the course”

(Interviewee005).

This may indicate that the academics in the first years may need to engage with Indigenous students to ensure they know who they are as to address any stereotypes due to colour however racist statements may be different depending on the academic or students that make them. The student continued about the lack of understanding by academics as being part of their awareness related to identity:

“I think that some are pretty good, I think others are a little bit wayward I guess particularly I feel, like marking assessments and they will mark a certain way
based on their understanding, they don’t seem to have that understanding”

(Interviewee004).

Understanding appears to relate to the academics’ knowledge of Indigenous people, the history and issues that they are teaching, whether the Indigenous student has identified and whether the academic has experience with, or knowledge of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The students’ experiences indicate that academics need an awareness of Indigenous students and Indigenous issues across many different aspects of academic work, including learning styles and marking assessments.

Academics

Academics’ lack of awareness of Indigenous students was openly discussed by the two academics who raised the issue of appearance, big classes and being busy. As previously discussed in this chapter, one academic mentioned that until they engaged with the Indigenous Unit at the university, they had no idea of the Indigenous students in their course. That experience suggests that the academic didn’t have any engagement with Indigenous students or people and relied on the student to self-identify. Another academic continued about self-identifying of Indigenous students due to large classes and use of technologies such as lecture capture:

“I think it is important for a mutual awareness of mutual support happening so I actually don’t know of any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in our degree that have openly acknowledged that that’s their background or their, that’s what they associate with, and mind you in my course that I teach there are a minimum of 80 students so a lot of them actually don’t, I don’t see them face to face because they do lecture capture or whatever but umm so I don’t actually am familiar with too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
identifying people not to say that they are not there, but they haven’t made that obvious” (Interviewee022).

This academic showed a lack of basic awareness of the diversity of Indigenous appearance (e.g. skin colour) that is accepted and normal in Indigenous communities and families. As a result, in some courses, assumptions are made that there are no Indigenous students. There are courses where students appear to be seen:

“...where I am based at the moment, I see them well acknowledged I see them well supported and I see them well ahh integrated to our courses or our program umm generally though I don’t see that always occurring in our wider community I think there are gaps in terms of support and integration. [...] We talk as we go to all of them but those quiet students who are paddling struggling underneath, paddling along and really frantic they don’t speak up, so we often don’t get to know about them until they hand in their next assessment” (Interviewee016).

Even when Indigenous students are acknowledged and supported, some academics still seemed to not engage with students unless they were struggling and identify themselves as Indigenous which highlights the connection between awareness, identity, and dominant deficit ways of constructing Indigenous students as needing “help”.

Summary of Academic Awareness

Students state that academics are busy and have big classes so many are unaware of Indigenous people in their classes unless a flag is raised. The students said that academics need to be aware of students in the class if they are lecturing or marking on Indigenous issues as this may cause distress to students. Colour of skin and racist comments were also a concern. There were students who had positive engagement with academics, and this made a difference to the quality
of experience. The two academics acknowledged that they were too busy and have big classes but thought Indigenous students were supported, although some may slip through the cracks. They knew that they may not identify as Indigenous students, and the only identification may be through their interaction with the Indigenous support units. It could be that most academics don’t identify Indigenous students due to what they look like and it could be a combination of approaching academics before the students need support as well as academics approaching the Indigenous units to meet any students in their schools.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to unpack how identity affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at university. Overall, the findings guided by critical race theory has confirmed that identity is important to Indigenous people when studying at university. It is particularly critical at the early stages of entering university, with first year students highlighting how they can feel stereotyped, judged, or invisible if they are still developing their own connections to cultural background, place and kinship. Without such things being understood and respected, racism and marginalisation can dominate the experience of identity for Indigenous students. One of the main areas of positive strength was that many students related well to their cultural background, kinships and place through their studies starting in the first year but critically this grew stronger as they progressed through their studies. However, those who felt identity was less clearly acknowledged or experienced in the first year of study were more likely to experience negative outcomes in progressing their studies. This can be complicated by the numbers of students in first year of study and some limitations of academics’ capacity to support students.

Academics indicated that they often had limited understanding and awareness of Indigenous students or people more generally. Students were highly aware of that and self-managed their contact with academics accordingly. Academics seemed to retreat to racialised
conceptions of Indigenous identity (e.g. skin colour) in order to identify and acknowledge Indigenous students in their classes. This is a limiting way of identifying and engaging with Indigenous people that can cause Indigenous students to feel invisible and unsupported in their identity. It was particularly problematic when academics spoke about Indigenous topics in class without assuming there were Indigenous students in the room.
Chapter 6 - Roles

Chapter summary

This is the second of three findings chapters that present the outcomes of the analysis of student and academic interviews. This chapter focuses on the major theme of roles. As outlined in the methodology and theory chapters, the findings chapters of the thesis are presented in relation to the three key theories guiding the research (i.e. Critical Race Theory, Role Theory and Self-fulfilling Prophecy). This roles chapter is guided by role theory and focuses on student and academic perceptions and experiences of ‘roles’ in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples studying at university. Analysis of the major theme of roles led to identification of sub themes including: Connection to Identity; Family Commitment; Community Roles; Transition between Community to University; University Roles; Leadership, and Health Professional Roles. Each sub-theme is presented with examples and interpretation drawing on theory and relevant scholarly literature. The chapter draws together key findings around elements of roles that lend strength and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ experiences during their study. Student and academic perceptions of roles that are barriers to positive student experiences and outcomes are explored. These findings are discussed in synthesis with the other findings chapters in the discussion chapter. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in the conclusion chapter of the thesis.

Introduction

Roles are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when studying at university. The roles that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play in their families and communities are important and this needs to be considered when they transition from the community to university and then continue within the university system and onto becoming health professionals. Historically, in mainstream Australia, the roles of Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander people have been viewed negatively or in limited terms. For example, Indigenous people have often been associated with roles such as maid, servant, labourer, farm worker, welfare recipient, person in need of help, and so on. Those kinds of role expectations are consistent with broader deficit and racist ways of seeing Indigenous people in the wider society. Such role expectations have played out in the higher education system and racist policies in the past (e.g. Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897) which only educated people who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to prepare them for low skilled roles and which exempted them from access to the higher education system (AIATSIS, 2008). To further explore how roles are seen and experienced within the contemporary higher education system, I interviewed 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and 10 non-Indigenous academics to ask them about their perceptions of the roles of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a health faculty of an Australian university. This chapter presents key findings in relation to roles.

Roles Theory was introduced in Chapter 3 to locate the roles of the Indigenous students in the higher education system. Early Role theorists such as Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959) suggested that we need to understand the transition of roles when people are moving from one role to another such as Indigenous students transitioning from community to the university. Many of the structured (structured (formal) role as part of structure) and symbolic interactional (non-structural (informal) role interacting with people and environment) roles in the Indigenous community are invisible and often not seen, heard or included in western society and are usually overlooked in favour of a Eurocentric roles (Corporal, Sunderland, O’Leary & Riley, 2020; NATSIHC, 2008). When applied in Australia, role theory highlights how the roles of Indigenous people such as community health workers have either been portrayed negatively or overshadowed throughout a history of colonisation (Huggins 1998; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Rose 2014). Given that schools and universities continue to fail Indigenous students, there is an
urgent need to focus on the significance of these roles in relation to retention and attrition within a higher education system (NATSIHC, 2008). I have presented the themes below in a way that foregrounds the roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and academics involved in my research.

One of the main criteria of being an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person is being accepted in your community as a member of that community (Gardiner, 2000). This refers to having a place or a role in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that you are living within, whether you come from that land historically, or are living on that land contemporaneously. An individual’s role is important because they are accepted as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander within the community. Sometimes people choose to attain further qualifications, sometimes they want to learn and develop within their community role. Many go onto higher education through university so that they can practice as a health professional, either in their community or in the wider community, where they can still connect back, or give back, to their communities. The role in the community, the transition into university and the role they see themselves occupying at university can affect not only the students but their families and the whole community. The high percentage of Indigenous students’ attrition rates that is mentioned in the literature review Chapter 2 (NATSIHC, 2008) will not only impact on the Indigenous students but their families and communities if they are not supported in the transition to university and their community and university roles. Questions were asked of both Indigenous students and non-Indigenous academic staff about their perceptions of the roles Indigenous students have in their communities; the transition of the role from community to university; and the role they occupy within the university. The participants in this study had much to say in relation to roles and the transition of roles from the community setting to the university setting.
Sub-themes related to Roles

My analysis of roles in the interview data revealed experiences that both lend strength to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at university and challenge that strength. The sub-themes under the major theme of Roles include: Connection to Identity; Family Commitment; Community Roles; Transition between Community to University; University Roles; Leadership, and Health Professional Roles. I will first discuss the sub themes below by drawing on participant quotations. I acknowledge that they are not mutually exclusive categories. For example, a student’s role in the community may also be a role in their family.

Connection to Identity

The first of the sub themes that came out of the interviews with the Indigenous students and academics was how role is connected to identity.

Students

The following first year student connected her role as a nursing student with her identity as an Indigenous person through identifying and drawing support from both cultural Elders that support her and “nursing aunties” i.e. Elders within the nursing profession:

“...as well so umm the Elders I’ll be talking with and Aunties I’ve got are nursing aunties instead of going to talking with all my teachers. [...] I’m going to be starting to interact with a different aspect of the community”

(Interviewee007).

This highlights the connection between community and cultural roles and students’ emerging professional identities. The student highlights how she is still connected to her community. Another first year student talked about the differences in relating and communicating with university staff compared to cultural Elders:
“Yep, especially the language and the communication where you stand as far as umm like communicating with like academics and um anyone really that you sort of communicate with the course convenors or anyone like that major that compared with an Elder or one of your uncles or whoever in the community it’s sort of yeah it’s different” (Interviewee010).

The first year students demonstrated the connection that roles have to their identity and how they may gain support from Elders and communicate differently to them. Such experiences may increase students’ ability to communicate professionally with a range of people and are hence positive.

A withdrawn student talked about his role in the Indigenous community:

“Okay so in my community I probably fulfil a couple of different roles, primarily I am a family man so I’m, I my immediate family my partner my son I’m Aboriginal I identify as an Aboriginal man my son is an Aboriginal boy both my grandmothers live in my community so and they are both Aboriginal, so we are known as an Aboriginal family of Aboriginal heritage.” (Interviewee027).

The student talks about having a certain role as opposed to the roles of his partner, his son and his grandparents. This shows his structural role in the Indigenous community, but it does not mention his role as a student.

A final year student spoke about their role in being a role model for their community and how they want to return to help out:

“So, I feel it’s important for me to be a role model I guess as well but also when I finish my degree to go back and work in my community and try and change some of the negative things but also to try and change those negative things but draw on the positive things as well in the community” (Interviewee011).
That student shows the connection between their role at university and going back to their community to help out others by being a role model. This again is specific to their identity as an Indigenous person and the roles they may play. Being a role model is not what the person’s professional role is but is seen as an interactional role which is designed specially to interact with others in their Indigenous community and to encourage others to study. Another final year student talked about a role that is a symbolic interactional role within their Indigenous community. The student reaffirmed this connection of role to their identity as a mentor to other Indigenous students:

“Um as, I see myself as a mentor because I am so far in my degree and I want to help the ahh umm the earlier students make sure that they continue through and don’t give up and I’ve also done mentoring for the uni both [Name of University] in general and [Name of Indigenous Unit] and the helper thing kind of that again. [...] Helper role through uni.” (Interviewee005).

The final year student mentions these roles of mentor and helper to their community and once again these are symbolic interactional roles that are not structured roles but roles that are created to encourage and help other Indigenous people. The final year students highlighted that they want to help other Indigenous people in any roles they have. The final year student below described needing to adjust when working in mainstream as opposed to Indigenous community settings:

“I have gone from community work, working with my own mob with mainstream and just the way they do everything is completely different. [...] I am learning how to adapt I’m learning how to mix two worlds” (Interviewee004).
That quotation highlights that Indigenous students straddle different identities and roles in community and mainstream settings and experience change when they work with other people outside their community.

**Academics**

The following academic saw the connection between role and identity in their own life and how roles may change when learning to be a health professional at university:

“*I came into my degree with family traditions probably not as strong as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would come in with, but I had to um purposely give up some of those traditions in terms of health. [...] I have had to distance myself from that tradition so I think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would do the same thing naturally cause um you know they don’t want to lose their heritage because you need to keep that but there is a different way of thinking that isn’t non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander it’s just the professional training*” (Interviewee022).

The academic had a good understanding of the students’ role connected to identity however may require more understanding that some of the Indigenous roles could be more included in the training at university to be more suited to Indigenous people and their background. Students interviewed did not indicate that they had to leave behind their cultural traditions when attending university but instead talked about having to learn new things and straddle new roles and contexts alongside community, family, and cultural roles.

Another academic spoke about the Indigenous students identifying as Indigenous and being very vocal about what they want, which supports the previous quote in identifying the ways that Indigenous students combine their student and Indigenous roles and identities:
“I think they have, if I can think about my current body of students and I several who are Indigenous and maybe I wouldn’t have picked up on that, cause it’s not particularly obvious but they identify with Indigenous people, they are very vocal and would stand up for what they believe and what they want and are very assertive.” (Interviewee016).

This continues to highlight that identity is connected to the Indigenous student’s role of representing their community. The academic stated that Indigenous peoples who do not look like the archetype Indigenous students are very passionate about their identity. Students become frustrated that the academics and others at university may not understand their identity and role as an Indigenous person and how they may work with their community. There appears to be a distinct role for the “Indigenous student” as opposed to just “student” that emerges through the combination of cultural identifications as a student.

Summary of Connection to Identity
The students spoke about how they consulted with community Elders in relation to the roles at university and how they should be as health professionals. The students further stated that talking with Elders is different than talking to academics and that they find new Elders or “aunties” within their emerging health profession. Students have structured roles in community in relation to work as well as symbolic interactional roles within family and as role models and mentors to other Indigenous people with many wanting to go back to work in their communities. Students are aware that their role may change at university but want to maintain their identity. Students tended to describe straddling two worlds rather than leaving behind Indigenous culture and community. A non-Indigenous academic stated that they thought Indigenous peoples’ roles change at university and students may need to leave some of their cultural traditions to take on studies, but that idea was not reinforced in the student interviews. Another academic spoke about Indigenous students
being vocal about their culture and standing up for what they want. These academics appear to see a connection between Indigenous identity and their roles at university both negative and positive.

**Family Commitment**

*Students*

Roles in the family are important for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and this continues when they start studies and university. Many Indigenous students have a role in their family to complete their studies as part of representing their communities in a particular health profession. Also, many of the students in health-related courses have children and juggle the role of parent and student. This has been spoken about as having to take on an extra role (Home, 1997). A first year student realised this when starting her studies:

> “But also grasp everything there is to know about university and being involved in it as much as I can obviously it’s difficult because my role generally is to be a mum and go home to do all that and that ticks just fine […] But, I think families is a big one for me because of lots of responsibility and not just my own family but my mum and my grandparents and some, that kind of stuff and just having to juggle it all and what that looks like and I know my family is not as big as a lot of Indigenous families” (Interviewee003).

The role in family is considered a big responsibility for Indigenous people and there is added pressure on them when they take on the role of a student at university while juggling family commitments.

The following final year student reinforced that family commitments are one of the roles that impacts their study.

> “So, there’s lot of family and cultural responsibilities that students have to kind of leave and deal with which can get in the way of, cause studying is hard and
you can’t just keep taking breaks so I think that can affect Aboriginal students

um what another one, so what did I just say” (Interviewee005).

This student highlighted how their family role is considered important to Indigenous people and even in their final years of study they have to make decisions in relation to their role as a student and how much time they could give to their family and cultural roles.

Academics

One of the academics also recognised that family roles are important to Indigenous students and that family commitments affect the Indigenous students’ role at university, causing them to make choices between studying and family:

“...all of a sudden they’re not caring for the other people, but they may reduce the extent that they can to fulfil that role that may be such as they just don’t have the time and space to do so. [...] That’s right and it kind of depends on the individual like you know when it comes to family you know 99 percent of the time hopefully more that’s the most important thing so that’s always a central thing in your life ... and university will come second but you know there will be cases where it is different, that applies to work as well, some people’s work is more important than their family” (Interviewee020).

The academic talks about the family role being important but then suggests that some students may consider university to be more important. This speaks of the identification of the need to balance the family role and student role of Indigenous students.

Summary of Family Commitment

Students spoke about taking on an extra role when taking on the role of a student at university, as many have the family responsibilities as part of their wider community cultural commitments. The students spoke about balancing these family and community role commitments and student
role. The academic spoke about being aware of family role commitments however suggested that students need to commit to the students’ roles. The Indigenous students and academic highlighted the pressure between individual and collective roles. The interviews showed how taking on an extra role may lead to role strain and role stress.

**Community Roles**

*Students*

The roles that students play in the community vary and sometimes are related to the future role that they will play at the university and as health professionals. This first year student spoke about their role in the community as being related to their role as a student and future health professional representing their family and community:

“Yeah, cause, I’m not really living in my home in my community umm it’s not as umm I wish I could go back more and kind of, last time I was there was during the most recent break and like I love going back I see family and stuff like that, I guess the role I kind of play in that is kind of like I’m the ahh the fellow that moved to the city and doing his med degree so… it’s like a sense of pride there as well it makes me sort of feel good that my family feel proud of what I am doing as well” (Interviewee013).

That student suggested that they don’t have a role geographically located in their community but still have a symbolic role as someone from the community who has gone away and is studying and becoming a health professional.

Another first year student talked about not having an active role in the community that is current but hoping to have an active role like her grandmother:

“Inactive at the moment. [...] Inactive, um my grandmother she works down at Yugambeh. [...] So, she’s sort of starting now in her late 60s to try and get a
bit of her culture and stuff as well so she has become an active member and thing in the community, that’s something that I want to lean towards. [...] So, I want more of an active role in that community” (Interviewee008).

This student recognised that they don’t have a role in the community so did not appear to have role conflict between their community and student roles. The student talked about wanting a role in the community, though, which may be related to the course that the student is studying.

This first year student talked about having an educator role in the community which may not be a structured role but an interactional or doing role:

“I suppose it is like I said before touching on if I am in a community setting that don’t know a lot about Indigenous people cause as a lot of people that have no understanding of what our values and beliefs would be and why we conduct ourselves the way we do, and I see my role as a little bit of an educator in that you know. [...] I suppose myself is a bit of an educator role and um having young children as well it really important for me that as of now toddlers that they understand that what the Aboriginal flag look like and what do the colours mean why you know, why do we say certain words that we say. [...] So, I say more of an educational role” (Interviewee003).

The role does not appear to be related to the structured role that the Indigenous person has in the community or is going to pursue at university. The role of educator may be related to the practical skills that the student had to develop because of them being Indigenous to educate people about Indigenous people.

The interactional role is also spoken about by a student that has previously withdrawn from university. The withdrawn student explained that they have a helper and nurturer role in the community:
“...as a helper [...] As a helper cause I volunteer for and organisation who gives gifts to people from rural and remote communities who find themselves all of a sudden in the city hospital [...] So we might run some meals ...to the families for the year, or we try and fund raiser for petrol vouchers and stuff like that so I try and help and assist people umm I also I am just happy to cruise along and look after my little mob. [...] a nurturer I suppose, I’m a nurturing role I’m yeah ...nurturer. [...] That’s probably it, a nurturing role and then even saying that as I talk, I am discovering that I wouldn’t even see myself as that yeah” (Interviewee006).

The symbolic interactional roles that the student has in the community are once again not structured roles but relate to how they interact with other people. The student will study in a health field related to that kind of activity, which provides a structured role to perform these interaction roles.

The next withdrawn student does have a structured role in the community as a disability and community support worker which they want to get more qualifications in through their studies:

“I work as a disability worker and a community support worker at an Aboriginal run respite centre so also through my work I wear my uniform as red black and yellow [colours of the Aboriginal flag], so I identify as that community support worker but as an Aboriginal community support worker you know as well so I don’t think people have any doubt about where I stand” (Interviewee027).

This community role lets people know that he is in a structured role as part of the Indigenous community and may be wanting to further this through studying at university. This can be
straight forward; however, they could find that there are cultural differences in the way the roles operate within a western system which may cause a culture clash.

This student shared that they had not seen a valued role in the community for themselves however they do like to assist people:

“...yeah um well for me mm I really see myself as a person who can assist other people of making bridges from a life of marginalisation to a life of celebration. [...] Well I think that if I talk about my early life, there was no valued role, there wasn’t opportunity for a valued role.” (Interviewee001).

It’s interesting that the students often link “roles” with helping or supporting family and community. This will be linked to their decisions to study health professions as well. The student may be suggesting that as an Indigenous person that could not see a clear role in the community for themselves as they felt marginalised, they were performing a non-structured role of helping others. This can happen with marginalised groups where the people are doing roles, but it is not named or structured. It does become clear when they start studies, as their voluntary roles are sometimes in the area that the person wants to study in.

The final year students seem to have a more focused view of their role in community and it is usually lined up with the area they are finalising their studies in. One final year student mentions having a big role in the community and that they are a role model and an Aunty which suggests having very busy roles and being very involved in their community:

“...okay so a big role is basically important because in my community it’s so much poverty okay basically and feel like and like a lot of my family don’t like have never received a higher education. [...] So, I feel it’s important for me to be a role model I guess as well but also when I finish my degree to go back and work in my community and try and change some of the negative things but also
to try and change those negative things but draw on the positive things as well in the community. [...] So that’s about what my role is, but my role is many but in my community I’m already a nana ... so you know how it is, I’m an Aunty and a Great Aunty now...got many roles” (Interviewee011).

The student suggests that she has these roles within her community and wants to finish her studies and go back to her community and continue these roles with the added structured role that her degree provides for her.

This final year student talks about her role in the community as being helping, nurturing and support roles that may be connected to structured roles within Indigenous community organisations. Once again, the student has a role within her Indigenous community:

“I guess my role in the community based on just the work that I have chosen to do in the community is more of helping and nurturing role I tend to, I have done a lot of work with [name of Indigenous organisation] and I have done a lot of work for [name of Indigenous organisation] particularly helping young people and sort of just being there cause I tend to find that you can’t always talk to friends and family because it is harder you know what I mean cause sometimes you need someone who is not involved because they can give you more black and white advice, you know and they see everything from a completely different perspective so um I’ve done a lot of work with particularly young women and a lot of children who are under eight in our communities um I guess I am that support person that you know the young ones know, a few of them know where they can get me even if I am not at work so they know where I am so they know they can come and see me when they need help.” (Interviewee004).
This would suggest that the student is studying to get more qualifications for the role that she already has been doing in the community and would want to operate in the structured role within the community when finished. The students suggest they have a purpose for studying at university which is related to the role that they may have in their community. It also suggests that the community would support them because they are part of that community and they have a role to play in the Indigenous community.

**Academics**

The academics spoke about seeing the roles of Indigenous people being no different to any other people in society, however there was a suggestion that the students were seen as leaders within their communities:

“"I don’t think that the roles of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders within their communities are any different than they are for anyone else in the broader community, or anyone from the broader community relating down to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and vice versa because they are going to be leaders, they’re going to be people who carry out the day to day tasks they’re going to be teachers I like to think that everyone in every society acts as a teacher, some people do it better than others so I don’t see there’s any difference” (Interviewee024).

The academics also suggested that the roles of the students were to help their communities because the communities needed help. There are hence implied suggestions of the Indigenous community being considered more in need than the wider community and the students will have roles as leaders through studying, but their current roles are just the same as other people. This seems to dismiss the roles the students may already play in their community or the strengths of that community.
Another academic openly admitted they have no knowledge of Indigenous people’s roles in their communities but had the same opinion that the Indigenous communities are in greater need than the wider communities:

“I’m in this health discipline and I don’t have much experience with these communities all what you hear is about is low socio-economic standards so honestly it there in health like it’s pretty bad in these communities.”
(Interviewee023).

Not all academics have a low opinion of Indigenous peoples’ roles in their community, however they don’t see their roles as differing from those of any member of a community:

“I see the role within a community to be the same as the role that would occur in any community for example there would be there would be a lot of people with a lot of experience and wisdom, there would be Elders who are looked upon for advice um there are the younger people learning the ropes there is the middle people who have family responsibility, like the roles that you would play are similar regardless of which community are in”(Interviewee019).

This academic is describing a concept of community that is based upon age and experience providing leadership. Young people know less, middle age people raise families, older people are wise and experienced and therefore lead. This model is not consistent with the academic model that favours institutional study over life experience.

The academic goes on to say:

“Yeah in the sense I think Aboriginal people should be no different than from any other community or Australians in general and any role that anyone else plays they should be able to play and that should be no different because um
clearly there are issues that we all would like to address, the Aboriginal people would like to see improvements in their way of life in some of the status, statistics and parameters and what not but that cannot be achieved by an outsider of sorts telling them what to do and telling them that is best so I think that at almost every level whether it’s the head of the family whether it’s the head of the community school teachers principles there should be Aboriginal people who are at that level and that is not easy.” (Interviewee025).

The roles mentioned by the previous academic are roles that Indigenous should have as part of their families with no outsiders telling them what to do but then they say they should have roles as part of the wider community such as being a principle at a school:

“...but then I think that is no different than the rest of us, we all have different roles don’t we [...] I think what we see locally in particularly [Name of City] community is they have a strong presence.” (Interviewee016).

It is important to emphasise that these two roles are different: Being a leader because you have a lifetime of experience in the community and being a school principal because you have completed academic training are very different things. The structures we live in, favour academic qualifications over life experience. Roles are presented as the same, however these roles are felt very differently in the Indigenous community.

Summary of Community Roles
The summary of roles in the community is quite complex. Indigenous students play roles in their communities with some already in the roles and wanting to upgrade their qualifications to function in this role and others wanting to become qualified to work in new roles. Some roles in community are structured roles however many of the roles are symbolic interactional roles, motivating many to go to university. The students often associate their roles in communities with
helping and supporting family and community. However, many academics didn’t think that Indigenous students would be different to any other students in their community roles. Many academics didn’t see the roles in community as structured but more symbolic interactional until the Indigenous student is qualified through university. There can also be a clash between the community and university roles.

**Transition between Community to University**

Students and academics spoke about different aspects of the transition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ role in their community to the role within the university system. This transition is very important in the first years of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ studies because this is usually where the student will struggle and may leave university.

**Students**

The roles that students enter at university see them transitioning to different ways of speaking and acting as future health professionals:

“Yeap, um, it is quite different I think in terms of community and at uni you kind of have to a different it kind of like a different role in the sense that it’s more of an air of professionalism I guess or ... you have to kind of confine yourself a bit in the uni perspective so the way I would talk back in community with family and stuff is like a different I don’t know like a different way of talking about things and then when you bring it to the uni context you it’s like a more academic based so like you do kind of tone down a bit the casualness yeah. [...] It’s the expectation I guess, you can’t just go around like doing what you normally do in with your family and stuff at uni. [...] You are expected to it’s like a different role you’re a physician in training I guess, [...] at the school of
medicine so you’re expected to present yourself that way not just like…” (Interviewee013).

The role transitions this student spoke about affect how they feel they should speak and act in their new role as a medical student. The student mentions that those ways of speaking and acting are different in the community. This may indicate opportunities to build their experience and establish tools to successfully navigate the cultural interface (see Nakata, 2000). However, many Indigenous people struggle with the transition due to speech and acting because this may mean giving up some of their cultural ways associated with language and protocols. Also, it was not clear if the student was keeping both roles:

“…well you sort of keep both roles” (Interviewee010).

Having more than one role means that you are taking on an extra role and this may be a challenge for some students because it can lead to role strain. Knowing how to balance these roles can lead to anxiety because students are giving up some of their cultural or family roles in the community.

Students said having support networks at university helps them with the transition and direction for the future career:

“So far, I haven’t grasped the transition up, I got so much other crap going on in my life that I am still trying to figure that out, umm the transition has been smoother knowing that I’ve got that network here that I can come to for support […] Here I’m trying to be more active. […] That is a transition. […] That’s where I’m headed (laughs), so that I can take here and take that back to the outside too.” (Interviewee008).
Having support at university in the transition was seen as important to help overcome stresses. Besides having support, students spoke about finding themselves as an academic as opposed to being in “mum mode”:

“I am a single mum I’m at home I’m always mum mode at home so when I do find myself when I come to university, I am no longer in that mum mode I’m in, I’m learning to be to find myself” [...] “myself, an academic at university” (Interviewee002).

The previous student spoke about the change of role and finding themselves which is a common thing for Indigenous students who are parents. Looking after family is an important role in the community and they have to balance this with the new academic role (Home, 1997). Not all students found their roles at university to be completely different to their community roles. The next student explained that the roles are similar and that the transition was easy:

“My roles are sort of similar hey in both sort of areas. [...] I think that university transfer over from the community is that I guess it is very similar” (Interviewee009).

Many Indigenous people may be working in health already and want to upgrade their qualifications and skills, so the roles appear similar with an easy transition to university.

The next student argued that the transition for him as an Indigenous student was challenging due to barriers not experienced by non-Indigenous students. The student appeared to be talking about their cultural role in the community and how they could not bring some of that into university and had to take on aspects of the non-Indigenous roles which the non-Indigenous students didn’t understand.

“There was transition and there was many, um, there was many challenges like sometimes there was, um, when I first went to uni in the 90s I umm you know
sometimes um people were informing me of who I was. Now I looked around
the class and I thought how come no one else is being informed about who they
are or how they ahh how they could see themselves or how they should not
possibly see themselves and yeah so I think for a lot of students though there
are many challenges in that transition yes and it is a good transition if people
haven’t you know lived in that space themselves they really won’t get a sense
of what an individual has to go through the barriers and the shifting sense of
self and it is to do with these challenges they’re systemic in that way they’re
hidden they’re so hidden from the non-Indigenous person it doesn’t they don’t
even conceive it yeah” (Interviewee001).

Change is apparent when transitioning into the university role as said by the above student. He
suggested that non-Indigenous people don’t know about the change as they have never
experienced the same change. The barriers to the role in university are suggested as racism,
colour of skin, historical “unskilled” roles for Indigenous people, and socioeconomic status of
Indigenous people. Those barriers are also recognised by a final year student who spoke about
the formal and white English structured institution when coming from an Indigenous community:

“‘Oh its completely different from your role in community, but then that’s why
you’ve got to find the link that’s while you’re there with community because
it’s hard to go if, if, you’ve always been in your community which I haven’t I
can imagine it’s very hard for people who just leave their community who have
grown into adolescence who young adulthood in their community, up home I
think it would be harder for them to transition that role and find their place
within the university because it’s so formal and it’s so white that coming from
an Aboriginal community to a very white English structured kind of place it
would be hard for you to find your role, you know because I’ve been out of my community for a bit I know this is just an institution” (Interviewee011).

So, the student who was in their final year of study argued that the student role is different from the role in their community where they have lived all their lives. Another student talked about experiencing culture shock after moving from a rural area with more Indigenous people to a place where the majority of people are non-Indigenous. However, a final year student also suggested that the change was not big for her because she already lived in the city:

“I’m lucky cause I have always been in and around the city so I guess you already had that adaptability had that sense of […] But you know like my cousin Steve come down from Alice to start that is a major culture shock, particularly you know somewhere like Alice where you’re coming from somewhere where there is a whole community is there so not as many non-Indigenous somewhere like this and they are far and few between it is a real shock and I think it is really hard for them to cope because there is a different acceptance that we have usually for our own people. […] I choose this uni because I got told that the murri program here is the best and is a smaller campus. […] I needed that connectedness to be able to successfully do my studies, so yeah.” (Interviewee004).

The final year student spoke about the transition to university being more adaptable if you live in the city and interact with many non-Indigenous people as opposed to the culture shock of coming from a rural community with a large Indigenous population with less interaction with non-Indigenous people. However, the student felt a smaller campus with a Murri program (Indigenous Student Support Unit) was beneficial for a transition into university where she would be accepted and successful. Therefore, students may view their roles as being different or
similar and even changing during the transition. Students from all year levels reported experiencing role change. The following final year student said that changing worlds happened rapidly with little time to adjust:

“Yeah, I get what you mean, it can change umm because basically you’re changing worlds from a community setting to a university setting. [...] Personally, I feel like it changes too much, just that amount of time I had for those responsibilities. [...] I felt it was an easy transition for me. [...] I don’t know. [...] I think they are similar but there can be differences.” (Interviewee005).

The previous student encompassed the diversity of how the student’s role can be similar, while different and there is a changing of settings that impacts on your role. However, it was an easy transition for them.

**Academics**

With academics the transition of role for Indigenous students to university is seen as quite challenging because they must be an independent learner which is different than school or other learning places where the teachers or trainers are keeping a close eye on you. This may relate to school leavers or mature age students studying in vocational education courses:

“There are some additional pressures for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with some of that conflict of expectations and I think for a student in general the transition to university can be quite challenging as well. They are expected to be more independent learners, the standard, the difference from school or other learning opportunities that they would have had and so an Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander student had those same transitions as well in terms of learning what university’s about and how to
manage that when nobody's keeping that close an eye on you to say are you doing your work.” (Interviewee015).

The previous academic could be suggesting that the Indigenous students have to learn how to take on a university student role and that they will require support with learning this new role. The following academic expands on this by talking about how the community role is different and is a big transition because of their family responsibilities in the community and that the academic wants to support them to achieve:

“Changing that role, yeah, absolutely where their role in the community might have been a mother and partner and maybe a partner of in family or living in a community group and then they have to now find time to engage with you know fulltime course load maybe. [...] Yeah, it’s a big role, a big transition. [...] I absolutely am aware that anybody who comes to university has a transition and school leavers just as much as mature age but the mature age students and often Indigenous are have other life responsibilities that have an impact and I am supportive of that and certainly know that life gets in the way of commitment, but I expect that they will remain in contact with me and then I can support them to achieve.” (Interviewee016).

The academic identified that it is a big transition and support is needed, but still wanted the student to contact them as the academic. The academic did focus on mature aged students with families suggesting that many Indigenous students have roles related to their family responsibilities. This would mean a big change of roles for them. Another academic doesn’t specify age related issues but mentions that the role transition can be a cultural shock for all people. It is rewarding that this academic believes there needs to be services at university that address people feeling different:
“In my little knowledge this is a very institutionalised world and normally with everyday community culture doesn’t live in buildings and according to your head of school and you’re like it’s a different world and so I think it’s the culture shock within one’s own culture it’s a culture shock” (Interviewee019).

Then this was shared about rewards for students adjusting to learning they are not used to:

“Um but I would like to think a rewarding one, one where they go okay, I have to adjust to a way in which knowledge is generated and discussed and created in ways I might not be used to” (Interviewee019).

Finally, about the provision of services to help the transition:

“So, provide a specialised needs and services that are tailored to their unique circumstance without making them feel like they are different, everyone wants to feel the same no one wants to feel different that creates exclusion.”

(Interviewee019).

The above academic expressed their opinion during the interview that the university is different than community and you have to adjust to suit this, with services that provided that will include you and not make you feel different. This suggests a changing of the role or taking on a new role for the Indigenous students during the transition process with help from Indigenous Student Support Units.

Summary of Transition between Community to University

The students interviewed spoke about the different aspects of transition experience where their role was concerned. Some students spoke about their roles being different, so they actually saw study as a new role they were taking on. Others spoke about their role changing from their current role in the community to a more professional role while other students spoke about the
role being similar and they are learning more about the role that they want to continue with back in their community. The role was also influenced by going from a rural to urban setting, cultural to white institutional environment and interactional role in community to a future structured role as a professional. The academics see Indigenous students as not being ready for their role in university due to cultural background; or they see the role of the Indigenous student as being the same as any other student’s struggles transitioning into university. The academics reaffirm that Indigenous students have to change their roles or take on a new role with help by the student approaching the academic or going to specialize services such as Indigenous student support units.

**University Roles**

*Students*

The first year students were still finding their way with developing a role as students at university and as future health professionals. One first year student spoke about interactional roles more than the structured role of being a health professional.

This first year student talked about having a role that relays to other people about the experiences of him and his family related to Aboriginal health. This is an interactional role:

“I feel like um, cause, we do sometimes cover content related to Aboriginal health and stuff like that and obviously I’m not an expert on Indigenous health but like it’s like a thing people do ask, ah (Steve) what is something that you kind of see with because you can’t be really generalise the whole Aboriginal health thing, you know like in my community what and how I see things there like I guess my role here is to kind of relaying this is what my experience and this is what like my family kind of gone through with Aboriginal health […] I think it is inherent for people to, for other students to ask me”

(Interviewee013).
Sharing yours and your family’s experiences does not constitute a structural (formal) role however this student spoke about this role which may develop into being part of his role as a health professional with knowledge of Aboriginal health. The symbolic interactional (informal or non-structural) roles of the students were mentioned by first year students as seen by how they spoke about having a leadership role but pointing out that they do not want it to interact with their studies:

“I've got a bit of that leadership role that even as a younger one of the students I going to have to, well I do step up and do that, but need it to not to interact, with my studies too much as well.” (Interviewee007).

This student mentions the interactional leadership role manifested as a role of leading others, but which is not part of her studies. Indigenous students as a community group of people may create a role that interacts with and assists each other as part of their community. The role may be associated with their role in the community. The following first year student continues about his interactional role as a role model to younger people within his family and community inside and outside of university and which may not be directly connected with the role that his studies are about:

“I don’t know, I guess, somewhat of a role model, I guess, um more so for my younger brother but also for you know his friends and some of the younger[Name of University] uni students although they’re years ahead of me I try and stay a role model in the outside aspects of uni life you know what I mean so when they go on with their age” (Interviewee010).

While students have a role at university that is the same as for others, they see themselves as out there helping other students at the same time. The next first year student presented differently as
having a role as a quiet achiever within a small group helping each other. This is still an interactional role of how the student interacts with others:

“Quite achiever. [...] That’s how I see myself um like I said I don’t know at the moment we’re all sort of sticking with our little group and hanging out with our little mob and just trying to get by. [...] We’re all trying to hold each other in there so none of us. [...] Probably for my own motivation. [...] Yeah like stuff everyone’s got a million things going on and just feeling like you can lean on those people for that support that you don’t necessarily have at home or with family or friends that what not.” (Interviewee008).

The role of quiet achiever is how the student spoke about seeing themselves and how others may see her. This does not appear to be associated with her health professional role but could be how the student wants to operate within her health professional role. Another first year student spoke about not feeling they have a role when interviewed but that they wanted to complete the health professional role of being a social worker and work back in the community:

“...yeah I suppose that I don’t feel I have a specific role at the university yet but to know what the will look like for me after I am still a bit star gazed as yet starting but I would still would treat that as I am yeah, I feel l am at an advantage because I once this is finally completed I um then I can say I am a social worker, that’s what I am dedicating my time to and that would be back in the community that’s where my passion is, that’s what I am interested in more so um so yeah I don’t feel as though I have a specific role just yet” (Interviewee003).

The above student has spoken about being new to studying and not identifying a role within the university but said they will have a structured role of Social Worker when they have finished and
working back in the community. While the future structured role has been identified for this student the other first year students spoke about interactional roles while studying that could lead into their structured roles as health professionals [learning skills as they go which are part of their practice]. Not identifying a role within the university system was also noted by a withdrawn student who spoke about not having an active role in the university. However, he did mention tutoring and helping out people, but this was not as important as the community work:

“I don’t have as much of an active role in the university as with Indigenous students tutoring and that […] Whereas in community I’m starting to do that sort of stuff. […] So, I guess it doesn’t transfer over the values and the ideas and that I have. […] The idea of Indigenous students transfers over but not the actual practice of tutoring people or helping out its more of a visual thing at university where I’m doing my work whereas in the community it’s more of lending a hand to other people.” (Interviewee009).

The students not identifying with their structural role as a tutor at university could mean that the student has their focus on the interactional roles within the community of lending a hand to people. The role at university for students is not always spoken about with community in mind. The next student spoke about seeing herself as a learner wanting to achieve goals at university. The student did not want to be a nurturer but instead wanted to be nurtured as a learner:

“Learner! […] I got to really respect learning and love learning and that’s exactly what I am here to do. […] I don’t want to be the loudmouth, or you know, I don’t want to I am just here to learn … and why, to achieve my goals. […] I’m not here to nurture, I’m here to, look I’m here to nurture to myself really because I need this, only do I need this I want this.” (Interviewee006).
The previous student spoke about the role of being a learner which could be seen as an interactional role or a structured role for a student at university. This suggests the student may see themselves as an individual at university rather than part of the community. However, another student talked about the role of helping other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as part of the community, although it was not something he had planned on doing:

“That’s a role I didn’t really plan on but that’s something I’ve embraced at uni helping as many of the other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids as I can and as much to them as wearing in my, rather than wearing what I am wearing today, you know I wear in one of my Aboriginal football carnival shirt or my work uniform or whatever because of what I spoke about last week about positive you know and like having a presence, having a positive presence.” (Interviewee027).

It appears that the previous student spoke about how he had not planned this role of helping. That is how many interactional roles develop; through doing, then it can eventuate into being part of the persons structured role. The “helping other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” role is suggested as operating as a community person within the university system. The next student also sees themselves in a similar role. The final year student spoke about seeing themselves as a person representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and motivating others:

“I don’t see myself necessarily as a different person but in the university aspect I see myself as a person who is representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the fact that I’m first in the family and the fact that you know not every there is a said to be a high dropout rate of Indigenous people so in school and such I see myself as pushing through as one of those Indigenous kids who wants to get somewhere and you know and hopefully in the future will
motivate others at high school when I’m a teacher myself to get somewhere”

(Interviewee012).

The next final year student also spoke about helping other Indigenous students to succeed. This was even though the student saw his role as just being a student:

“What role just being a student. [...] Yeah maybe help other younger Indigenous students, give my advice to them as much as I can ... cause, I want to see them succeed just like hopefully I will.” (Interviewee014).

The structured student role spoken about by the previous student was well identified and is part of the structured university role however the interactional role of helping others may be part of the student’s commitment to being Indigenous. The next student spoke about seeing herself as a mentor. She spoke about helping other Indigenous students:

“I see myself as a mentor because I am so far in my degree and I want to help the ahh um the earlier students make sure that they continue through and don’t give up and I’ve also done mentoring for the uni both [name of university] in general and [name of Indigenous Unit] and the helper thing kind of that again.” (Interviewee005).

The previous student continued to speak about the interactional role of helping and a structured role of mentoring the same as other students. This shows wanting to be involved as part of the wider Indigenous community within the university. Even though it is not mentioned one would suggest that the helping, mentoring and tutoring would be in the courses that they are studying in. This would enhance their roles as health professionals in the future by developing skills, values and practice.
The academic said that the Indigenous students are students with obligations to themselves and as part of the wider student body which suggests that the Indigenous students have a larger role as students:

“I think in universities as students primarily their obligations are to themselves. And so, learning what sort of expectations there are as students at university, and so what they can do to help themselves, but I also think there's a very, there can be a very positive role there for the wider community as well in seeing that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are part of the general student body and at times just like I would see from some other groups.” (Interviewee015).

While the previous academic may be right about their role as being seen as a student the obligation to themselves and fitting in with other groups, it overlooks that they are members of the Indigenous community. The next academic spoke about the students having an equal role as other students, but adds that Indigenous students have been given special entry which could imply, they are different:

“Oh, I think that they have an equal role to other students in that equal opportunities I think that obviously that there’s programs and special funding entries to acknowledge the importance of having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students coming through the university.” (Interviewee022).

The academic goes on to suggest that the Indigenous students will be trained up individually in their roles to work in their communities as well as a role of educating other staff and students about their identity and profession:
“Really similar to what I said before to train up these individuals in professions that can then go on and actually service their communities with that health professional education but as a respected member of the community I think is probably the most ideal way to do it so I think they have got a key role in the university, I think that they have got a key role in educating staff and other students about their identity and possibly about shedding new light on so like shedding new light on each profession.” (Interviewee022).

Finally, the academic suggested that they want the Indigenous students to graduate and represent the profession well but not as a cookie cutter [identical, lacking individuality] type students:

“...you don’t want a cookie cutter type [identical, lacking individuality] student, but you do want a student to be graduating at the end that you’re confident that will represent your profession well.” (Interviewee022).

The previous academic has spoken about different aspects of how they see the role of the Indigenous student as being equal to other students, yet receiving special entry, being trained up to work in their communities, a key role in educating others at university, being a different student not a cookie cutter (identical, lacking individuality) type and representing the profession. The academic has suggested that if they are letting Indigenous students into university then the students need to have an educational role in the university and the profession in regard to identity and their role as an Indigenous health professional. However, another academic that was interviewed voiced that the Indigenous students in nursing or medicine have the same roles as other students at university and that they would not want to be treated any differently from other students:

“As students no I don’t, now if an Aboriginal student enrols in a course say medicine or nursing I think they would need to fulfil the roles and expectations
of the student just like any other students there and I would personally not think that the Aboriginal student himself or herself would want to be treated any differently simply because they are of Aboriginal heritage and I think that they would want to blend in and do what everybody else does they have the same aspirations they sit the same exams they are looking for the same student outcomes same terms of employment so I would not think that the role of an Aboriginal student in a university is any different from the other students” (Interviewee025).

The academics spoke about the Indigenous students’ role as being no different than other students, that they would mix in with other student groups and be treated no differently. Yet one academic did point out that they are different by having special entry funding and should educate others and not be a cookie cutter [identical, lacking individuality] type student. This suggests that academics may see the Indigenous roles as students as being a structural role. The symbolic interactional role mentioned was learning and educating others.

Summary of University Roles
The Indigenous students spoke about their individual student roles at university in terms of training to become a health professional as well as roles in helping other Indigenous students through mentoring, tutoring and leadership. Many of these are symbolic interactional roles of giving back to other Indigenous people and the community rather than structured/functional roles. This is part of the identity and expectation of being an Indigenous person; part of a collective society. The symbolic interactional roles of helping could enhance the Indigenous student’s health professional roles. The academics posed that the students’ roles were the same as other students and that they should be treated no differently. Yet if students had special entry into university their role should include contributing to the education of other students and staff about their Indigenous identity. The academics did not want Indigenous students to be a cookie
cutter [identical, lacking individuality] type student but to be different, to contribute and mix in with other students.

**Leadership**

*Students*

Leadership was mentioned by the Indigenous students and academics in various ways that highlight how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may see themselves as having a role that was considered as interactional or structural. The leadership role may have been in the community before the student started at university or may have developed when they were studying at university. The first year students interviewed were only starting university and had already spoken about seeing themselves as role models and leaders. A first year student mentioned that they were a role model in their family and a leader at university. The student mentioned the role within their family:

“Um I like to think of myself as a positive role model I guess, it’s a role model as I’m not in a bad place I’ve got good parents’ good family good education and you know if I’m not working, now I’m studying full time I’m actually doing something” (Interviewee007).

The student then continues with the role at university:

“Yeah I in that sense I’ve got a bit of that leadership role that even as a younger one of the students I going to have to, well I do step up and do that but need it to not to interact with my studies too much as well”

“I’m sort of a leader and within that university structure I’ve sort of taken on that leader role with the [name of Indigenous Unit] girls’ um at the same time go to class and sit back and not be the leader and have the academics bringing it” (Interviewee007).
The previous student spoke about being a role model as an interactional role within her family and community. The role of leader is another interactional role within her community of Indigenous students however she prefers not to be a leader in her classes. Being a role model for other Indigenous students and people within and outside of university was also spoken about by another student:

“I don’t know I guess somewhat of a role model I guess um more so for my younger brother, but also for you know his friends and some of the younger [Name of University] uni students although they’re years ahead of me I try and stay a role model in the outside aspects of uni life you know what I mean so when they go on with their age. [...] So, I see myself as a bit of a role model but I’m certainly not up there” (Interviewee010).

The role of being a role model may not be a structural role, but it is seen as a form of leadership for other Indigenous people and students. The next student talked about setting a good example and giving Indigenous people a good name by being a positive role model:

“I see myself as someone who can inspire other Aboriginal people coming through. [...] I see my role as someone who again can be a positive role model for other Indigenous people coming through. [...] I see myself as someone who could set a good example for other Indigenous students coming through the first years and other people who are fresh to uni. [...] I see myself as someone who can give Indigenous people a good name by doing well at uni umm increase the reputation of Indigenous students at uni.” (Interviewee009).

It appears to be important to the previous student to increase the reputation of Indigenous students by doing well which could imply that Indigenous students need others to be role models
to help them to do well. Leadership related roles spoken about by another student were role modelling, guidance, help support to other students:

“This is something I’ve stepped into that’s grown with me and it’s about rather than being one of the crowd I now want to like stand out as an Aboriginal person at university and I want to be […] I walk into [Name of Indigenous Unit] now and people they’re talking to me and they’re 18 or 19, it’s Uncle, you know so, and that automatically switches something on that says like role modelling, you know guidance, help support” (Interviewee027).

The role modelling, guidance and help and support that the student spoke about were perceived as leadership. He mentions that he is also seen as an “Uncle” which incorporates Indigenous cultural background within the leadership roles spoken about. A final year student spoke about leadership through being a role model at university and then returning to community to change negative perceptions and draw on positive aspects in the community:

“So, I feel it’s important for me to be a role model I guess as well but also when I finish my degree to go back and work in my community and try and change some of the negative things but also to try and change those negative things but draw on the positive things as well in the community” (Interviewee011).

Throughout their studies the students felt it was important to be a role model and take this back to their communities to make changes in their communities for the better highlighting leadership as important to the Indigenous student. Another final year student mentioned they are a role model to younger siblings:

“A student that works hard. […] Yeah as a big role model for my younger siblings […] being a person setting an example.” (Interviewee014).
The leadership role of being a role model that the students spoke about is specifically associated to other family members and wider Indigenous community members. Furthering on from role modelling another aspect of leadership is the role of mentoring which this final year student spoke about:

“I did mentoring, I do mentoring with nursing plus at the moment I’m doing mentoring with uni-key” (Interviewee018).

The student above suggested that they may do mentoring as a structured role wider than just the interactional role of mentoring other Indigenous students. This may be a structured role that students can take on which will assist with their future role as a health professional. However, the next final year student mentioned seeing themselves as being further along and want to play the interactional role of mentor and being a role model:

“I see myself as a mentor because I am so far in my degree and I want to help the ahh um the earlier students make sure that they continue through and don’t give up. […] I want to be a good role model you know for our people and show them that it can be done and just to show other people non-Indigenous people as well that we can do it.” (Interviewee005).

The role of mentor is to help earlier students not to give up, while the role modelling is also to show non-Indigenous people that they can get through studies. The students seem to imply that they are being watched by both other Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people when going through their studies. This could have an effect of putting pressure on them in these leadership roles of mentoring and role modelling during their studies.

**Academics**

An academic spoke about the difference of leadership in an Aboriginal community and the cities due to a different lifestyle. They related being a role model to leadership in community and
family and university. The academic spoke about changing dynamics in community and Indigenous units with change of leaders:

“You know in terms of leadership and there important in both of them um I would have thought the dynamics of the communities would be quite different so if you are living in an Aboriginal community verses living in a large city I think the lifestyle would be for them would be quite different I think having good role models is important regardless um and so I know having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that have got degrees and got a good education and are good role models for their communities is important um but also just mothers and fathers and again people that are good role models are really important as well. [...] And I don’t know whether it would be harder for the person coming to the university or the community that had some leader or role model that is then left um and then I guess you know within the [name of the Indigenous Unit] centre each year as people come and go the dynamics going to change each year” (Interviewee021).

The academic was talking about the Indigenous students’ roles within their community and at university, with most aspects of leadership encapsulated in being a role model for their community, family and other Indigenous students. Another academic spoke about how they saw the leadership roles and role models in the community suggesting successful Indigenous students will create space as leaders in their communities when graduating:

“I think that their part of the community as everyone else is but I don’t think their voices are heard as much as they probably should but I think um they have a leadership role in the community [...] I think their probably role models to other Indigenous um people in the community [...] so I think for some it
might be a struggle but um I see their role as important as anyone else but also
again that role model to others [...] so that they’re leaders of the future and
would go back into the community and you know um create a space”
(Interviewee017).

The two academics interviewed talked about the leadership role of the Indigenous students
within their communities and the Indigenous student cohort; and they also described how
Indigenous students will be leaders within their communities when they graduate. The two
academics pointed out that Indigenous people are not always visible to non-Indigenous students
and academics. This might suggest that Indigenous people are not seen as leaders in the wider
university or society but only to other Indigenous people.

Summary of Leadership

Leadership roles, including those of role model and mentor are symbolic interactional or
structural roles which may exist in the community before students start university, or
alternatively, the roles may develop while studying at university. Students see themselves as role
models and leaders in their family and at university amongst other Indigenous students by setting
a good example and giving Indigenous people a good name. Some are “Uncle” or “Aunty” which
incorporates Indigenous cultural background. Many students want to go back to community to
change negative aspects and draw on positive characteristics in the community to enable changes
for the better. Some students are mentors in structured roles which includes mentoring wider
than just the Indigenous students. With both role modelling and mentoring students may feel like
they are being watched by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people when going through their
studies. This could put pressure on them in leadership roles. These academics suggested that
Indigenous students take on leadership roles in community, family, and university, including
changing dynamics in community and Indigenous units with change of leaders. The main
leadership role was being a role model for their community, family and Indigenous student
cohort as well as being leaders in their communities when they graduate. The two academics did suggest that Indigenous are invisible to some people and only seen as leaders to other Indigenous people not the wider university or society.

**Health Professional Roles**

Health Professional roles were seen as a goal of going through the higher education system by both the Indigenous students and the academics.

**Students**

One first year student spoke about the future health professional role through being a physician in training and suggested that you have to present yourself that way:

“*You are expected to it’s like a different role you’re a physician in training I guess [...] at the school of medicine, so you’re expected to present yourself that way*” (Interviewee013).

The previous student suggested that they are expected to act like the future health professional while studying. This may imply a change or taking on of a role. However, another first year student interviewed talked about the health professional role of a social worker and that they were wanting to get qualified but did not want to be away from working in the field too long. This suggested that the student has a role in the community related to the field of social work and wants to get the qualifications:

“I* feel I am at an advantage because I once this is finally completed I am then I can say I am a social worker, I what I am dedicating my time to and that would be back in the community that’s where my passion is. [...] I don’t want too long out of the field, because I am not going to be as wanted as somebody else that is still in it, you know that doesn’t put me at any disadvantage cause, I am
trying to better myself, so I understand that I skills that I have to develop.”

(Interviewee003).

The previous first year student spoke about achieving the qualifications for the role of a future health professional that they wanted. The achievement of the qualifications may require a change as suggested by the next student interviewed. This final year student spoke about being willing to do whatever it takes to get the professional role through following the university policy and procedures and acting like a professional:

“Coming from community you can’t do just what you want, whatever trades [professions] you want to do, you obviously be willing to participate and follow the uni policies and procedures you know, act like a professional and you’re wanting to show that you are there, and you know it’s different.”

(Interviewee012).

The change of role to act like a future professional as spoken about by the previous final year student suggests you may have to act differently.

The next final year student spoke about incorporating the new qualifications into your role as an Aboriginal health professional but sometimes it may not be culturally appropriate. The student goes on to suggest that you cannot get anywhere without the qualification to help change things in organisations and communities:

“Because unfortunately how the society is, us Aboriginal people, I guess we have to adapt a little bit more and incorporate what we want into what we have to do, so we have to learn to incorporate what we want and what we want to achieve into what the white fellow way is, which means we have to learn the paperwork, we have to learn how to write a report, we have to learn to do all of that even though realistically speaking that is not how we do things, not
really culturally appropriate so it’s a really big learning curve and my first year placement was very hard learning cause I went into a mainstream health organisation [...] Yeah and it’s important to be able to help and these days the way the government is you can’t get anywhere without a qualification and if you can’t get anywhere then you can’t help change things yeah so it’s all about getting that change which I think is long overdue” (Interviewee004).

The students that were interviewed spoke about having to change to be in the role of a future health professional. The students spoke about taking on acting as a professional even while studying but they do struggle with the change. The roles they feel compelled to take on at University are not always the culturally appropriate ways of doing things in the community, even by health professionals.

**Academics**

The academic interviewed spoke about needing more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care professionals and this should not be any different than other communities:

“One that I’ve got to deal with is the numbers of Indigenous doctors in Australia. Oh well there aren’t, we need to have more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in health care professions and that’s fine the point is that Aboriginal, when one looks at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in terms of people fulfilling roles it shouldn’t be any different than any other community. ” (Interviewee024).

The previous academic may suggest that the future health professional role of the Indigenous student will be the same as other students. The next academic that was interviewed suggested that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person may hold on to what they need to [e.g. culture] but be willing to improve to meet the role of being a health professional:
“I think an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person coming into the university and also a nutrition dietetics degree would have to have a bit of flexibility to hold on to what they need to hold on to but also be willing to improve to become a practitioner that can then meet the needs of the dietetic association” (Interviewee022).

The academic continued by arguing that the Indigenous student had to half take off the hat of being a community person and half put on the hat of being a professional:

“...and possibly it’s a matter of different hats so while you’re in your professional job you take your hat off not completely because I don’t you are being true to yourself if you do that, take it off enough to be able to be professional as a dietitian and then you know you put it back on when you’re in community but you never completely take any hat off because you can bring it back in” (Interviewee022).

The academic continued by suggesting that Indigenous students may be better suited to the role of the public health area as this was more suited to their communities:

“...the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be more suited to the public health area because where they actually go in and on a large scale effect their community and I think that they’ve got a stronger role or ability to relate in that situation and more appropriate but we still need to them to be dietitians that can then go back into that so my expectation would be a bit of give and a little of get to maintain who they are but also to become who we want them to become.” (Interviewee022).
The previous academic had spoken about the Indigenous students having to change to the role of health professional and that they may be suited to health professional roles that deal with wider issues in the community rather than the individual.

The next academic interviewed spoke about seeing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students coming into medicine however they would like to see them in other health professional roles as well so that they can to go back to their communities to bring about change:

“I would really like to see a large number of Aboriginal and Islander people coming in as students especially into the medical school but also into the other health professions because a lot of emphasis is on doctors but I think it’s critically important that there are other roles in the health for the health service the mechanism to operate you need mental health so psychology is something where you need to attract students, nursing the paramedicine and the allied sciences like the physiotherapy the exercise rehabilitation speech pathology and so on and social work is another critical important and I think if you look at all the other elements you would, I would really think social work is something that would play a huge role, you can have an Aboriginal student graduate as a doctor go and work but you would need a good team of people that he or she would work with in order for the system to work better so I think that yes medicine is important but I think that we need to focus on all the other supporting professions and make them attractive for students to enrol in to and then like I said once they enrolled in these programs nature takes its course they graduate and it’s up to them what they really want to do but my hope is that some of them will come back get become part of the system that educated them and contribute that way and the others to actually go back into their communities and bring about change” (Interviewee025).
The academics interviewed recognised that there are Indigenous students studying to become health professionals and that they are required to change when studying at university which may mean leaving their cultural roles out of the studies. The academics spoke about the students going back to their communities and, rather than focusing on specific individual health professional roles, they should consider other health professional roles that may suit their community health needs. While this sounds like they are concerned with the Indigenous students it could be that they may not see Indigenous students as suited to some professional roles that are more individual.

*Summary of Health Professional Roles*

Students put forward the qualifications for health professional roles as the reason for studying and the goal of completing university. Students said getting the qualifications may require you to change and act differently, for example, a physician in training means you have to present yourself in a certain way. Incorporating new qualifications and acting as a health professional while studying may not be culturally appropriate, because students spoke about struggling with the change. The academics said that they want to see an increase of Indigenous health professionals who would be seen as no different from other students. They spoke about Indigenous students holding on to what they need to [e.g. culture] but also being willing to improve to meet the requirements of being a health professional. The academic said students have to half take off the hat of being a community person and half put on the hat of being a professional. Nakata (2000) sees this as the cultural interface. They further indicated Indigenous students may be better suited to the role of public health, than to health service provision to individuals. Regardless of the end goal, Indigenous students are required to change when studying at university, and this may mean leaving their cultural roles out of their studies.
Conclusion

The purpose of the roles chapter was to explore the findings of how the roles of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying in the health courses at university are connected to their communities, their studies, and the transition between the two. The roles in community were seen as important and even though these were seen as symbolic interactional (non-structural or informal) roles outside of their communities, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students saw them as structural/functional roles within their communities. Both Indigenous students and non-Indigenous academics spoke about role stress and strain in the transition from community to the university because Indigenous students are seen as taking on a new role and juggling the two roles as well as straining the roles they were already doing. Indigenous students spoke about roles at university being symbolic interactional (non-structural or informal) and structural (formal) roles that included role modelling, mentoring and helping of other Indigenous students. One issue that came up from academics was about leaving cultural roles at the door and focussing on the health professional role, which is addressed further in the discussion and conclusion chapters.
Chapter 7 - Expectations

Chapter Summary

This is the third of three findings chapters that presents the outcomes of the analysis of student and academic interviews and focuses on the issue of expectations. As outlined in the methodology and theory chapters, the findings chapters of the thesis are presented in relation to the three key theories guiding the research (i.e. Critical Race Theory, Role Theory and Self-fulfilling Prophecy). This expectations chapter is guided by self-fulfilling prophecy and focuses on student and academic perceptions and experiences of ‘expectations’ in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples studying at university. Analysis of the major theme of expectations identified sub themes that included: Achieving Goals; Bettering Yourself; High Expectations; Students Perceptions; Academics Perceptions; Same as Others, and Low Expectations. Each theme is presented with examples and analysis drawing on relevant theory and scholarly literature. The chapter draws together key understandings around elements of expectations that lend strength and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students during their study. Student and academic perceptions and experiences related to expectations that challenge strengths and are barriers to positive student-academic relationship building and student outcomes are explored.

Introduction

The expectations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have towards university are important because they shape students perceptions regarding what academics think of them within the university context. Various researchers (Sarra, 2012; Riley, 2019; Dandy et al, 2015) have argued that the perceptions academics and students have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students may shape the perceptions and esteem of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Sarra (2012) notes that within Australia the expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander people have been influenced by false statements regarding Indigenous peoples’ capabilities and life circumstances within the dominant society. The combination of a history of discriminatory and racist policies and deficit perspectives towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has resulted in a higher education system where there continue to be low numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly when compared to their non-Indigenous peers.

To explore how expectations are seen within the higher education system, I interviewed seventeen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and ten non-Indigenous academics to ask them about their expectations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a health faculty of an Australian university. This chapter presents key findings in relation to expectations and concludes with a discussion on these findings.

The notion of self-fulfilling prophecy was introduced in Chapter 3 to better understand the expectations of Indigenous students in the higher education system since the expectations of Indigenous people tend to be overlooked within Western society. Early Self-Fulfilling Prophecy theorists such as Merton (1948) suggested that the expectations of people who were marginalised were often influenced by a false statement that was created about certain groups of people including people of colour such as African American. When applied in Australia, various researchers (Cooper et al., 2006; Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2000; Dandy et al., 2015; Riley, 2019) have demonstrated how lower expectations have influenced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within education. Various Indigenous scholars have argued that this is due to the negative perceptions held by mainstream society shaped by a history of colonisation (Huggins, 1998; Moreton-Robinson 2000). Given that schools and universities continue to fail Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and that universities continue to demonstrate low retention and attrition rates of Indigenous learners (Hall & Wilkes, 2015; Jacob, Raymond, Jones, Jacob, Drysdale, & Isaacs, 2016; Trudgett, 2009, 2011), there is an urgent need
to gain a better understanding of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students perceive their own university experience. In the following section, I laid out the sub-themes in a way that I believe foregrounds the expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involved in my research and the teaching academics who also consented to be interviewed.

**Sub-themes related to Expectations**

My analysis of expectations in the interview data revealed experiences that both lend strength to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at university as well as challenge that strength. The sub-themes under the major theme of Expectations include: Achieving goals; Bettering yourself; High expectations; Student perceptions; Academics perceptions; Same as others, and Low expectations. I will first discuss the sub-themes below by drawing on participant responses. I acknowledge that they are not mutually exclusive categories. For example, the sub-theme “Student’s perceptions” could also fit within the theme “Low expectations”. The intertwining of what participants express in the sub-themes may be seen as repetition highlighting this matrix of connectiveness. I will endeavour to show this complexity in my discussion.

**Achieving Goals**

The first of the sub themes that came out of the interviews with the Indigenous students and academics was about the Indigenous students’ expectations in relation to university and more specifically to their expectations of achieving positive goals.

**Students**

First year Indigenous students interviewed expressed their passion for achieving academic success during their time at university, as the following student’s statements revealed:

“You know I want to so desperately achieve something; you know I that I want to, my expectations are that I will complete and that I will go on to do greater things” (Interviewee003).
The first student spoke about having high expectations of their potential to do great things when they came into university in the first year suggesting a desire to have influence as well as to help others within their community and wider society. Another first year student talked about the importance of achieving to demonstrate the potential of Indigenous people within university. They explained further that for them, it is important:

“...to give a good outlook to the younger generation of Aboriginal students and something that shows them that things, that they may not dream of doing are achievable. [...] they’re certainly achievable, you know what I mean that’s what I want to achieve” (Interviewee010).

This statement highlights that expectations Indigenous students have of themselves is not only about achieving personal success but also about acting as a role model for other Indigenous students. This desire to help and influence others is also reflected by the Indigenous student who noted that she would like to reach the goal of finishing her degree in order help other women as she was helped by midwives herself as a student. She further elaborates:

“...the reason I got into midwifery is because I enjoyed being pregnant, I loved the journey with my midwives, both, and I believe that being a midwife, I can give back to the women, and be there for them every step of their way so in that respect. [...] I have to get to that goal.” (Interviewee 002).

Once again, we see how these students want to achieve their goal not only out of a personal desire to achieve success but also as a way to give back to others within the community who have gone through similar challenges and issues. However, such altruistic goals can also lend towards heart-breaking disappointments if those goals are not realised.

Other students emphasised the financial pressure that comes within obtaining a degree and how this can add towards the stress of completion. Another student who had
withdrawn from studies, talks about the importance of “hitting the target” and achieving the goal of being a nurse because of the financial strain:

“That’s what I am here for, paying $1000s of dollars, I want to hit those goals [...] and to be a nurse, I got to be here, and I got to achieve, got to hit that target” (Interviewee006).

The student reinforced the financial costs to her. The next student, who had also withdrawn from their studies was clear that they did not see their Aboriginality as a limitation towards achieving success and that they expected to achieve in their studies as would any other student. She explained:

“...I don’t see my Aboriginality or anything else as something like a handicap or going to restrict or limit my potential, I feel that I can do as anyone else there who puts the as long as I put the work, all the hard work in and I am committed to my studies and that I believe I can achieve” (Interviewee009).

She reiterated that she did not see her Aboriginality as restricting or limiting her potential. Her statement seems to imply that she may have been familiar to a more deficit mindset in relation to Aboriginality as she asserts that her Indigenous status is not “a handicap” or a limitation towards achieving her goals. This assertion may suggest that she is familiar with the lower societal expectations towards Aboriginal peoples before starting studies.

The next student interviewed was in their final year and talked about the importance of not giving up and setting new goals to be successful and maintain momentum:

“I just want to do well because I’m not the sort of person to give up and I set myself a goal [and] as hard as it may be and as much as I want to give up sometimes I want to achieve that goal and, to be honest, I want to be successful in life. I want to have a good balance, you know, I want to still have a social
life and be able to do stuff but I want to not be a person begging or on Centrelink my whole life” (Interviewee012).

Here we see a student speaking about wanting to achieve, which suggests that the student has high expectations of themselves, however, this student also references not wanting to be a person who begs or who is “on Centrelink my whole life” again suggesting that the student feels that they not only must achieve but that they also must disprove negative societal expectations. This is again reiterated by another final year student who also eludes an awareness of these negative expectations and posed that First Australian students must adapt to “white fellow ways” in order to achieve and suggested that this may not be culturally appropriate. The student explained:

“Because unfortunately, how the society is towards us Aboriginal people. I guess we have to adapt a little bit more. [...] So we have to learn to incorporate what we want and what we want to achieve into what the white fellow way is, which means we have to learn the paperwork, we have to learn how to write a report, we have to learn to do all of that, even though, realistically speaking that is not how we do things, not really culturally appropriate so it’s a really big learning curve and my first year placement was very hard learning cause I went into a mainstream health organisation.” (Interviewee004).

For this student, achieving does not only mean achieving academic goals. It also means having to learn and adapt to new ways of knowing and understanding the world that may not align with Indigenous ways of knowing and being. While all of the students spoke about being aware of what is required and needed to achieve, and all of the students reported high expectations of their own ability to achieve, there was also a recognition from students that these high expectations
may not be shared by their mainstream peers and that some adaptations would be required of them to fit into the norms and values held by the university sector. In this way Indigenous students are faced with a dual challenge of managing their own high expectations while at the same time overriding lower expectations of the system on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in general.

**Academics**

Academics regarded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ place within the university as important particularly given that Indigenous student numbers within education are below the benchmark. They also noted that they regarded the Indigenous students enrolled within the university as potential role models for a future generation of Indigenous students as the following statement revealed:

“Um [I regard Indigenous student enrolment as] really important because, the I forget what the statistics[are], but I am sure that the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is below that of the national bench mark and so the more that we can involve and educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the tertiary level and then they are role models for other people in their community to show what they can achieve is really important.”

(*Interviewee021*).

Academics expressed the desire to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve because they valued the need to increase the numbers of successful Indigenous graduates. Yet, the next academic implied a low expectation of performance from Indigenous students by suggesting that they may require additional strategies to support them:
“It is achievable to them and there’s different strategies that we could do if they are struggling in any particular area to get them through and the university offers so many different services.” (Interviewee022).

The fact that the academic noted that there are different strategies available to struggling Indigenous students could imply a lower expectation of Indigenous students ability to achieve without support which may suggest lower expectations. Another academic spoke about setting high expectations for students and believing in their ability to achieve and learn. This academic explains:

“I think my answer to that is based on the fact that as you said it is based on the self-fulfilling prophecy, it you set a very high expectation for anyone and believe that they can achieve it and make them feel like they can achieve it they will achieve it and I strongly believe that. [...] I don’t need you to be smart, I don’t want you to kick butt you know if you get 100 percent or if you get 70 percent I don’t care, you care but I don’t care, I want you to graduate with a sense of the wonderment and amazing curiosity about the world that’s it that’s my ultimate goal that you go I’ve learnt something and that’s cool or that was interesting” (Interviewee019).

The academic mentioned setting a high expectation for anyone which must include the Indigenous students’ cultural background to draw on the strengths associated with this such as having insight to Indigenous communities. Rather than seeing their cultural background as holding them back from learning. Another academic spoke about students needing to blend into the university and enjoy their studies like the other students and build up their own goals and aspirations rather than having the responsibility of the world on their shoulders and trying to save and their community:
“Overall you can see the reoccurring theme that I have in my expectations in their roles as well as my expectations of what they should be is very, it’s the same whether they are Aboriginal students or otherwise and I really think we do them a disservice by putting the onus the responsibility of the world on their shoulders from the moment they walk in, saying look you have the world to save because you need to go and save your community you need to go and do this you need to go and do that I think that they need to fit in blend in enjoy their studies and do what every other student would do, have, build up their own goals, aspirations of what they want to do and they will excel that way and anything else they do beyond that is something that should naturally come to them and say look I feel this is something that I have to do for my community and that would be the approach that I would take.” (Interviewee025).

This academic seems to recognise the external pressure some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may feel in relation to both community responsibilities and university expectations. The academic spoke about how the pressure for Indigenous students to “save their community” may not allow them to build up their personal goals. The expectations that academics have of Indigenous students appear to be the same as what they have for other students in relation to their potential to achieve academic goals and outcomes. While this may appear to be all positive, it could cause academics to overlook any specific challenges and barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander may face that are different to those of their non-Indigenous peers (i.e. racism; discrimination). This may overlook them as Indigenous people and suggest that their cultural background may hold them back and suggest a low expectation of them at university.
Summary of Achieving Goals

The students spoke about having an expectation of achieving their goals of completing their studies and working as health professionals. The academics interviewed discussed the importance of increasing Indigenous student numbers within the health sector. They also emphasised the importance of helping to facilitate the learning of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners in order to help them achieve their goals and become role models for a future generation of learners. However, they also noted that Indigenous students may need to associate with other students and recognised that they may have pressure from family and cultural responsibilities.

Bettering Yourself

Both students and academics’ responses both revealed expectations towards the “bettering yourself” in relation to university attendance. The notion of bettering yourself implies that Indigenous students do have high expectations of themselves in relation to their ability to complete their studies and go on to be health professionals. It is also a form of resisting the lower expectations that are placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in many areas of Australian institutions and society.

Students

A first year student spoke about transitioning into something better to show people it can be done. Indigenous people do this not only for themselves but bettering one’s self for their family and communities:

“I want to show people that it can be done no matter where you come from, you don’t know who you are or what you are at least you can hopefully transition into something better, that’s where I’m going” (Interviewee008).
Showing society that Indigenous students can achieve appears to be a large motivating factor for Indigenous students as does influencing a younger generation of Indigenous learners as this first year student explained:

“The reason I want to do that [achieve a degree in Health], I guess [is] to help the mob you know what I mean, the younger mob to come to wherever they want to be I suppose. [...] That’s certainly achievable, you know what I mean that’s what I want to achieve” (Interviewee010).

Helping younger mob to come to wherever they want to be can be seen as wanting to achieve within a university environment, obtain a degree, and raise both their expectations of themselves as well as potentially societal expectations of them. However, other students were more concerned with getting through their degree quickly, so that they could give back to their community as this one student remarks:

“As a student I just want to get in and get it done yeah. [...] Yeah get out there in the community and do it” (Interviewee006).

Another student also acknowledged that she regarded the university as a means to create a difference in the world. She stated:

“I have that because I feel like, only having one life on earth and from that just knowing that you only get one chance to do as much as you can I want to put as much effort as I can into my university life at the moment just so I can put myself in a better position later to be able to get all these different jobs or be in leadership positions and all that sort of thing I feel like the only way I can sort of, feel like I can make more of a difference to the world if I can put in all the
hard work and committed to what I am doing and not just sit in the background and do nothing” (Interviewee009).

While many students spoke about putting themselves in a better position, they often included remarks of that revealed a strong desire to obtain the degree in order to make a difference within the world. For example, the next student describes themselves as an Indigenous kid who wanted to get somewhere:

“I see myself as pushing through as one of those Indigenous kids who wants to get somewhere” (Interviewee012).

The student posed themselves as being part of a wider Indigenous community and as a community person with high expectations. Another final year student also speaks of bettering herself for herself, but added that this is primarily as an Aboriginal person with a background of hardship and poverty:

“The expectations of myself is first and foremost to do this for myself and to finish and then as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander the expectation is always to keep it in, like as an Aboriginal person, I have a similar story to a lot of Aboriginal people where we grew up in hardship and poverty”

(Interviewee011).

In this case, the student acknowledges that for her, success is not only about personal achievement but also about her ability to achieve despite challenging circumstances. She emphasises that “that they have to keep being Aboriginal even when they graduate as a health professional” perhaps as a reminder to not forget where one as come from and also, perhaps of acknowledging the differences that exist between the two worlds she is required to navigate, that of her community and that of academia. Another final year student stresses the importance
maintaining motivation and that keeping community at the forefront of one’s mind is one way to ensure that motivation remains. She noted:

“I think that if you yourself want to succeed it will happen or if you want to go back and help you will have the motivation to keep going” (Interviewee014).

Going back to the community appears to be an important part of bettering one’s self as many students mentioned this. The students appear to be confident and have high expectations of themselves to complete their studies and assist other Indigenous people as being part of their communities.

**Academics**

Academic’s perceptions of success may be defined differently between Indigenous communities and academic cultures. For instance, one academics’ response revealed that success in his view involved progressing into higher levels of post graduate studies at university, he noted not seeing many Indigenous students “succeeding” in that regard:

“I'm happy to elaborate because I think often what we will see you know in terms of students we see succeeding and that could be those that are getting great marks those that are doing honours master study because there has been all this history you know there has been so few Indigenous people studying at university they just haven’t progressed through so when we do look at our masters cohort you know 80 percent are female students white and the 20 percent are male maybe you know slightly different cultures particularly too that’s what we see, so that’s what we have in our minds cause we often see masters the PhD students who sort of the high achievers, unless we are seeing Indigenous people in that group as well it makes it hard it makes it harder to
The previous academic mentioned both not many Indigenous students studying at university and that there are not high achievers. The assumption was that progress, or bettering oneself, was measured in academic terms. Because there are few Indigenous students in these groups of Masters and PhDs, it is assumed to be harder for them to progress or better themselves.

**Summary of Bettering yourself**

Students mentioned bettering themselves in the context of going back to the community. They saw this as also a way of resisting low expectations that can be placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This action was seen as important for assisting Indigenous young people to see what is possible and to keep their ambitions alive. Students have high expectations and appear confident to complete studies as well as assisting other Indigenous people as a community member. An academic spoke about the low numbers of Indigenous students studying at university, including Masters and PhD students, indicating an expectation it may be harder for Indigenous students to progress or better themselves.

**High Expectations**

Students’ high expectations may be influenced by many different factors including how students perceive the way academics think about them. Academics’ high expectations of Indigenous students may be influenced by what they know, or perceive they know, about the Indigenous students they are teaching.

**Students**

A first year student spoke about how they felt that academics wanted them to know everything and this has made her feel overwhelmed:
“A lot, they [academics] want you to know everything. [...] That’s how I feel at the moment, the load that they want you to know and understand I’m feeling like overwhelmed and I think that they expect me to know what they are talking about they start talking in their jargon and I’m like I have no idea what they are talking about so if I think of anything they need to break it down a bit not all of us have come from nursing backgrounds or finished high school or stuff so bring it back down for those who sit there looking around like I don’t know that’s why we come back and bounce off each other like did you get what they were talking about cause I yeah I find that difficult. [...] A lot at once too much all at once. [...] They just expect you to know all that, all those words and stuff straight up. [...] Stressful times!” (Interviewee008).

This expectation was suggested as being too high for this first year student and the academics needed to break it down a bit for students when first starting. In final year it appears that students still thought that academics have high expectations of them as they want to go out and work as nurses:

“I think they [academics] have a high expectation of the students. [...] I think so I think that they got a high expectation of every student. [...] I mean that in third year they expect us to be pretty much ready to go out there and work as nurses which I understand I wouldn’t want an incompetent nurse looking after me someone who is didn’t know their knowledge” (Interviewee026).

The students spoke about how they felt the high expectations were relevant to everyone. The students spoke of having felt high expectations both when they were starting studies and when they were finishing studies.
The academic admitted that they did have heavy expectations on students:

“I also think that, I can imagine that we put pretty heavy expectations on the individuals.” (Interviewee015).

The previous academic spoke of high expectations of individual students. The following academic suggests that part of the high expectation is culture shock when coming from high school and the workplace:

“I think it would be a big culture shock for them and I think that’s the case for most students in some way or another so even just coming from high school to university is a culture shock, coming from the workplace back to university if you haven’t done it for a long time is a culture shock because I think at university we do have high expectations of students be it academically or be it professionally” (Interviewee022).

The academic also mentioned academically or professionally which suggested that this expectation was not only at the start of studies but at the end of the studies when the students graduated as health professionals. The next academic spoke about having high expectations of the students even though they may come from a lower [socio-economic] background:

“I have that thing in mind, I would say whoever comes here must work hard […] High expectations! […] They might think that I would have a low expectations, they might think but personally it’s the other way around for me I expect high, I expect very highly of them, because they would have to perform better to get their community into the thing, but they might think otherwise, they are coming from a lower background so they might be thinking because of that they get
something, these people, low expectations, I don’t know I may be wrong”

(Interviewee023).

The academic spoke about having high expectations of students coming from a lower socio-economic background and treating them the same as other students at university. He said he will not show favours through low expectations.

Summary of High Expectations

The high expectations the Indigenous students spoke about appeared to be high expectations of all the students, and they may stress the students out rather than teaching them how to be future health practitioners. High expectations of all students can indicate that academics assume all students come from a similar cultural background and/or starting point. This is not the case and is seen as a colour blind approach. This at odds with the high expectations of students that the academics spoke about, which may not have been specifically be high expectations for Indigenous students in the health faculty. The academics spoke about having high expectations for all students but then digressed, to stating that they put heavy expectations on Indigenous students, and these students struggle with culture shock and come from low backgrounds, but the academics would not treat them differently. The academics posed the expectations would be the same for them as other students, which appears as a colour blind approach with undertones of stereotyping of the Indigenous students as having low expectations.

Students Perceptions

Students

Student perceptions is about how student perceive the expectations that academics have about them as Indigenous students. The first year student interviewed said that academics were mostly good to him and reached out to Aboriginal students. They were not just tolerant of them:
“By academics I think mostly good cause at [name of university] what I found its really quite not just tolerant but outreaching to the Aboriginal students” (Interviewee013).

The expectations of Indigenous students are seen to be mostly good according to the previous student. This choice of words suggested they could be better. The next first year student talked about the expectations of them by the academics as being middle expectations and not amazing:

“I think their expectation of me is I am my own adult and I am my own person and I am responsible for myself um but that is what they would assume every student was, but, you know, also that they would um expect me to make contact with them and be known to them and that if there was other issue that I would let them know that um I don’t know if that’s I assume that exactly what they would hope from us that we will be respectful and that you know we would respect them as much as they respect us but also taking ownership of our own stuff and our own learnings our own journey through study but I think as a first year their expectations are pretty, you know, in the middle but there probably not expecting us to be amazing at it but.” (Interviewee003).

This student suggested that lower expectations may relate to where the student was in their study journey; that is in first year, rather than any assumption about the individual student’s capacity. If the student indicated they may require assistance from the academic, it could lower how the academics saw the particular student. The next first year student spoke about academics being professional which is why they may treat you like every other student:

“I think from my knowledge of the academics around here they’re pretty professional in the way they do things, so they just treat you the same as every other student.” (Interviewee010).
The first year student just starting university identified that academics can treat you like all the other students. The next first year student spoke about the academics seeing her as an independent learner passing, despite which nationality you are:

“I think they expect me to be an independent learner to do my work get the grades that they would expect a first year to get regardless of my nationality”
(Interviewee002).

This student suggested that academics treat you as an independent learner because they see you the same as other people. The next student, however, was worried about being treated differently because of the colour of their skin as an Indigenous person:

“I just basically, treat me the same don’t treat me different because I am black”
(Interviewee006).

The student explained:

“You know and if I need any extra help, I don’t know it because I am black, it’s just that I need help, everyone needs help [...] Yeah, I and so far, I have not noticed anything. [...] I would like to think that they wouldn’t. [...] As long as I’m not acting like an idiot or you know like some people do black, white or brindle you know. [...] I like to be treated with respect and treat them with respect as well, I hope they wouldn’t, and I can’t see why they would.”
(Interviewee006).

The previous student spoke about being worried that she would not be treated with respect when she asked for help, due to the colour of her skin and cultural background. The next withdrawn student spoke about being worried about being seen as not good by the academics because he
had come in through an Indigenous pathway which may be seen as lesser or inferior to other students pathways into university:

“Personally, my experience, they, the academics staff, like ever since I’ve started, I’ve never had a bad experience and that negative experiences that lot that I’ve dealt with over years. [...] Yeah, this is probably just assuming they probably just think that, maybe I’m an Indigenous person, an Indigenous student coming through who doesn’t have a lot to offer, who doesn’t have heaps of potential compared to the rest of the student population, probably someone who umm, my experiences come to when I went to UQ because I was going through that program up there, that medical program my first year at uni [university], I always had self-doubts doubts about my own academic performance and that. [...] So, I guess from that experience I always felt that, and the academic staff know that’s how I got in and how those Indigenous students come through [...] Maybe they would have thought that they were lesser or inferior to the other students or not as smart or intelligent, I don’t have anything else to offer” (Interviewee009).

The previous student spoke about being worried that the academics had low expectations of him because of the Indigenous pathway to university, however he has not had bad experiences. The next student spoke about being judged differently because he may be seen as being from the poor health related background of Indigenous people which may have influenced the academics to treat him differently:

“I have never personally had a problem with my Indigenous background with an academic but um I guess you could say that they could be judged differently because obviously coming down to facts and stuff or the academics may realise
that Indigenous students obviously have more health related issues than others and other problems and I’ve never had any problems with an academic judging me if that’s what you are trying to mean or anything like that [...] I think again it comes down to the individual themselves, but I think most lecturers should just should treat us the exact same. [...] Because at the end of the day we’re all individuals and you know we’re all the same people”

(Interviewee012).

The previous student spoke about never having a problem with academics however appeared to be aware that they could judge Indigenous people differently due to having more health-related issues. The next student spoke about the academics only seeing Aboriginal people as traditional if they are poor, sick, or uneducated. The student explained further that this is because people don’t want to accept that this is due to what non-Indigenous people have done to Aboriginal people through colonisation:

“Academics oh pretty much the same as the whole of Australia that if they’re not poor, sick or uneducated we’re not really Aboriginal or we’re not traditional Aboriginal as they like to put it or that’s how everybody in general identifies in Australia” (Interviewee011).

The student explained:

“I think because they don’t have to grow up in those similar circumstances because yeah everyone wants to hear of everyone’s experiences in life it gives for a more fairer discussion but understand the western is still very racist nation who wants to deny a lot of the history that non- Aboriginal people have done to Aboriginal people, they don’t want to hear it or they want us to get over it or and they haven’t grown up with the umm so when non- Aboriginal
people say why should I say sorry because I didn’t do that well it didn’t happen to me but all my family are affected by it and I have had to bear witness and um all the damage that was caused to my Elders and that again come down to us the children the repercussions and stuff like that so lecturers, so when you don’t grow up like that you don’t understand” (Interviewee011).

The previous final year student has the perception of academics that they may not fully understand the circumstances that Aboriginal people grow up in, and this influences how the academics see students and influences the expectations they have of the students. Another final year student stated that the academics don’t think that they [Aboriginal students] are any different from other students and treat everyone the same, because the academics don’t really care as they are only doing their job:

“I don’t think, they think, any different so far in my experience they’re just another student. [...] I don’t think they really care; I don’t think they really think of anyone other advantages they just treat everyone the same way as they are doing their job” (Interviewee014).

How the final year student spoke about the academics not caring and only doing their job and treating the Indigenous student no different than others, further highlights that this could influence expectations of academics negatively. Another final year student confirmed this by stating how the academics just treat her the same as everybody else:

“They just treat me the same as everyone else I think yeah” (Interviewee018).

The previous student spoke about how she perceived the academics had treated her over the years of study. This relates to how the student perceived the academics saw her as an Indigenous student, and how this had affected their expectations of her. However, another final year student
said that they treated them the same as other students unless they involved the Indigenous Student Support Unit:

“I feel like they have the same expectations of us but they [academics] are aware that there may be other things, and, we have the [Name of Indigenous Unit] unit, so you know if there is certain situations happening, then make allowances or nothing too far, you know stuff that’s appropriate, but you know they recognise our cultural backgrounds and stuff like that” (Interviewee005).

The previous student perceived that academics have some awareness of her as an Indigenous student however they treated and saw her the same as other students. The next final year student mentioned that some academics are pretty good, but others are a little “wayward” because they have very little understanding of differences in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities when assessing Indigenous student’s assignments:

“I think that some are pretty good I think others are a little bit wayward I guess particularly I feel like marking assessments and they will mark a certain way based on their understanding, they don’t seem to have that understanding that each mob or each state might depending where your from have different practices, so if you I’ve written a lot on the northern territory emergency response and the detriments of that based on that cultural practice of them where my family is from and my family are affected by that but I find the because it’s not in line with is believed to be Aboriginal culture based on whether it Brisbane or the Kooris mobs then their very strict on having to prove it properly or they mark you down or question you a lot more about the information and that sort of why are you questioning me cause shouldn’t you really have the information, your teaching the subject” (Interviewee004).
The student above spoke about how an academic’s limited knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will further affect the perceptions and expectations the academic has of her as a student. The next final year student spoke about an academic not knowing or answering her as an Indigenous student even though she identified with the [name of Indigenous unit] to appeal a grade:

“Well I don’t even think they know about us, no seriously I went up to appeal a grade with [name of staff member] and I told her several times I am a [Name of Indigenous Unit] student every single time she forgotten I’m a bit dark you think she would remember yeah ah and nothing happened as a result, yeah but I don’t think they know that they have got like Indigenous nursing students.” (Interviewee026).

The final year student highlights that academics sometimes do not see the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within their classes even when they identify themselves. This could have implied that the academic did not know how to engage with her as an Indigenous student.

Summary of Student Perceptions
The students spoke about academics seeing them with high and low expectations as they appear to treat them the same as other students. This is demonstrated by wanting all students to be independent learners and asking for help if needed. The students further shared their experiences of being not seen in the classes and academics having limited knowledge of Indigenous people except for their bad health.

Academics Perceptions
Academics
The academics had similar perceptions of the Indigenous students as the students had of them.

The first academic talked about having the same expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander students as they had of other students but did acknowledged that the students may not understand some things that the academics are conveying:

“Well in my course we discuss expectations up front about roles and responsibilities for the lecturers and tutors and also the students and so the expectations that I would have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are the same as I would have of other students. [...] Yes, I would hope that they would understand some of those things that we try to convey in class. That we are expecting them to take a lot of responsibility for their own learning and that we do have quite a big course so that it's hard for me to know exactly where everybody's at, unless they let me know in some way and I hope that they would feel that I have the same expectations for them as students, as for other people.” (Interviewee015).

The academic demonstrates that she may have low expectations through mentioning that she hoped the Indigenous student understood what they are conveying in class. The first thoughts of another academic suggested that he did not think about expectations of Indigenous people:

“…um again never really thought of it too much” (Interviewee021).

The academic not thinking much about expectations of Indigenous people may suggest that the academic does not know much about Indigenous people, did not want to say or had low expectations of them. The next academic spoke about expectations of Indigenous students to be the same as any other student by attending, participating and preparing for classes:

“I would expect everything that I would expect of any other student so in terms of participation, attending classes, you know participating in classes, being prepared for classes” (Interviewee020).
The academic stated that he wanted Indigenous students to participate the same as all the other students which may suggest that the academic does not know much about Indigenous students, and this will influence the expectations he has of them. Another academic spoke about seeing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the same as other students and if they had an issue they should come and talk to him the same as any other students. The academic further spoke about how the outreach effort to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students had not borne fruit yet at that time:

"Exact same expectations as I have of all the other students, they got to come they got to do their work they have to succeed if there is an issue they can come and talk about it, but the standards are the standards the expectations are the same. [...] Well again I hesitate to get into anybody’s anyone’s else’s mind set um let be honest with you efforts to reach out to be specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students haven’t borne any fruit, in terms of yeah let’s have a chat and again it hasn’t hurt them either, I think we’re a little worse off, I would like to have an idea of the students perceptions the point is I’ve got to respect the students and I’m not going to tell a student specifically because they are an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or an International student or a student with a family that the same time they are trying to raise that they must come and talk to us, raise the flag sometime if they want to come by and chat, its fine if not." (Interviewee024).

The academic implied that he knew Indigenous students because of the outreach efforts to them, but then stated that he would treat them the same as other students. This will influence his expectations of the Indigenous students to be lower as he may have already formed an opinion of them through the outreach. The next academic talked about being concerned that Indigenous
people have previously had bad experiences with teachers or people in power. This appears to influence this academic’s expectation of Indigenous people:

“I think that probably depends on their previous experience of teachers or people that they would sense that you are in power, so some I think, would be a little bit concerned maybe” (Interviewee017).

The academic mentioned that she thought that Indigenous people could be resistant to the authority of academic and may influence their expectations. This concern reinforces a perception that Indigenous people have not engaged well with people in power positions such as academics. This prior knowledge may also influence her expectations of Indigenous students. The next academic interviewed spoke about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students expecting the university to make exceptions for them or being very rigid and not changing for them. The academic then suggested that she hoped it would be somewhere in between for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

“Oh (pause), I think it could go either way, I think that they (pause) I think that it could be different depending on the individual student, some students might come in thinking or expecting that because their got Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander that’s who they are and I’m not going to compromise that and they might think that they can get away with a different type of behaviour because of their strong background, um so they could expect the university will, um well because you know we do want them to be involved in the university, they might expect that the university will make a lot of concessions for them because of that alternatively they might think that um the university is very rigid or very different to the way that they’ve would naturally, or that they have been bought up and therefore the university is going to be very rigid and
very non accepting of their background and I would like to think that its somewhere in between that.” (Interviewee022).

The academic may be suggesting that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may require assistance, but she expects the students to change to suit the rigid university. This implies that her expectation of them could be influenced by this towards being lower achievers than other students due to their cultural background. The next academic talked about a comparison of well-educated Aboriginal people compared to other Aboriginal communities. He then went on to state that Aboriginal people’s education standards were lower than Aboriginal or native people [Maori] from New Zealand:

“Number one, is because, I definitely feel as I see a big difference between the well-educated people in Aboriginal communities compared to other communities, I always compare this, correct me if I am wrong, there are Aboriginal or native people in New Zealand. […] Compared to them other Aboriginal people’s education standards are very low that is my feeling, is that do you think.” (Interviewee023).

The previous academics’ thoughts are clear about low expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia compared to the Maori of Aotearoa [New Zealand]. This highlighted a lack of understanding of the Indigenous people and issues in Australia which would create low expectations. The next academic spoke about having the same expectations for Indigenous students as she had for everyone and she liked to set high expectations for everyone:

“The same [expectations] that I have for anyone. […] I think my answer to that is based on the fact that as you said it is based on the self-fulfilling prophecy, it you set a very high expectation for anyone and believe that they can achieve it
and make them feel like they can achieve it they will achieve it and I strongly believe that” (Interviewee019).

The previous academic spoke about having the same expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as she had for everyone which may imply that she did not consider her expectations of Indigenous people. The next academic’s first thoughts when interviewed were that the students thought academics had high expectations of them:

“Previously when I have been engaged, I think they feel that sometimes we have a higher expectation of them.” (Interviewee016).

The previous academic mentioned high expectations as her first thought of how Indigenous students saw them but never mentioned what her expectations of the Indigenous students actually were.

**Summary of Academics Perceptions**

Academics spoke about having the same expectations of Indigenous students as with other students, but they need to participate, prepare and understand what is being taught. One academic did not consider Indigenous students at all. Other academics spoke about outreach to Indigenous students and how some have struggled to enter university. Academics argued that the university can’t change for Indigenous students entering and they must adapt. Another suggested that Indigenous people in Australia are not as educated as Indigenous people in other countries. Academics spoke about having high expectations to treat them the same as others.

**Same as Others**

*Students*

One first year student interviewee spoke about the academics throwing the big things [academia] at you if you are an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or a standard student:
“I think that if you’re an Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander student or if you’re just a standard student they’d still be throwing those big things at you straight away and you just don’t know about it.” (Interviewee008).

The previous student suggested that the expectation is the same as other students. The use of the word standard student implies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students know they are not recognised as standard students, so the expectation may not be the same. The next first year student mentioned that academics had the same expectation of him as of normal students, and they wouldn’t even know he was there:

“They don’t view me any different than any other student. […] I don’t think the expectation of an Indigenous student is any different to a normal student because I don’t know 9 times out of 10, they wouldn’t even know that you’re an Indigenous student.” (Interviewee010).

The previous student mentioned being the same as normal students once again suggesting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are not normal students, but the expectations are the same. This highlights that academics are not considering Indigenous students within their courses. Another first year student also spoke about academics having the same expectations of her as other students and wanting them to be independent learners regardless of nationality:

“I think they expect me to be an independent learner to do my work get the grades that they would expect a first year to get regardless of my nationality” (Interviewee002).

The previous student raises being an independent learner indicating that she feels they don’t recognise her as being part of a wider Indigenous group. This has influenced her expectation of herself as an Indigenous student, that she is the same as other students, an assessment which will
be determined by the academic. A withdrawn student stated that they have not noticed being treated differently than other students:

“yeah, I and so far, I have not noticed anything. [...] As anything different in the treatment or anything” (Interviewee006).

Not noticing anything different in treatment indicated that the student viewed academics expectations of her as being the same as other students. The next withdrawn student proclaimed that being Indigenous has been a point of difference but with many dark [skin coloured] foreign students you’re not the only dark skin coloured person in the classroom:

“I think that’s where it might help with that interaction whereas the Indigenous student might have been the only point of difference before they are certainly not they are not the only point of difference now in the majority of classes you know and I found it too in my class where I’ve seen the foreign students stick together and I’ve seen if they’re a darker student they will stick with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as well you know so it’s there is that sense of you’re not in it on your own” (Interviewee027).

With the increase of overseas students of differing skin colours the student was also talking about the various cultural backgrounds as being different. The student is suggesting that he thinks the academics’ expectations of students are the same as other students due to the increase of different skin colour and cultural background of foreign students. The next student who was interviewed in his final year spoke about there being some academics having doubts, but he thought that “at the end of the day” the academics’ expectations would be the same as other students whether they were from Japan or Indonesia. The student went to state that students as individuals, were all the same people with different cultures and different backgrounds:
“You know some lecturers might have doubts, but I think most of their expectations would be the exact same as another student you know whether you’re from Japan or you’re from Indonesia. [...] Where it is the expectations should be equally and you know down to who you are and because at the end of the day, we’re all individuals and you know we’re all the same people we’re just you know different cultures different backgrounds so the end of the day” (Interviewee012).

The student spoke about all the students being the same yet coming from different cultures and backgrounds and he felt the academics had some doubts but they [academics] should have the same expectations of all students. The fact that the student mentioned doubts raises the possibility that he may have experienced different expectations from academics. The next final year student interviewed asserted that he thought academics have the same expectations for all students because academics don’t care about students and are “only doing their job”:

“I don’t think they think any different so far in my experience they’re just another student. [...] I don’t think they really care; I don’t think they really think of anyone other advantages they just treat everyone the same way as they are doing their job. [...] To pass, that’s it the lecturers don’t care as long as they’re doing their job and they pass as many students as they can or more that they don’t. I think a lot of lecturers these days don’t teach, so that like, they don’t put themselves in the student’s shoes. [...] They don’t see how the student is taking everything, they just do what they got to do” (Interviewee014).

That the final year student is speaking about how he thinks academics treat everyone the same because they don’t care and are only doing their jobs, may imply that the academics have not
engaged with him as an Indigenous student to demonstrate different expectations. Academics not caring about students may be seen as having low expectations of students, even though they are seen as treating everyone the same.

**Academics**

One academic interviewed spoke about viewing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the same as other students and mentioned that they require students to participate and to check in and get additional help if they need to:

“*Well in my course we discuss expectations up front about roles and responsibilities for the lecturers and tutors and also the students and so the expectations that I would have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are the same as I would have of other students. So, expecting participation in the course, however that works for the particular one. [...] I have an expectation that students will take opportunities, sometimes with prompting, to check in with us and get help if they need additional help with things.*” (Interviewee015).

The previous academic spoke about the students requiring help as well as saying that they have the same expectation of all students. This could imply that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may require help, suggesting that the academic may have low expectations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The next academic followed on stating the same view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by suggesting that he had the same expectations of them as other students but that they should work hard and seek help if needed:

“*I don’t think they are any different than the expectations I have of any other student and so just to work hard do their best and um seek help if they need it*” (Interviewee021).
The academic saying they expect all students to work hard and ask for help if needed, may suggest a low expectation of Indigenous students, or it could indicate a colour-blind situation where academics do not see any students as being different. Another academic interviewed started off by stating that they have the same expectations of Indigenous students as other students however then spoke about challenges due to life circumstances and that Indigenous students face and how they have the means to seek support when meeting significant challenges:

“I would expect everything that I would expect of any other student so in terms of participation, attending classes, you know participating in classes, being prepared for classes, umm but I would also expect them in their own unique case to be prepared for some challenges that they may face particularly if they’re sort out to beat the average student and that boils down to their own life circumstances, socio economic status and things like that carpool or transport as well as the racial issue you know being quite being different and being perceived as being different you know within a class you know because they may be in a class of a hundred people but they may be the only Indigenous student in that class so they I would expect them to you know have the means or at least seek support so they can sort of meet those challenges, cause they’re pretty significant challenges” (Interviewee020).

The previous academic stated that they have the same expectations of Indigenous students but then presented the notion that they have challenges. This response is ambiguous and suggests that the academic may have low expectations because they expect the Indigenous students to seek support. Asking for support, even though the academic has high expectations of the students, was also mentioned by the next academic:
“Exact same expectations as I have of all the other students, they got to come, they got to do their work, they have to succeed, if there is an issue they can come and talk about it, but the standards are the standards the expectations are the same.” (Interviewee024).

The previous academic said the standards are the standards which could mean that they have standards, or the university has standards. Sometimes it is not clear if the expectation is from the academic or the university. The next academic spoke about this by suggesting that they have the same expectations of any student but she herself would assist individuals:

“I would have the same expectations that I would have of any student at university, but I think everyone is individual and it’s the way I like to teach is to be available to assist people individually” (Interviewee017).

The academic expectations of all students appeared to have an exception that she would assist individual students, which suggests that even though she stated that her expectations are the same for all, she may have lower expectations for some students. However, the next academic spoke about not believing in disempowering expectations based on racial background and having the same expectations for all students, but the students had to work hard:

“The same that I have for anyone. [...] I don’t believe that having a disempowering discourse or a disempowering expectations based on race racial background, you know I’ve got students from all walks of life in my classroom, I love the diversity in my classroom and I expect them to all do well and I tell them that, you’re going to do well, I say study hard this won’t come easy it’s just not going to be handed on a plate you really mean something when you graduate it will mean that you worked your butt off and that’s
fantastic but all of you have every chance in the world to do well.”

(Interviewee019).

The previous academic may have good intentions to have the same expectations for all and not have expectations based on race. It implies that every student has had the same opportunities and training to enter the course at university and even working hard may not achieve the required results without assistance. This also shows a lack of understanding of equity. Another academic spoke about how she expects the same from Indigenous students as everyone else, but did mention that they have to attend as much as possible and engage with material:

“The expectations I have of them is no different to any student […] That is that they will attend as much as possible to what they need to and engage with the material. [...] Previously when I have been engaged, I think they [Indigenous students] feel that sometimes we have a higher expectation of them. [...] Then they can do and that’s not correct, it never been what I think, absolutely I expect the same from them as anyone else” (Interviewee016).

The previous academics statement may be ambiguous because she has been influenced by her previous engagements with Indigenous students where she wanted them to attend as much as possible and engage with material. Surely, academics want all students to attend and engage with the course material, not just Indigenous students. Therefore, even though the academic stated that she has the same expectations and that the students think she has high expectations, she may actually have lower expectations, due to not seeing them as attending or engaging.

Summary of Same as Others

Indigenous students spoke about being seen the same as standard or normal students and they were to be independent learners regardless of nationality. Students said they have not noticed being treated differently even though are seen as being different due to their cultural background.
Students spoke about being seen the same as other students of colour due to the increase of students from overseas whether they were from Japan or Indonesia. They spoke of same expectations because academics treat everyone the same because they don’t care and are only doing their jobs. Academics said they viewed Indigenous students the same as other students and have the same expectations of them which suggests a colour blind situation which is expanded on in the discussion chapter. They said that if they required help the academic would give them assistance, the same as they would other students. The academics said the Indigenous students should work hard the same as other students and seek help if needed. The focus by academics on Indigenous students seeking help suggests low expectations that implies a deficit thinking. The academics spoke about how they expected them to attend as much as possible and engage with material and seek support because standards are the standards that fails to recognise meritocracy.

**Low Expectations**

*Students*

The first-year students starting out in studies at university may have low expectations from previous experiences before entering university and are hoping that at university they will be supported. One first year student spoke about having low expectations, but said she felt supported to go on to complete:

“I say my expectations aren’t too high as yet because I um don’t want to, I don’t want to scare myself that I can’t do it because I am so supported here, and you know I want to so desperately achieve something you know I don’t want to, my expectations are that I will complete and that I will go on to do greater things”

(Interviewee003).

Being in the first year of studying this student is starting off with low expectations but has felt support from academics and other people at the early stage. Already having low expectations can
be hard for Indigenous students starting out as they are relying on academics not to reinforce these low expectations due to their cultural background in their studies. This starting off with low expectations and requiring support from academics is seen with the next student as well. The next student mentioned that other people appear to know where she is going but she has no idea:

“…a lot of people don’t know that but they’re looking at me like ahh she knows where she’s going know strong in like no, got no idea where I am going”

(Interviewee008).

The previous student stated about not knowing where she is going, suggesting low expectations of herself at the start of her studies. Academics need to be aware of this, so they don’t reinforce it by having low expectations of the student. However, a withdrawn student talked about having higher expectations of himself as opposed to feeling that other people may have lower expectations of him due to prejudice:

“The expectations would be as; they definitely wouldn’t be as high as the expectations I have of myself. [...] I just say that um I can’t really put a value on their compared to mine, but I just feel like maybe they’d underestimate um how well I could do in my studies. [...] If they have prejudice that’s where they think that Indigenous students aren’t going to perform as well then in that case their expectations of me would be less a lot less than the expectations, I have of myself” (Interviewee009).

The previous student spoke about having higher expectations of himself than what he felt other people may have of him, this could be suggesting that his perception is that academics have low expectations of him as a student. The next student stated that lecturers have different expectations with some not expecting him to succeed for a variety of reasons:
“I look different again different lecturers had different expectations, some people have the expectation that you are not going to succeed because whatever, for a variety of reasons” (Interviewee001).

The previous student spoke about academics as having different expectations, but he focussed on them not expecting him to succeed. The student did point out that only some academics had low expectations, not all lecturers. The students have spoken about experiencing low expectations in different ways, a final year student shared feeling uncomfortable about an academic offering her assistance when she first started, as it could be seen as low expectations:

“I had some really good lecturers like my first year lecturers there was one she was really good, she, cause I used to sit at the front and she would come over and make sure I had stuff printed out shed ask me if I got umm, first I didn’t know how to find her but then I felt like I could approach her and so I went up a couple of times and I would ask her questions in her room and yeah little things like that and then I got I connected like I got engaged in that subject yeah” (Interviewee018).

The reason that the previous student shared about not knowing which way to take the offer of assistance is that she may have thought the academic had low expectations of her, was feeling sorry for her, and expecting her to fail. The perception that Indigenous people commonly fail could affect the Indigenous students themselves. The next final year student continues this topic speaking about how the offer of assistance could be seen as academics having low expectations of Indigenous students. Even though checking up is appreciated, sometimes she would like to be treated the same as other students:

“I think the majority just expect the same, but sometimes I do wonder if they have lower expectations of us. [...] But I have never had anything to be
confirming that, I just wonder sometimes. [...] As to why maybe an example is when they find out that they have an Indigenous student sometimes they check with us to make sure we’re okay, they go that little extra mile which I appreciate, and I think it’s great but sometimes I feel like I should be treated the same. [...] You know what I mean. [...] Yeah, I think so yeah, like why am I being checked up on more than any other student” (Interviewee005).

The previous final year student explained that she wanted to be treated the same as other students even though she appreciated academics wanting to help them. Wanting to help Indigenous students through checking up on them to ensure they make it through their studies, can give the impression that the academics have low expectations of the Indigenous students.

Academics

The first academic began by stating that they have the same expectations of Indigenous students as they do other students but then went on to say that some academics may think that they will struggle with essays and even fail studies. The academic continued on to state that based on this he did have low expectations of Indigenous students:

“I don’t think they are any different than expectations I have of any other student and so just to work hard do their best and umm seek help if they need it. [...] I guess that some academics might think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students would struggle to write an essay”

“So, based on that, I don’t know but I will have to check the data again I probably would expect that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are going to either fail courses or to withdraw from courses at a higher rate than the rest of the students based on the evidence that I’ve already seen okay so”
“Yeah sure not that I think that, so they think that I think that they are not going to pass, they’re not going to succeed, because, it’s a very complex question sure, okay so these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may think that I will have low expectations of them that may be because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are underrepresented at university um yeah so” (Interviewee021).

The previous academic started with seeing Indigenous students the same as other students but then openly stated that he had low expectations based on evidence he has already seen with a higher rate of student’s attrition. This stereotyping of Indigenous students would influence this academic’s expectation of them even though all of the students may not be like this. What is not said, is what else influenced the academic to make this statement. The next academic posed that he may not expect much from Indigenous students and that other academics may have lower expectations purely because of who they [Indigenous students] are:

“Yeah I think maybe they might expect that I don’t that I wouldn’t expect as much from them that I would have probably not expecting them to be a straight 7 student, that I might be more allowing for them to be slack in the sense of not attending class, re submitting stuff late, I really do think that they would think a lot of academics have a lower expectation purely because of who they are and I think that’s not good cause that reflects a bias or prejudice on behalf of people around them but you know even though it may not be a good thing it still could be the reality out there” (Interviewee020).

While the academic suggested that other academics have this bias for prejudice of Indigenous students it may also reflect the academic himself having low expectations of the students. The previous academic stated clearly that there is prejudice within the university towards Indigenous
students. The next academic talked about how she was concerned that Indigenous students may take advantage of the government wanting them to study within the University system that there would be a lowering of standards:

“I think it could go either way I think that they, I think that it could be different depending on the individual student some students might come in, they come in thinking or expecting that because their got Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander that’s who they are and I’m not going to compromise that and they might think that they can get away with a different type of behaviour because of their strong background um so they could expect the university will, well because you know we do want them to be involved in the university, they might expect that the university will make a lot of concessions for them. […] Doesn’t the government want a high percentage than is currently in within that is enrolled in university and I think that is a fantastic thing, but I’m hoping like anything that just because the uni or the government wants them in here that they don’t think that they’re, that we are going to lower the standard to increase those numbers, because I think you can lower the standard a little bit for any not for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander but for any student that wants to be who’s willing to try but I would hope that they won’t think that we are going to lower the standard just because we want Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dietitians graduating” (Interviewee022).

The previous academic argued that compromising to allow Indigenous students into University could be viewed as setting lower standards for the course and for the students graduating as professionals. This highlights how the academic has lower expectations of the Indigenous students due to the entry pathways that are being provided to them through governments attempt to increase numbers. The next academic continued with this discussion of pathways by saying
that he hopes the Indigenous students do not have selfish intentions when they come into university through the Indigenous pathways, but that they have right intentions, set goals the same as any other students studying in the degrees:

“My expectations are that yes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students I’m fully supportive of a pathway to get them in to these health courses however it should not be or that should not be result of our selfish intentions or we need to have a certain number of Indigenous students enrolled to say look we are an embracing university we are supporting it so we need to have the right intentions for getting these students in and that is number one and number two I would think that any students that comes in to do medicine, pharmacy or nursing are bright students, they are driven and they would have the same expectations and goals for themselves as any other student an international student then a Caucasian student a south Asian student as with an immigrant they all have aspirations they all want to advance themselves and so and I think that we need to be mindful of that” (Interviewee025).

The academic suggested that she has same expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as other students. However, the academic then spoke about the students not taking advantage of the pathways through selfish ambition which suggests a low expectation of them. Another academic stated that many students are admitted into nursing with lower Overall Positions (OP)s and it’s hard for them academically especially when they have family responsibilities. The academic stated that many will walk away and maybe they should have studied as an Enrolled Nurse (ER) at TAFE:

“I think the thing with nursing is that we accepted students who have a lower OP and you know right up to some of our Indigenous it up to could even be 20.
[...] Well what you got there is a student who is potentially not as bright or not as committed. [...] You see with nursing probably being the lowest in terms of academic ability on entry I think it has an impact, so, one it’s hard for them because it’s all a new thing its hard it’s hard to step up and then two the family responsibilities, the two combined just makes it I can’t do it and they just walk away and so do many other students it’s not just them, but sometimes I think it is the combination of they not really they are not really ready for university they might be better in a TAFE for instance as an enrolled Nurse”

(Interviewee016).

The previous academic argued that the Indigenous students going into nursing may not be ready to study at university level which implies that she has low expectations of Indigenous students and may not fully understand the historical factors associated with Indigenous people as well as stereotyping and racism of the Indigenous students.

Summary of Low Expectations

Students stated that when they start at university, they may have low expectations of themselves as they may not know where they are going but felt supported by academics. This suggests academics need to avoid reinforcing low expectations. Students spoke about having high expectations but mentioned that some academics and others may have low expectations due to prejudice. Students felt uncomfortable about offers of assistance from academics because it felt like they were feeling sorry for them and expecting them to fail. While the checking up is appreciated, some Indigenous students spoke about wanting to be treated like other students as it gave the impression that the academic had low expectations of them as Indigenous students. Academics spoke about having the same expectations of Indigenous students as others but then digress to say they think they will struggle with essays and even fail studies. Academics speak about this low expectation being due to attrition rates they have already seen and what other
academics say about not expecting much from Indigenous students. This low expectation could be seen as stereotyping even though the academics say it is based on evidence. Academics were concerned that there is a lowering of standards because Indigenous students are coming in through Indigenous entry pathways set up by the government wanting to increase numbers at University. There was little evidence that academics were able to differentiate between equity and equality. They tended to make blanket statements about treating all students the same with some qualification that Indigenous students may face challenges. The perception of these challenges tended to be based on a deficit model of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Academics argue that Indigenous students should not have selfish ambition and take advantage of the pathways but have the right intentions, set goals the same as any other students. As part of this academics argue many are not ready for university as they have family responsibilities and should study courses at TAFE. It appears many academics do not fully understand colonial historical factors and still have covert stereotyping and racism in relation to Indigenous students.

Conclusion

In this findings chapter, the purpose was to explore expectations in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying at university. The chapter started by looking at the positive or strength aspects of expectations of Indigenous students and then concluded with the issues of low expectations that relate to self-fulling prophecy and stereotype threat of Indigenous students taking on the negativity of others not seen as good enough to study at university.

The expectations that Indigenous students have of themselves is that they have goals to achieve, they want to achieve health degrees and return to work in their communities. Academics agree with this, however, they suggest a strategy of assimilation to the university environment by ‘fitting in’ and being ‘treated the same’ as other students to achieve this, which by implication suggests leaving their cultural identity at the door. Indigenous students have
expectations of bettering themselves while academics point out that only low numbers of students have bettered themselves at university through post graduate studies. High expectations spoken about for all students may actually put pressure on Indigenous students coming into university and while academics mentioned high expectations of all students, they then digressed to wanting to help Indigenous students which indicated low expectations for this group in particular.

Indigenous students’ perceptions of how academics see them is that they only see them in terms of negative stereotypes, or as invisible. The Indigenous students stated that academics see them as independent learners, the same as all the other students and have shown limited knowledge of Indigenous people. Academics mentioned that they see Indigenous students the same as other students and haven’t thought about them at all except that they need assistance entering university and are not as educated as Indigenous people from Aotearoa.

The Indigenous students spoke about how academics see them as being the same as other students, but sometimes treat them differently due to their cultural background. Students indicated they were seen as the same as students of colour from overseas. Students stated that academics would give them assistance while they were treating people the same, as this was part of doing their job. The academics support this by talking about treating everyone the same and giving support if they were approached by a student. This speaks of colour blindness and deficit thinking that needs to be addressed within the university system. It also shows a lack of understanding of the difference between equity and equality.

Indigenous students put forward that they have fears coming into studies even though they know they want to achieve a professional degree. The students also spoke about being weary of asking for support from academics, or even having them check up on them, as it looks like the academics are sorry for them and expect them to fail. The academics start with high expectations then talk about low expectations through wanting to help Indigenous students.
Some of this due to previous engagement with Indigenous students or stories shared among academics about their engagements with these students. The low expectations of Indigenous students appear related to self-fulfilling prophecy, stereotype threat and deficit thinking.

Overall, the findings chapter on expectations has drawn out some major issues of colour blindness, deficit thinking, self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotype threat in relation to Indigenous students studying at university. This will be further expanded in the discussion and conclusion chapters.
Chapter 8 - Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to synthesise findings and discuss their implications. The chapter will begin by reiterating the goal of the research, literature presented, research questions and methodology. Then an overview of the findings will follow by discussing the key meta-themes emerging from the research. The chapter concludes with reflections on how the study findings can inform practices in universities.

A brief recap of study aims and approach

The aim of this research was to examine the ways that identity, roles and expectations shape the experiences and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students at university. The research provided qualitative data in relation to why Indigenous health students may leave university studies. It also provided some insight into academics’ awareness (or lack of awareness) of cultural knowledge pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and it provided strategies for reducing the attrition rates of Indigenous health students at university.

The literature review revealed that Indigenous students are recruited into health courses to increase the numbers in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce and to ensure the cultural safety and social, emotional wellbeing of Indigenous people within the health system. The literature also reiterated the importance of retaining and graduating Indigenous students as health professionals from University. The specific research questions for the study were:

1. What do academics know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ cultural background and identity when teaching in health faculty courses at university?
2. How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students change their roles from community to their roles in university health faculty courses?
3. What expectations do lecturers have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?
I explored those questions using a theoretical framework that drew upon Critical Race Theory (Identity), Role Theory (Roles), and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy (Expectations) to guide and ask questions to students and academics about the way in which they perceive Indigenous identity and roles within a university context. This included expectations that Academics had of their Indigenous students as well as Indigenous students’ expectations of themselves. The theoretical framework of identity, roles and expectations in relation to Indigenous students was valuable in that it enabled a deeper insight into the interactions between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous academics which may assist in identifying key areas that could contribute to Indigenous students’ success and retention rates.

An important contribution of this study is the methodology, which could be used for other research. I used Indigenous methodologies to ensure that Indigenous people’s interests, knowledge, and experiences were centrally situated throughout my research and so that the Indigenous learners interviewed were able to tell their stories comfortably. The best research method that intertwined with Indigenous methodologies was a qualitative research methodology that consisted of semi-structured interviews and purposive sampling. In the following section I discuss the meta-themes from across the three findings chapters in order to identify their significance in the context of relevant literature.

**Synthesising findings: Merging experiences of identity, roles, and expectations**

In this section I have synthesised the findings detailed in chapters on identity, roles and expectations. This synthesis highlights the complexity that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students face when completing studies at university. The data specifically relates to students studying to become health professionals to increase the Indigenous workforce and address gaps in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes. Nevertheless, the results are relevant to the broader context of how higher education engages, retains, and successfully supports Indigenous students. Across the three findings chapters meta-themes emerged. The first group of
meta-themes are connections, going back, giving back, ways of doing and the collective and the individual. These are discussed in the context of the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when studying at university. The second group of meta-themes are competing demands, equality and equity and stereotyping. These are discussed in the context of the challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students face within the western education system.

Overall, these meta-themes offer up the strengths and challenges not only of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities but to the wider decision makers within the health, education and workforce structures. This is expanded on in the conclusion chapter with important recommendations from this research. The first of the meta-sections is the connections, which highlights the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s connections.

**Going Back**
Moving from community to university and “going back” to community was discussed throughout the findings chapters of identity, roles and expectations. Various researchers (Battiste 2005; LaDuke, 2009; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011) speak about the importance of Indigenous students connecting with their communities. The individualistic nature of university may rub against more collaborative notions of the students wanting to give back to the Indigenous communities of which they belong (McKinley & Brayboy, 2005). One student spoke about the transition from community to university being very hard because “it’s so formal and it’s so white” … “coming from an Aboriginal community to a very white English structured kind of place”. However, students still spoke about coming to university and going back to their community to work as health professionals.
Having an identity as an Indigenous person includes this wider sense of belonging and the need to develop this health professional role not only for themselves but the whole community. The connections to their Indigenous community and other Indigenous students encourage them to want to go back to community as well as wanting to give to other Indigenous people because they can identify with others who have the similar stories and identity as them. Having similar stories creates this expectation of achieving your health professional roles through university and then going back to community and giving to other Indigenous people and the wider community.

Sadly, the academics appeared unaware of the importance of coming from and going back to the community but maintain advocating equality by having the same expectations of Indigenous students as everyone else. It could be included in university staff training that the majority of Indigenous people want to go back to their communities to practice as health professionals, it is therefore necessary that they retain their sense of what is culturally appropriate, rather than being encouraged to forgo this aspect of themselves in order to fit into the university culture.

Overall, these findings of “going back” are significant because of raising the awareness that Indigenous people from communities may already be doing this work whether it be seen as symbolic interactional (non-structural, informal) or structural/functional (formal) and want to return to their community with recognised western system structured/functional (formal) health professional qualifications from the university. Furthermore, that Indigenous students who may not be working in their communities have decided to do health professional studies to meet health needs within their communities.
Connections

An overarching theme of connections emerged from across the three findings chapters of identity, roles and expectations. I define connections as the interconnection between people to their land, place, Country, culture, family, kin, community, roles and expectations.

Connections in Chapter 5, the Identity Chapter, related to cultural background, kinships and place. These are very important to Indigenous students because it provides them with a sense of belonging. This is a notion that they belong to Country as defined by their Indigenous community, in defiance of what colonial Australia has tried to remove from them through idiosyncrasies of terra nullius, Stolen Children, removals from Country, and policies of assimilation. Critical race theory (CRT) has challenged this silencing of their voices in relation to their sense of belonging. As I (Corporal, 2017) and other writers such as Huggins and Huggins (1994), Huggins (1998) and Moreton-Robinson (2015) have stated, Australia needs to listen to the voice of the Indigenous people who have been silenced, belittled, and invisible for too long.

Oddly, in much research with Indigenous students, those students’ voices are not clearly heard or visible. In this study, Indigenous students’ voices were privileged and heard. This centring of Indigenous students’ voices allowed participants to refer the connections to their cultural background, kinship networks, place, Country, and their future professions and this related to the findings of the aforementioned chapters in the following key ways of identity, roles and expectations.

Students spoke about connection in the identity findings chapter to cultural background, kinships and place confirming that these things are still important to Indigenous students today and when studying in mainstream institutions (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016; Styres, 2017; West, et al., 2010). The study showed that students have enduring connection to multiple places, including their “home” Country, ancestral lands, urban communities and the Country upon which they live and study. One Indigenous student spoke about how they connect with where they live now and the local Indigenous community as well as
the cultural and kinship connection to their own Country. The Indigenous students’ voices about having connection to different cultural identity, roles and expectations as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be silenced or made invisible by academics in the classroom by suggestions of treating everyone the same.

Non-Indigenous academics did not place much importance on their identity, compared to their focus on the identity of the Indigenous students. There were contradictions to this because whilst identifying the Indigenous students as different, they then articulated a position that advocated for all students to be “treated the same”. Hence there was a visible imbalance in the degree to which Indigenous students and staff were identified by their cultural heritages: that is, Indigenous students were often defined significantly by their cultural heritages whereas non-Indigenous academics were not (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, 2015).

Due to their lack of connection to Indigenous peoples, cultures and Country, academics interviewed for the research displayed a generalised and often superficial knowledge of Indigenous students, culture, and Country. This arguably makes them more vulnerable to entertaining stereotypes, archetypes, and a romanticised or superficial image of Indigenous people and cultures including their students (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016; Francis, 1992). Non-Indigenous staff might, for example, be limited to seeing publicly shared cultural practices such as ‘Welcome to Country’ and cultural dances, or even knowing the difference between a Welcome to Country and an ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016). Welcome to Country and other cultural performances are important protocols and are of significance as rites of passage for people when they enter local traditional custodians Country and it is seen as rude not to know or ignore these protocols. These protocols are important for building and maintaining relationships with Indigenous people and communities.

A common archetype that still affects Indigenous people is the image of the ‘noble savage’ (Pearson & Morris, 2017) or ‘exotic other’ (Carlson, 2016; Grant, 2017). Academics
interviewed for this research displayed some degree of romanticising Indigenous people and cultures through, for example, reflecting on the role of Elders in teaching young people in Indigenous communities. While that role for Elders is certainly common in our communities, there appeared to be a romanticised understanding of it in the eyes of some non-Indigenous academics who were interviewed. Academics spoke about Elders teaching younger people in the Roles chapter without them demonstrating any understanding of how this teaching worked, but rather as an exotic romanticised concept.

In this study, Indigenous students also added that they experience being objectified and commodified as “token” students who fill the university’s (and governments’) Indigenous education and health workforce targets. While the fact that non-Indigenous academics acknowledged their Indigenous students and wanted them to do well, government’s goals for increased Indigenous participation may be the main drivers rather than an authentic understanding of the Indigenous community and student aim and experience. This reinforces how Indigenous people have been previously controlled through various Indigenous Acts imposed on them by so-called “well-meaning” government policies (Luke, 2010; Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016; Bunda 2006). For example, Luke, (2010, p 47) noted that “the idiosyncratic aims and good intentions of academic staff and departments aside, universities have served the extension of state and corporate power through the international dissemination of knowledge, technical expertise, lingua franca, and, indeed, particular forms of ideological disposition”.

Academics spoke about welcoming Indigenous students in their course however they had to conform their identity, roles and expectations to how the university operates. This implies that others know what is best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and it is only through taking on the norms of the academic middle class, that they can truly ‘better themselves’ or operate as health professionals.
The students spoke about kinships as part of their identity as an Indigenous person and this gives them their values and beliefs. One of the main protocols that was illustrated through students’ responses was a strong respect for Elders whether they were blood relatives or not. Some academics indicated an awareness of the link between identity and kinships and mentioned the importance of Elders. One academic even suggested that due to kinships some Indigenous people may not be able to work in different communities. However, many academics have not considered kinship networks as part of Indigenous students’ identity when they are engaging with them at university. Kinship is of vital importance to Indigenous students requiring academic awareness (Corporal, 2017).

Indigenous students considered place as important to identity. The students spoke about identity being connected to place as it provides them a connection to their cultural background and land as an Indigenous person. However, some students were still in search of their place due to historical factors and government policies of removal, assimilation or segregation. Students also spoke about being connected to other places where they were historically brought up or studying. This shaped their knowledge of their own identity as an Indigenous person from their own Country or place. While academics could see the significance of place as important, they often had very little awareness of the significance of the place they were on, or how difficult it might be for an Indigenous student who was away from their community. This was exemplified by statements from the Identity chapter such as “it’s something I hold as part of being me” and “don’t be 34 and sit there going I don’t know where I am from”. The academics may need a deeper understand of place so that they can relate themselves more to the importance of place for Indigenous students. (Bunda 2006; Luke, 2010; Holt, 2015; Fredericks & Bargallie, 2016).

Indigenous students spoke about cultural background as being important to their identity because it provided a connection to their worldview, protocols, kinship, role and
connection to Country. It is the sense of belonging that makes them who they are as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Martin, 2003; Huggins & Huggins, 1998; Ford, 2010; Holt, 2015). Yet, academics spoke about knowing the local Aboriginal people and only seemed to have a general knowledge of Indigenous people and their community responsibilities. When speaking about Indigenous students, academics openly said they knew very little about the cultural background of Indigenous people (Corporal, 2007; 2017). This may be something to expand on for academics when they start teaching at university (West et al., 2010).

It is also important for academics to recognise that not all Indigenous students will be familiar with their cultural background. For example, cultural background has been a struggle for some Indigenous students due to family constraints or not knowing who family are. This is a consequence of the longstanding impact of the Stolen Generations, and historical factors such as families not wanting to identify as Indigenous for fear of their children being removed. In addition, some families may wish to avoid the negative stereotyping of their children (Rosser, 1985; Huggins 1998; Huggins & Huggins, 2008; Nugent, 2015; Corporal, 2017). Many students who know or are on the journey to finding their cultural background embrace their identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as their other cultural backgrounds (Corporal, 2007; 2017; Martin 2000; Holt, 2015; Nugent, 2015). This highlights the intersectionality of the Indigenous students’ lives. It would be important to explore this further at university when students start their studies.

Giving Back

Another one of the meta themes that came out of the findings regarding “giving back”, is different in that the Indigenous person is giving back to the community and not necessarily going back to the community where they are traditionally or historically from. Indigenous students may choose to contribute/give to what are seen as Indigenous communities within and external to their community. This does not exclude them giving back to their communities through
connecting with them and being role models, helpers or mentors to encourage people to study at university. Academics and students saw many Indigenous students in leadership roles and role models within their communities and at university as part of the giving back to the communities. McKinley and Brayboy (2005) reinforce that Indigenous students’ who study within university programs speak about giving back to other Indigenous people and their communities: “I have to give back; there is no other way” (p. 426). They further present that giving back is associated with having a shared beliefs, experience and histories (McKinley & Brayboy, 2005).

Final year students spoke about being role models as mentors and helpers within the university however these are interactional roles that are not structured roles but are created to encourage and help other Indigenous people. This suggests that Indigenous students take on these roles as part of a collective society within the university as well as outside the university. The Indigenous community is wider than where the student is culturally connected to and includes the other Indigenous students they are studying with. This highlights that identity is related to the roles played by the Indigenous students but also how this may change when they work with other people outside their community.

It appears important to students to increase the reputation of Indigenous students by doing well. This also highlights how Indigenous students know that they are managing deficit expectations when other Indigenous people need them to be role models to help them to do well. The role modelling, guidance and help and support that an older student spoke about was seen as leadership when he mentioned being seen as an “Uncle” which incorporates Indigenous cultural background within leadership. This also meant “giving back” to the community by helping other Indigenous people by being a role model and encouraging them to study. Giving back to the community is important and these roles appear to be symbolic interactional roles rather than structural roles of going back to the community after the completion of the studies. This again is specific to their identity as an Indigenous person and the role they may play.
Finally, Indigenous students explained that their expectations of themselves are about achieving not only for themselves but showing that, if they can achieve this as an Indigenous student, other Indigenous students can do this as well. An Indigenous midwifery student reinforced this by passionately stating that it is great to reach the goal of being a health professional so that she can help other Indigenous people who are going through what she went through when she had children.

Giving back is a meta theme throughout all the findings chapters and, while similar to going back, it is slightly different in that people spoke passionately about wanting to give back to other Indigenous people as part of knowing the journey that others have been on. This is an important issue for universities to be aware of as they can enable this giving back within the education systems.

**Ways of Doing**

Ways of doing within the western system has been raised throughout each of the findings chapters of identity, roles and expectations. Nakata (2000) poses that many Indigenous students operate within the cultural interface at university and they bring Indigenous ways of doing into this space. In this study, ways of doing is defined as seeing how Indigenous people operate as representatives of their cultural and community groups as a way to empower other Indigenous students in various education systems including university. Ways of doing is wider than just the Indigenous units in university and includes many individual Indigenous students who have roles helping, mentoring, role modelling and educating other Indigenous students as well as non-Indigenous academics and students.

When considering ways of doing within the western system you need to view how Indigenous students spoke about how they worked their communities. Indigenous students’ roles when working within their communities may be different to how they work with mainstream or non-Indigenous people outside the community. When working outside their Indigenous
community, they are working with other people in the wider society who may have different beliefs and ways of doing things than they do. Many Indigenous students see themselves as working cross-culturally with the skills and knowledge they have learnt at university.

While Battiste (2011) argues that “Western education has much to gain by viewing the world through the eyes and languages of Aboriginal people” (p. 202), academics within the western system continue to view Indigenous communities as requiring more help than those within mainstream society. Such perspectives highlight the non-Indigenous academics limited view of the knowledge Indigenous communities have to offer dominant institutions including higher education (Valencia, 2010; Pidgeon, 2008a). The notion that Indigenous students will only gain leadership roles through the completion of mainstream educational studies may dismiss the cultural identity and leadership roles they already serve as Indigenous people. It displays little awareness of the value Indigenous students’ already bring in roles within their communities. In addition, if not addressed, it could negatively influence the opinions these Indigenous students have of themselves when studying within the western system. The subliminal message sometimes perpetuated within higher education is that Indigenous people need help and will not be able to help their community unless they are able to leave their communities and study within a western educational system. Furthermore, the important communal and cultural roles Indigenous students often play within their own community is only recognised as being of value for their communities, rather than of a skill-set they bring into the dominant institution, even after they have graduated as a health professionals. Academics do not see Indigenous students working outside their communities unless they give up some of their culture and start acting in a western way.

Battiste (2011) poses that “education is supposed to teach culture over generations, however it is not being accomplished because it appears the real reason for education is to maintain social and political status quo” (p. 196). This starts early in the education system for
Indigenous students and continues when they commence at university. Youngblood (2000) states that this is about Indigenous students not being able to see reflections of themselves within the western system. There is hence pressure on the Indigenous students from academics to hold on to what they need in their culture but also to be willing to let go of parts of their culture to meet the role of being a health professional. An academic spoke about “taking off the hat of being a community person” and “putting on the hat of being a health professional”. The academics see the need for Indigenous students to study as health professionals but want them to change and leave much of their cultural roles out of the studies.

It does appear that academics want Indigenous students to be tokenistic role models who have adopted a western framework, leaving their cultural roles behind by taking up the role of health professional, as defined by the western institutions (Brayboy, 2005). The implications of this may be that the Indigenous student may be seen to have changed or may no longer be able to relate as well with their community. Goffman (1959) contended that when people leave a role that people relate well with to take up a different role which others may not relate to at all. Indigenous students argued that they were expected to act like the future health professional while studying. The change of role to act like a future professional suggests you may have to act differently; you cannot be yourself. However, academics need to consider the Indigenous students ways of doing which is related to the culture of sharing and being connected to other Indigenous students and communities. Nakata (2000) poses that many Indigenous students work at the cultural interface within universities where there an intersection of cultural and western knowledge. Many of the ways of doing within the western system have originated from Indigenous ways of knowing (Nakata, 2000).

It is hence important that the cultural background of Indigenous student is foremost when they are doing role modelling, helping others and any leadership roles at university. To do justice to ways of doing within the education system the universities need to recognise the utter
importance of the cultural identity, roles and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the contribution they make and stop seeing it as a deficit.

**Collective and Individual**

Throughout identity, roles and expectations of the Indigenous students there is this constant battle between the collectivist and individual orientations. Collective is defined as a person being seen as part of a particular group who are connected through culture, kinship and community. In this instance we are talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are connected to each other through these connections of culture, kinship and community. The individual is when a person is seen as one person (e.g. student) who may be part of the wider society (e.g. university) with individual rights as a part of that society.

The Indigenous students spoke about seeing their identity as part of the wider Indigenous community as well as their own kinships and community. All the Indigenous students saw themselves as part of their cultural collectives through ongoing colonised history of separation and assimilation. The Indigenous students spoke about having roles and expectations of representing their culture, kinships and communities while studying at university. Indigenous students have a collectivist framework that is exhibited by them when using studies and learning at university to show other Indigenous students how they can use education while retaining their culture (McKinley & Brayboy, 2005). Indigenous students are seen as more enculturated into a way of cooperation and collectivism (see Brayboy, 1999; Deyle, 1995; Foley, 1995; Erikson & Mohatt, 1982).

One first year student spoke about transitioning into “something better” to show people it can be done. Indigenous people do this not only for themselves but bettering one’s self for their family and communities. Showing people and your community that it can be done appears to be part of transitioning to something better. This opposes Educational institutions within the western framework that are often based on a notion of competition, a direct contrast to
the concept of cooperation emphasised in an Indigenous framework (McKinley & Brayboy 2005). Sharing yours and your family’s Indigenous cultural experiences is a symbolic interactional role, however it was suggested that it can develop into being part of a structured role as a health professional with knowledge of Aboriginal health (Rose, 2014).

The connection between role and identity demonstrates that Indigenous students saw themselves in a collectivist society as being part of a wider group. One of the main connections is their connection with Elders and the language used to communicate being different. There is a maintaining of their identity and connection to the Elders and community even though they are being seen in an individual student role. The students talk about having structural roles in the community as part of being in a collectivist society. This can infer that the students are proud of their Indigenous heritage and the roles that they have as part of the collective group. By contrast students’ roles are usually related to individual roles in the western context. The collectivism that the Indigenous students are talking about could be as wide as including all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or could refer to their immediate family, language kinship group or connections to place or land. The collectivism of Indigenous students provides them with a sense of belonging.

Indigenous people place importance on their community as well as their individual roles as students. It highlights the struggles of role strain and stress between community roles and individual roles of Indigenous students. This can be straightforward; however, Indigenous people may find that there are cultural differences in the way the roles operate within a western system which may cause a culture clash. Indigenous students may feel marginalised because they do not clearly see their community roles in the western system even though they are still performing these symbolic interactional roles with other Indigenous students at university (Corporal, et al., 2020; Rose, 2014). This can happen with marginalised groups where the people are performing roles, but these are not named or structured. It does become clearer when students
begin studies because they sometimes study in the area in which they already operate in the community.

Academics saw the role of Indigenous people at university to be defined by their status as students with obligations to themselves as individuals and to changing themselves as necessary to fit in with other groups at university. This suggests a very individual role of bettering oneself for the benefit of the individual. It is also based on the unspoken notion that “to be like a middle-class image of professionalism”, is to be better.

Academics also saw Indigenous students as being the same as other students despite being aware of them as having special entry to into university and to be individually trained to work in their communities. Indigenous students are also encouraged/coerced to be educate other staff and students about their identities and profession. This suggests that academics see the roles Indigenous students have as being based on an individual structure. The symbolic interactional role mentioned was learning and educating others. The roles mentioned by academics are not a collective role of Indigenous people but individual roles of cross-cultural educating of others. This could indicate that the teaching of Indigenous cultural identity is lacking at university and even between staff and students that they want Indigenous students to educate people and take this role on.

**Competing Demands**

There are competing demands on Indigenous students that were spoken about across the three findings chapters of identity, roles and expectations. By merely being identified as an Indigenous person the students will having competing demands in their community and the university system. Being Indigenous, the student is part of a kinship network and worldview or ontology that they care for both family and Country; this may impact on their studies because they may be required to attend various events and ceremonies that the university does not see as important.
Even in a western framework, Home (1997) speaks about the importance of a person’s role looking after family and balancing this with the role in academia as a student. These conflicting responsibilities may contribute to role stress and strain. This comes as a result of taking on a new role and/or straining your current role (Hardy & Conway, 1988).

As Indigenous people the students have this conflict embedded in who they are and the role they play in their Indigenous community, which competes with the role they have in completing a degree at university. There is an expectation that the students need to dedicate time to their studies when they transition to university. This would mean a big change of roles for Indigenous mature aged students with family responsibilities. University is different than community and you must adjust to suit this with services that will include you and not make you feel different. A changing of the role or taking on a new role during the transition process may require the assistance of Indigenous Student Support Units and the wider university. This transition is very important in the first years of the Indigenous students’ studies as this is usually where the student will struggle and may leave university. Having more than one role means that you are taking on an extra role and this may be a challenge for some students as it can lead to role strain. Knowing how to balance these roles can lead to anxiety because of giving up some of your cultural or family roles in the community. Having support at university in the transition of the role was seen as important to help overcome the stresses.

The transition from community to university for Indigenous students can be challenging due to barriers not experienced by non-Indigenous students. Part of these unseen barriers is the colonial historical factors that have created barriers for Indigenous people to have access to university (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). This change that creates competing demands is apparent when transitioning into the university role from community, and many non-Indigenous people don’t know about the change because they have never experienced it. Indigenous people need to learn the student role at university because it is a big transition. They must seek out
support as well as contacting academics if needed. This puts pressure on the student to change as well as having to reach out to academics which many may not want to do. This may contribute to identity issues of the non-Indigenous academics as well as other students not understanding the person with an Indigenous background and culture. The academics may have lower expectations of the Indigenous student if they see them requiring assistance without understanding the full extent of the colonial historical factors.

The role in family is considered a major responsibility for Indigenous people and there is added pressure on them when they take on the role of a student at university while juggling family commitments. Hence, there is this competing demand between representing their family and community at university as well as completing their family and community responsibilities as an Indigenous person within their Indigenous community. Many academics do not consider the competing demands of Indigenous students’ family and community roles as they may only see the students as an individual who needs to meet the requirements of their courses and university. The balancing of these competing roles needs to be identified by both students and academics as taking on an extra role as a student may contribute to role strain and role stress. Furthermore, it raises the importance of kinship and family as communal roles verses the individual role of student. Academics need to be aware of these conflicts when dealing with Indigenous students.

The final year of study can put extra pressure on Indigenous students while they make decisions about their role as student, and how much time they can give to their family and cultural roles. Many Indigenous students struggle with the student role being different than their role in community and this usually comes to a head in the final years of study. It is seen as two different roles with competing demands of individual verses communal responsibilities which may not be seen by academics. Academics will become more aware of Indigenous students’ needs if they are more aware of the kinship networks and responsibilities.
Equality and Equity

The experiences of equality (sameness) and equity (difference) is throughout the three findings chapters of identity, roles and expectations. In relation to identity the Indigenous students had to sometimes identify themselves as Indigenous people because they were seen and treated the same as other students. The students saw themselves as going back to the community to work in their health professional roles to better their communities, however the academics saw them as individuals wanting to get a degree to work individually in their professions. Finally, with expectations the students felt that they were perceived the same as everyone else on most occasions with the odd academic appearing to have treated them differently by admitting that they knew who Indigenous students were and indicating they wanted to “help” them. Treating everyone the same can been seen as being colour blind by suggesting that everyone has the same starting place when coming to university (Casteel, 1998). The academics in the expectation findings spoke about wanting to “help Indigenous students” which implies that the Indigenous students aren’t the same as everyone else and that the academics may in fact have lower expectations of them because they identified themselves as Indigenous. This implies a deficit model in which many academics stated they had lower expectations of Indigenous students because the Indigenous students needed help. Therefore, tensions between equality (same) and equity (different) were seen throughout the Findings chapters.

To look at equality and equity it is important particularly in order to examine an assumption that university is neutral, and the norm is Eurocentric whiteness. The students are not seen as Indigenous by academics because they want them to be seen the same as other students all playing on the same field. One Indigenous student remarked about their identity, “yeah, because 9 times out of 10 they wouldn’t even know that you were an Indigenous student”. However, there is something wrong with you if you are not the same. The balance of treating
everyone the same as in equality and allowing for difference as in equity is very important in relation to Indigenous students studying to be health professionals.

Firstly, there is an assumption that university is neutral, and, because of this, academics may assume or expect that all students are familiar with university life and jargon. One student speaking about expectations was adamant about difference, “the load that they want you to know and understand! I’m feeling like overwhelmed and I think that they expect me to know what they are talking about. They start talking in their jargon and I’m, like, I have no idea what they are talking about so if I think, of anything, they need to break it down a bit”. This was relayed by an Indigenous student just starting university who, when asked about expectations, noted that they see non-Indigenous academics as just throwing the big things [academia] at you, treating you as an independent learner, and having the same expectation of Indigenous students as other students within this supposedly “neutral” institution.

The university is not a neutral institution or equaliser as suggested by policy makers (Anyon, 2006). Those students who are more familiar with that framework will have an advantage and this does not always take into consideration first in family (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Parker, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Many of the Indigenous students interviewed indicated that they were either first in family or unfamiliar with the university context and yet their responses indicated that there was an assumption from the academics and, indeed, from the university itself, that they would be familiar with the practices, protocols, and procedures of the university classroom.

The students are expected to understand the ways universities operate within the dominant white Eurocentric framework. Many students coming into the university and see the university as a white dominated space of learning that many Indigenous academics such as Moreton-Robinson (2015), Rigney (2001), McKinley and Brayboy (2005), Youngblood (2000) and Battiste (2005) critique. Indigenous students spoke about how they saw themselves coming
from their communities into a white system. Furthermore, even the non-Indigenous academics acknowledged that universities were Eurocentric places of learning and described the structures and ways of teaching as “white” which immediately excludes Indigenous students from being accepted as part of the institution. This reinforces that university is not a safe place for Indigenous students who may be less familiar with the western framework and mode of operation, daily practices and expectations of the university environment (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Parker, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

The Eurocentric framework within universities has the impact of making Indigenous students invisible as a people particularly if they are not seen by academics who want them to be and act the same as the rest of the students. The invisibility of Indigenous students is not new because, throughout the colonising history, many of the roles and knowledge skills of Indigenous people have been overlooked (Huggins & Huggins, 1994; Youngblood, 2000; Nakata, 2000; Corporal, 2017). In the findings of this study, non-Indigenous academics who had positive engagement with students may have had students approach them or they have visited the Indigenous units. This was supported in the literature review that mentioned that engagement with students through the Indigenous units was conducive to retention of students (AIDA National Medical Education Review, 2012).

Many Indigenous students may slip through the cracks unless they identify themselves and engage with the Indigenous support units (MDANZ & AIDA, 2012). While it is important to acknowledge the individual learning needs of each student, it is also appropriate to be aware of some of the systemic discrimination that has impacted Aboriginal communities through the legacy of colonisation. To disregard the importance of this through the notion of colour blindness is to disregard the value and importance of Indigenous history and ways of knowing. Academics want the students to be independent learners and do not recognise them as a part of a collective Indigenous group (Clycq, Ward Nouwen, & Vandenburgueke, 2014).
Interestingly enough Indigenous students are expected to be aware of university culture but there is not the recognition of the reciprocal or different set of roles within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (see Corporal, Sunderland, O’Leary & Riley, 2020). Indigenous students are expected to be the same as the other students by the non-Indigenous academics. Indigenous students may feel the message of everyone being treated the same could adversely impact on their experience of the expectations and roles that their community constructs for them as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The invisibility of Indigenous students within the Eurocentric white education system will be reinforced through academics treating Indigenous students the same as others.

The notion of “normal” and what is regarded as the “norm” as spoken about by students and academics continues the message of homogenisation. Even though some of the academics interviewed were not white Europeans, the non-Indigenous academics who did identify as being white, gave the impression of failing to see the privilege of their whiteness which could in fact “other” the Indigenous students (Schick, 2014; Walton, Priest, Kowal, White, Brickwood, Fox, & Paradies, 2014). To highlight this, a non-Indigenous academic stated in the expectations findings chapter that, “I would hope that they won’t think that we are going to lower the standard just because we want Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ... graduating”. Statements such indicate how deeply entrenched deficit thinking is within the ivory tower.

Academics and other university staff need to understand the historical context of their whiteness in relation to colonial history and recognise that it is not egalitarian, and we do not live in a homogenous society (Mazzei, 2008). Academics felt they need to be excessively generous and inclusive towards Indigenous students if they have to treat them differently through special entry programs because this was out of the “norm” of society (Schick, 2014). One of the academics made the comment that, while they welcomed Indigenous students through the special entry programs, they wanted them to appreciate being accepted in the health courses. These ideas
of “normal” and “privilege” sometimes do not come easy for some non-Indigenous people as they continue to focus on the deficit models in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Experiences of equality, of being seen as the same, suggests all the students are on the same playing field or have the same starting line (Casteel 1998; Clycq, Ward Nouwen, & Vandenbroucke, 2014; Schick, 2014; Walton, et, al, 2014; DiAngelo, 2018). The Indigenous students and academics in this study who mentioned that the academics treated all students the same could be seen as being egalitarian, however, it could also be regarded as dismissing, ignoring or pretending (gammon) not to see people of different racial/ethnic difference (Casteel, 1998; Huggins, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). That could also have a negative impact on Indigenous students’ sense of self-worth as this may be denying an integral part of one’s identity. Non-Indigenous academics not wanting to discuss issues of how they have been advantaged as individuals and the historical colonial education system could suggest the white fragility and colour blindness that needs to be addressed through anti-discriminatory practice such as cultural safety and cultural humility (Corporal, 2017; Goodman, 2011; DiAngelo, 2018).

The Indigenous students who identified as being Indigenous from lower socio-economic communities sometimes were also subject to the system of meritocracy within university (Anyon, 2006). Meritocracy gives reward or entitlement for individual competition and effort within the university system which usually benefits those students who have been through privileged education systems to get into university (Anyon, 2006). Being community people, this style of competition does not suit them as students and does not consider their cultural background of colonial historical disadvantage. There is a quietness about race within egalitarian messages within Australia, which makes one wonder if the people of white Eurocentric background have “white fragility” (DiAngelo, 2018) when white academics fail to engage in these conversations but prefer to maintain their colour blindness, seeing everyone the
same on the same playing field (Walton, et al, 2014; DiAngelo, 2018). While some academics noted being aware of Indigenous people, the Indigenous students interviewed relayed that many academics lacked knowledge and skills to teach Indigenous studies which could play out as fear or white fragility, that is of not knowing or wanting to talk about their feelings in relation to Indigenous issues especially colonial history (Huggins, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; DiAngelo, 2018).

This thought that something must be wrong with you if you are not the same as other students raises the issues of equity that academics and Indigenous students speak about such as giving extra support to people only if they have to. The academics spoke about having the same expectations of Indigenous students as other students nevertheless they do acknowledge that the Indigenous students may not understand some of the academic curriculum as taught. This shows a lack of knowledge in discrimination and cultural safety in the way that academics conflated equality and equity. It also suggests that non-Indigenous academics may have deficit thinking in relation to Indigenous students because of lower expectations about their academic ability (Valencia, 2010; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Riley, 2019). This contributes to how the ongoing deficit thinking of society or people in power can contribute to Indigenous people’s sense of self-worth which could also lead to self-blame or stereotype threat. The academics’ assumptions that Indigenous students may require more assistance to complete their studies was often based on a deficit model of abilities, rather than an acknowledgement of difference in cultural identity, expectations and roles. These conditions contribute to how Indigenous students start to blame themselves for not doing well because of their cultural identity and background (Clycq, Ward Nouwen, & Vandenbroucke, 2014). Valencia (2010) suggests that people from different cultural backgrounds are thought of as not being as good as others even in the education system.

In the expectations Chapter 8, the Indigenous students and non-Indigenous academics spoke about how academics could support Indigenous students when they came into
university. This appears to indicate low expectations of the Indigenous students by academics reinforcing the blame and transferring this deficit thinking to the Indigenous students themselves (Valencia, 2010). Nevertheless, it does not address the meritocratic structures within the education system (Anyon, 2006).

The combination of the meritocratic education structures which enforces the individual and competitive Eurocentric nature of university is at odds with the collective and sharing cultural protocols of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (McKinley & Brayboy, 2005; Valencia, 2010; Clycq, Ward Nouwen, & Vandenbroucke, 2014). Indigenous students and academics spoke about achieving and having high expectations of the education system throughout the Expectations chapter. However, Indigenous students may be referring to achieving and having high expectations as members of their collective Indigenous community, while academics refer to high expectations in the context of the western notion of competition and succeeding as an individual (Brayboy, 2005: Clycq, Ward Nouwen, & Vandenbroucke, 2014).

Academics interviewed regarded Indigenous students placed within the university as important particularly given that Indigenous students numbers within education are “below the benchmark”. Many noted that they regard Indigenous students within the university as potential role models for future Indigenous students. This can put pressure on the Indigenous students not to let the community down as their families and communities have high expectations of them achieving their goals of being health professionals and role models for other students to follow in their footsteps (Brayboy, 2005).

While academic’s expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students being mentors may be seen by academics wanting to support Indigenous students, another academic indicated that he knew Indigenous students because he was aware of the various outreach efforts to help support them. Despite knowing this, he still noted that he would treat
Indigenous students the same as other students. If academics’ only awareness of Indigenous students is because of their low numbers at university and/or their assumed need for additional support, then this may reinforce notions of deficit thinking. While academics appear to have good intentions for Indigenous students when they suggest Indigenous students may require assistance to get into university or need additional support with their studies, it also may imply that they have deficit thinking of Indigenous students (Valencia, 2010).

Finally, Indigenous students also mentioned that academics need to be aware of the fact that there may always be Indigenous students in their classes if they are lecturing or marking assessments on Indigenous issues because this may cause distress to students if they do not fully understand Indigenous people and their issues (Larson et al., 2007; Toombs & Gorman, 2010; West et al., 2010a; AIDA National Medical Education Review, 2012; Kelaher, Ferdinand & Paradies 2014). Regardless, they should still be mindful even if there are no Indigenous students in the classroom as the way academic’s speak about or frame Indigenous peoples has the potential to influence all of their students thinking, regardless of how they identify.

Hence, it is important to remember that Indigenous people carry their strong cultural identity, roles and expectations with them into the university system.

Stereotypes
Stereotypes, archetypes and the false statement of deficit thinking has come through very strongly in the findings chapters of identity, roles and expectations both from the Indigenous students and the non-Indigenous academics.

One of the effects of stereotyping is a stereotype threat when a person is concerned about acting in a way that is seen as perpetuating a perceived negative stereotype of their particular group. Indigenous students attending university they may feel extra pressure or shame when asking for assistance, as they may fear that by asking, this will confirm negative false stereotypes regarding their ability or life circumstances (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995).
This same experience of shame or pressure is less likely to be experienced by non-Indigenous students (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Elliott-Groves & Fryberg, 2019; Riley & Pidgeon, 2019). It is also related to the deficit thinking of Indigenous people where they are considered not good enough and it enhances the false statement about them not being able to complete studies by themselves (Valencia, 2010).

Academics admitted they could do better, but they said that students should engage with them and not worry about having conversations with the academics because they will not say negative stereotypes (Valencia, 2010; Corporal, 2017). Nevertheless, students argued that racism is directly related to their identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and this was brought to their attention throughout their studies starting from when they first entered university and engaged with other students and academics until the final years of study. Students stated that their identity as an Indigenous person is seen as deficit which is “othering” and problematises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Corporal, 2017; Valencia, 2010). The issue of racism has been seen to raise its ugly head as soon as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people identify themselves no matter what skin pigmentation or socioeconomic background (Corporal, 2017). Racism appeared through stereotyping of the Indigenous student’s identity through colour of their skin or trying to justify Indigenous people to other people when Indigenous issues are presented in class and when they come through Indigenous pathways.

The non-identification of students as being Indigenous unless they self-identify indicates that academics and others at university are looking for visible archetypes of Indigenous people which limits the knowledge of the connection of an Indigenous students’ identity and their role in the Indigenous community. Unless an Indigenous student is vocal about their identity, the academics appear not to acknowledge them in the classrooms. This may indicate a lack of understanding of Indigenous students in relation to their identity and support historical factors related to social Darwinism based on colour of skin. Youngblood (2000) argues that the
The Indigenous students indicated that they felt their actions and behaviours were being observed by other Indigenous people as well as non-Indigenous people when going through their studies. One student shared an experience about not knowing which way to take the offer of assistance because she thought the academic had low expectations of her, was feeling sorry for her and expecting her to fail. This highlights a stereotype threat where Indigenous students won’t ask for help because of the negative stereotypes that academics may have of Indigenous people not being intelligent enough to complete studies at university (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

The deficit thinking of Indigenous people coming in through perceived special entry programs, wanting assistance from academics, having to self-identify, being watched by others and identified by colour of the skin, reinforces archetype, stereotyping and false statements that Indigenous people are not as good as others (Valencia, 2010). This can undermine their aspirations.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the findings from the interviews of the 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and 10 non-Indigenous academics from a Health Faculty of a major Australian University. The aim of the chapter was to summarise the study findings and discuss their implications. The chapter began by briefly reiterating the goal of the research, literature presented, research questions and methodology. Then an overview of the findings followed the discussing the key meta-themes emerging from the research.
Chapter 9 - Conclusion

Chapter summary

The chapter will start off with a personal narrative about my reflections of the long process of this study and why this has been important to me as an Aboriginal male within this system and also why this research is important for everyone involved in the Indigenous health workforce and education systems in Australia. There will be a summary of key findings and recommendations for Indigenous people first and foremost and then other people within the Indigenous health workforce and higher education systems. Limitations will be mentioned and with final concluding remarks.

Introduction

This research has been a long experience and tiresome process of engaging with colonised thinking and systems as an Arrernte man and it is while nearing the conclusion that I reflect on what has impacted my learnings and how this aligns with the reasons for actually starting the journey. I started this research with an aim to share what I thought was impacting upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as they attempt the journey into academia. These students have the ultimate aim of obtaining a role as a health professional who has the ability to influence the health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities. Many of whom are like me and have lost loved ones prematurely to health issues that could have been prevented. These tragedies could have been reduced by having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working as health professionals. Researching the pathways into these professions through the higher education system appeared an appropriate area of interest. This could potentially contribute to increasing the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals in the health workforce. In this way we could contribute to the betterment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in Australia.
This thesis comes at a time when the Australian government has rejected the ‘2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart’ by Indigenous leaders. Recognition of Indigenous people in the Australian constitution has stalled and “Closing the Gap” reports show disturbingly negative trends or slow progress. The Uluru Statement talks about the “torment of our powerlessness” this speaks to the need for empowerment and structural recognition. This thesis has great relevance to these sentiments. It advocates that effective success at University requires Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be empowered in regard to the identity, roles and expectations in Indigenous culture and community, simultaneously with their progression through their studies.

We should never underestimate the difference of having an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person working in a health professional role within their community or the health system outside their community. The historical colonial factors within the higher education system that have contributed to disadvantaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from entering these health professional roles has been a major finding within this research through the interviews of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous academics. The remnants of our colonial past still contribute stumbling blocks to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attempting to complete their studies as health professionals within the higher education system.

When reflecting back at how to approach this important issue of retention and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professional students, I conducted the research using an historical approach as to why there was a push to increase the numbers. The life expectancy of Indigenous people in Australia is at least 10 years lower than the rest of Australia. Collectively, colonial history and the current effects of colonialization have restricted Indigenous peoples’ successful inclusion in the western education system. The literature review highlighted the poor health of Indigenous people and the recommendations that their own people be trained up as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers, doctors, nurses,
midwives, Allied Health Workers. The literature review further highlighted the low retention and completion rates of Indigenous students.

The one area that I wanted to explore was Indigenous students’ and academics’ perceptions of how the identity, roles and expectations of the Indigenous students influenced the retention and completion rates of the Indigenous students. The reason I explored these three major themes of identity, roles and expectations regarding Indigenous students studying at university was because many students have been disadvantaged and/or considered not good enough in relation to them. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been discriminated against because of their identity, have been seen as having lesser roles in society and the expectations of them were often lower. Through my many years of working and studying in health, social work and education, I have seen this on many occasions where many students have chosen not to study or leave studies due to one or a combination of identity, role and expectations.

I decided to ask three main questions of Indigenous students and academics about these three areas. To guide the questions, I brought together three different theories. Each theory had some inter-connections but could also be seen as standalone theories. The three theories I used were critical race theory (CRT) to guide questions about identity; role theory for roles and self-fulfilling prophecy for expectations. These three theories formed the theoretical framework of the research which also provided the major deductive themes for the findings chapters containing rich qualitative data from the Indigenous students and academics.

The methods chapter was where I brought together the research questions, theoretical framework and Indigenous methodology to gather the rich qualitative data from the Indigenous students and non-Indigenous academics that followed necessary ethical and cultural protocols. Using Indigenous methodology was crucial for the integrity of this research. Even as an Aboriginal researcher I still need to think about how I do research in way that is respectful,
inclusive and empowering of Indigenous people. These principles help guard against the Indigenous participants merely being objects of research. To achieve this, I was mindful of how to gather data off both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to allow them to tell their stories openly. This required me to adapt to participants’ needs and ensure their privacy and participation was prioritised. As result I was able to gather a very rich data set. With the qualitative data I gathered from the participants I decided to use NVivo 12 which I felt was able to record the themes both deductively and inductively. This allowed me to develop the findings chapters of identity, roles and expectations. The overall methodology I used was very successful because as an Indigenous researcher I followed proper cultural protocols for engaging with Indigenous student participants. This was also appropriate for non-Indigenous academic participants. There the research was inclusive and respectful to all the participants of the study.

The whole research process had to be carefully thought through so that it was carried out in a culturally appropriate way. I realised that the participants provide you with rich quality data by respecting appropriate protocols and being flexible this allowed participants to feel comfortable to be interviewed. This was a learning process and methodology also makes an important contribution to knowledge for future research in similar contexts. The process ensured I gathered rich data from both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the non-Indigenous academics. It was also very useful to have an interview guide that I developed through using my theoretical framework to guide the questions around identity, roles and expectations. I appreciated and was impressed by the Indigenous unit and the health faculty and schools in allowing me access to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the non-Indigenous academic staff.

As an Aboriginal Health Professional and Academic I have seen over many years the struggle for the Indigenous community to achieve progress in obtaining qualifications in the higher education system. The system is a western based system that has a legacy of viewing
Indigenous people in deficit terms. Consequently, I have directly experienced the ongoing impact of this system having low expectations of Indigenous people. Part of this problem has been perpetuated by western based cause and effect research rather than experiential research that examines meaning through the experience of identity, roles and expectations. Therefore, this research is significant because it has been carried out using Indigenous methods by engaging both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous academics to understand their experience and insights into recruitment, retention and completion. The findings provide a unique awareness of the processes that Indigenous health students can use to enable them to manoeuvre through the higher education system to achieve their goals as health professionals. Key findings build on relevant prior knowledge but also provide a new interpretive model to better empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and enlist the support of non-Indigenous academics and universities.

Summary of key findings

The key findings of the research were presented as three main findings chapters organised by my theoretical framework of identity, roles and expectations. Each of these chapters contains inductive sub-themes drawn from the Indigenous students and non-Indigenous academics interviews. Analysis was facilitated by utilising NVivo 12.

Chapter 5 examined identity. The chapter identified inductive sub-themes of cultural background, place, kinship, racism, colour and academic awareness. These were reoccurring themes. Indigenous students spoke about being proud of their cultural background, place and kinship but found that racism, colour and limited academic awareness were undermining factors in their experience at university. These issues still require action from universities. Many students felt that it didn’t matter what your colour was, as soon as you identified as Indigenous, you faced negative stereotypes and ‘othering’. Once they were perceived as being different or needing help, the system had lower expectations of their potential. Academics showed an
awareness and opposition to racism at university; however, they did not demonstrate an awareness of Indigenous students unless the students identified themselves.

Often the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was that they needed to take responsibility for inclusivity of their experience, whereas academics tended to lament that they treated everyone the ‘same’. Academics spoke about seeing Indigenous students as having to leave aspects of their culture at the door of the university to take on the study roles as future health professionals. The identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was not only seen in deficit terms but then homogenised into ‘I treat everyone the same’. This reflects the tensions between equity (seeing human difference) and equality (seeing human sameness) which could lead to Indigenous students feeling stereotype threat and being frightened to ask for help because they feared being stereotyped negatively as problem people with deficits. The deficit thinking did not deter Indigenous students from being proud of their identity and wanting to find out more about their cultural background and share this with others at university.

Chapter 6 explored roles. The following inductive themes were identified; connection to identity; family commitment; community roles; transition between community and university; university roles, leadership, and health professional roles. These were reoccurring inductive themes. Indigenous students often mentioned existing roles in their community or roles they wanted to fulfil as part of their Indigenous community. Many said they were aspiring to complete studies at university so they could work back in their community. They saw this as a critical part of being a member of a collective society within the Indigenous community. Students spoke about symbolic interactional (non-structural, informal) roles. These symbolic interactional roles are not necessarily recognised as structural (formal) roles in both their community and university. Even more interesting is that the roles considered by the Indigenous community as recognised structural (formal) roles in their communities were often not acknowledged as structural (formal) roles by the non-Indigenous community. Obtaining a health
professional qualification was necessary to formalise the role across the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Indigenous students spoke about obtaining university qualifications to have a role as part of ‘giving back’ to their communities and other Indigenous people.

Many Indigenous students spoke about looking forward to their future health professional role so that they would be seen in a functional/structured role as a recognised health professional such as a medical practitioner, nurse, midwife, social worker and other allied health professions. Both the students and academics commented that the transition from community to university was sometimes a big transition and they had to balance the community roles with what was required of them in a student role. Some academics argued that Indigenous students needed to leave some of their community cultural roles and only bring what was needed to university, however they still wanted them to share about their community roles with others at university.

The roles of Indigenous students were spoken about as leadership roles with many Indigenous students having to leave community to get qualified and return to their community to show others how this can be done. Here there was a community need for students to be role models, mentors and tutors. Many of these roles of helping others are symbolic interactional roles (non-structural or informal) and not structured/functional (structural or formal) roles. For example, many Indigenous people are seen as the counsellors or the “go to” health person in the community which is considered a structural (formal) role in the community but outside the community it is seen as a symbolic interactional (non-structural or informal) role. These health roles are seen to be formalised (made part of the structure) in a western system through university. With the inter-relationship between identity and roles, multiple and complex expectations emerging internally and externally were evident.

Chapter 7 was the final results chapter examining expectations. Inductive themes identified from interview questions on expectations were, achieving goals; bettering yourself;
high expectations; students perceptions; academics perceptions; same as others, and low expectations. Many Indigenous students spoke about wanting to achieve their goals of being a health professional and had high expectations of themselves achieving this through their studies. First year students especially spoke about this career expectation, whereas final years saw themselves as being able to achieve this.

Indigenous students spoke about how academics had high expectations of them and expected them to know about the requirements of university from the start of their studies. This knowledge included understanding the language of university and their chosen field of study. These expectations sometimes overloaded the students when first starting university. Many students perceived that the academics had a bias that viewed Indigenous students being low achievers who require help to complete studies. At the same time, both academics and Indigenous students spoke about the students being seen as the same as all the other students and that the academics would treat them the same as others. A lack of differentiation between equity and equality is evident in the academics claim of treating everyone the same.

Many academics and Indigenous students did speak about the academics appearing to have low expectations of them through offering them assistance and mentioning the many students who had come in through special entry programs. The conflicting positions of stating that everyone should be treated the same, while on the other hand, treating Indigenous students from a deficit model of needing to be given extra help, are clearly difficult to hold simultaneously. What was clear is that this situation was not helpful or viable for Indigenous students who may feel demoralised, less aspirational and then left studies. The deficit thinking and stereotyping reinforces structural racism in university which needs to be addressed at the academic level.

Chapter 8 synthesised the three finding chapters to discuss and highlight how the combination and separate themes of identity, roles and expectations reinforce existing knowledge
as well bringing new insights for recruitment, retention and completion for Indigenous university students. Many students and academics spoke about the importance of their connection to Country, place and kinships. They spoke further about coming from community to get a qualification to be a health professional and then returning to work in their community. The issues of equality of being seen the same as other people and equity being seen as different from others raised issues of colour blindness and racism. Stereotypes, archetypes and the legacy of deficit models of Indigenous people led to false statements and internalisations of not being good enough because of your colour and culture as an Indigenous person. These destructive forces of colonialisation, paternalism and racism raised their ugly head.

There are competing demands of Indigenous students as members of collective societies which require them to meet community and kinships commitments, alongside their commitment to university studies. Furthering on from this, the Indigenous agencies within the university system see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students having responsibilities in symbolic interactional roles of role modelling and mentoring other Indigenous students. Indeed, the collectiveness of community sees Indigenous students embrace the commitment of giving back to the community and other Indigenous students as part of “being Indigenous” by not forgetting where they come from and showing the way for others. This study has revealed these important aspects of Indigenous health students’ recruitment, retention and completion that will contribute to and improve the Indigenous knowledge in universities. In line with these important findings the following recommendations are made in terms of what needs to be maintained, developed and implemented.

**Recommendations**

These recommendations draw on the entirety of this thesis inclusive of the literature review, methodology, findings, and discussion chapters. It recognises there are many issues that remain unresolved in the health, education, and health workforce of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander people in Australia. The recommendations are directed to first and foremost the decision-makers within the policy area of the health and education workforce. These recommendations need to be understood by people who have responsibility for implementing changes to training and education systems. People within these systems such as Indigenous students, Indigenous support units, university leaders, university staff, academics and health workforce professionals must participate in this process and be brought along together on this journey. Overall, the recommendations should be read and listened to by everyone who has a part to play in building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and education workforce.

**Recommendation 1 – Build Community Relationships**

Recommend that universities outreach, engagement and recruitment processes to Indigenous people and communities include Indigenous staff. This will ensure that cultural relationships are established and maintained with the Indigenous communities so that students are clear about which health degrees the students want to study; how can they return to their community to work if they want too and how they can engage in flexible study modes such as online to fulfil roles and expectations within their community.

**Recommendation 2 – Cultural Safety/Responsiveness Training**

Recommend all university staff must attend ongoing cultural safety/responsiveness training. This must be a prerequisite for academic staff teaching in any health courses so that university curriculum ensures all students understand culturally safe and responsive practice. This will ensure that universities are aware of the connections that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with each other, Country, land, place, and kinships. There are Indigenous staff within the university system and Indigenous organisations (e.g. Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA)) that provide Cultural Safety and Cultural Responsiveness training to organisations including universities.
Recommendation 3 – Role Modelling and Mentoring

Recommend universities recognise Indigenous students giving back to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students within the university system as well as their own communities. This is seen as helping, mentoring, role modelling, educating and from time to time they are asked to give insight into the Indigenous experience. Role modelling and mentoring of students may sit both within the Indigenous Units or within various programs such as AIME or other Indigenous membership organisations such as Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) and Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSIN&M) and Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA). Universities together with the Indigenous students in the spirit of self-determination need to formalise these structures and initiatives for ‘giving back’ not just leaving this up to Indigenous people/communities/organisations.

Recommendation 4 – Build inclusive and cultural safe spaces within universities

Recommend universities, Indigenous units and academics have to create and maintain inclusive and culturally safe spaces at universities that recognise the collectiveness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This includes how universities build inclusive and cultural contexts to change university cultures to be relevant and appropriate to Indigenous communities and students alike. The Indigenous units need to be better resourced to support the Indigenous ways of doing operating outside and within these structures. Universities need to recognise the Indigenous ways of doing that is operating within these systems and support them in kind and financially through culturally safe processes of self-determination so that they can continue to increase numbers of students studying as health professionals.

Recommendation 5 – Increase Indigenous academic staff

Recommend that universities to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic staff from Indigenous health professionals (including doctors, nurses and social workers, etc) to be role models in order to address stereotypes and racism. Universities need to
acknowledge the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bring with them into the university space through their knowledge and sharing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history.

**Recommendation 6 – Flexible modes of delivery**
Recommend universities, need to consider flexible modes of delivery like intensives, online courses or university coming to community for busy parents and others who have family and community commitments. This could be spoken about at Indigenous students preorientation training and academics induction training should include training on how Indigenous students can transition to part time or online studies to reduce the stress of competing demands.

**Recommendation 7 – University policies**
Recommendation universities ensure policies regarding racism and discrimination are enforced in relation to staff and students’ attitudes and behaviours that are racist and stereotype Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

**Limitations and Considerations for Future Research**
This study had a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous academics who taught into first year health courses at a major university in Australia. Of course, there is a much broader population of Indigenous students within other tertiary institutions covering a range of professions outside health. There are likely to be some differences between these other groups but there is also likely to be strong synergies for most Indigenous students entering western based higher education systems. Differences may relate to divergent cultural contexts and organisational capacities. Given the findings from this research, which reinforce and build on some previous research, there is some confidence in asserting that the research results have resonance beyond its qualitative sample. Nevertheless, there remains important gaps in knowledge. This highlights the potential for research that can be done within
the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce area within university, rather than it being a limitation of this thesis. There were two main limitations to the research that could be addressed in future studies.

**Limitations**

Firstly, even though the research was open to all academic staff the research only recruited academic participation from non-Indigenous staff who were interested in Indigenous issues. Recruitment could have been expanded to involve non-Indigenous academics who had very little knowledge of, or interest in, Indigenous issues. There were two non-Indigenous academics who did not want to be involved in the research because they said that they knew nothing about Indigenous people. Due to process of gaining consent from the participants to engage in the qualitative interviews I could not encourage them to participate. This can be hard to do if people are frightened to comment on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their issues without sounding racist or ignorant. Even though this is a limitation it may not have influenced the findings because even though academic participants may have had an interest in Indigenous people, they still may not know much about them. The non-Indigenous academics who did participate indicated they had some knowledge about Indigenous people. This might indicate that the gaps in knowledge on issues such as cultural safety are likely to be potentially higher amongst academics who were not prepared to participate.

Secondly, due to following cultural protocols I did not feel it was proper to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students outside of the Indigenous student support unit. Reflecting on this I may have been able to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who have dropped out of the health courses at university who did not want to be engaged and involved with the Indigenous student support unit. Some Indigenous students may not have wanted to engage with the Indigenous student support unit due to confidentiality, not wanting other Indigenous people to know their business. Researchers could try to recruit the
Indigenous students outside of the Indigenous student support units through asking for ethics permission to engage through Student Services and Indigenous student groups at universities as long as they follow Indigenous protocols.

**Future considerations**

Future research might consider longitudinally tracking of academic and student development over time. This could especially be useful for tracking the impact of initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. For example, studies could recruit students in first year and re-interview them in their final year of study. Longitudinal studies could also interview students at the mid-way point of their studies and then also again a few years after graduation, following up in their professions and expanding on other recommendations and how they manage those expectations of ‘going back’. Likewise, studies could interview staff in their first year of employment to teach and then at set intervals in their career. Administration staff and senior leadership in universities could also be interviewed in future research.

**Concluding Paragraphs**

In conclusion I would like to reiterate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s health is of the foremost concern in relation to this research project. The training of the Indigenous health workforce especially the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves is crucial to ensure their cultural safety along with social and emotional wellbeing. These factors have a direct impact on health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can be supported to reconcile and build strength from their diverse identities and roles, and resist negative and false expectations, they will be in a good position to complete their studies and succeed as health professionals. This thesis has found that if Indigenous students encounter low expectations of their abilities from teaching academics and other students, they may succumb to negative self-expectations and
stereotype threat which could lead to higher attrition rates. However, if universities, teaching academics, staff and other students can make space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be stable and strong in their identities throughout their studies, we have a far greater opportunity to build a strong and stable health workforce that is also connected to Country, and people, and contribute to better health in our communities. This thesis offers some key understandings that will help us to facilitate such spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students.
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PARTICIPANTS FOR RESEARCH REQUIRED

Investigation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experience in a University Health Faculty

This research is exploring the interactions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and academic staff in health related programs at University.

We want to interview Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in University Health Faculty courses
  o in your first year of studies
  o in your final year of studies
  o or if you have chosen to leave the studies

If you do fit into one of these groups, please contact us about being involved in interviews. You will be asked questions regarding what you think about your experience as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student in the health related courses in the Health Faculty.

The outcome of this research will assist in providing a better understanding of what factors influence the attrition and retention rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and will in no way impact upon your relationship with your University. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

For more information about how to participate in this important research please contact:

Stephen Corporal (PhD Candidate) Email: s.corporal@griffith.edu.au
Phone (07) 33821624 or Mobile 0412399096
Dr Naomi Sunderland (Principle Supervisor) Email: n.sunderland@griffith.edu.au
Dr Tasha Riley (Assoc Supervisor) triley@griffith.edu.au
Prof Patrick O’Leary (Assoc Supervisor) p.oleary@griffith.edu.au
GU Ref No: HSV/29/14/HREC
PARTICIPANTS FOR RESEARCH REQUIRED

Investigation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
experience in a University Health Faculty

This research is exploring the interactions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and academic staff in health related programs at University.

We want to interview University academic staff teaching into first year courses in the Health Faculty.

If you do fit into one of this group, please contact us about being involved in interviews. You will be asked questions regarding what you think about experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the health related courses in the Health Faculty.

The outcome of this research will assist in providing a better understanding of what factors influence the attrition and retention rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and will in no way impact upon your relationship with your University. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

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GU Ref No: HSV/29/14/HREC
Appendix C – Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Indigenous Health Workforce Building: Indigenous Students and Academics interaction

Who is conducting the research

Stephen Corporal - PhD Candidate
Dr Naomi Sunderland – Principle Supervisor
Dr Tasha Riley – Associate Supervisor
Prof Patrick O’Leary – Associate Supervisor

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Contact Phone: +61 7 3382 1113
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Why is the research being conducted?

This research will explore interactions between Indigenous students and academic staff in health related programs at the University to see if this contributes to attrition rates. Even though many successful pathways were introduced to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people entering into health related higher education courses this should be regarded as only the first step in participation. More important is the on-going challenge of developing strategies that seek to retain Indigenous students within health related programs until program completion. Indigenous students continue to have high attrition/dropout rates and higher rates of failure when studying in the higher education system. One important factor may be quality of the interaction between the Indigenous student and the academic staff.

This research will involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and academics involved in first year courses from the University Health Faculty as participants. We will be seeking the assistance of the Indigenous Student Support Unit and Schools within the University Health Faculty to recruit the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Faculty students and academics for the study.

This research is being conducted by a University Higher Research Degree student Stephen Corporal a PhD Candidate who will be interviewing approximately thirty two participants from the University Health Faculty.

What you will be asked to do

If you agree to participate you will be asked semi-structured questions about what you think about the identity, roles and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the health related courses in the University Health Faculty.

Why you were selected

We want to interview approximately thirty two participants from a University Health Faculty. The participants will be chosen from four different groups. The first three groups will be made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and will include eight first year students, eight final year students and eight students that have chosen to leave a program in the health faculty. The other group will be made up of eight university academics lecturing in first year courses.
**Expected benefits of the research**
The outcome of this research will assist in providing a better understanding of what factors influence the attrition and retention rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as well as a more enhanced understanding of the complex relationships between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health faculty students and academics. This may then lead to new strategies which can be employed to address current issues of cultural safety, cultural awareness, and cultural competency within the university health faculty programs.

**Risks to you**
If you may feel upset by some topics discussed in the interview, please beware that you do not have to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with. Your participation in the research or not will have no effect on your studies and will in no way impact upon your relationship with your University. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

*(This information will be read out to you)*

**Your confidentiality**
The data collected from you will be de-identified to maintain confidentiality. There is an option on the Consent Form to allow your de-identified interview information to be included in a publication or reporting only through the use of pseudo/false names. Your privacy and confidentially will always be maintained.

The interview information collected using digital recording, written interview notes, and fully transcribed interviews will be stored in locked filing cabinet and computer at office at the University.

We will reconnect with you to provide an opportunity you to validate my interpretation of your interview data. Once the data has been validated by you it will be de-identified

**Your participation is voluntary**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your decision to be involved in the research will in no way impact upon your relationship with the University. Potential participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Questions / further information**
Stephen Corporal – PhD Candidate
Dr Naomi Sunderland – Principle Supervisor
Dr Tasha Riley – Co Supervisor
Prof Patrick O’Leary – Co Supervisor

School of Human Services and Social Work
Contact Phone: +61 7 3382 1113
Contact Email: s.corporal@griffith.edu.au

Reference Number: GU Ref No: HSV/29/14/HREC

**The ethical conduct of this research**
Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about
the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 3735 4375 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

Feedback to you
I plan to provide you with an opportunity to validate my interpretation of your narrative. The communication of overall findings and results will be through development of a thesis that will contribute to the knowledge base of the University and submissions to international and national journals as well as a presentation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and all the staff who have contributed to the research. There will be presentations to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and community forums.

Privacy Statement – non-disclosure
“The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan or telephone (07) 3735 4375.”
Appendix D – Consent Form

Indigenous Health Workforce Building:
Indigenous Students and Academics interaction
CONSENT FORM

Research Team
Stephen Corporal PhD Candidate
Dr Naomi Sunderland
Dr Tasha Riley
Prof Patrick O’Leary

School of Human Services and Social Work
Contact Phone: +61 7 3382 1113
Contact Email: n.sunderland@griffith.edu.au
Or: s.corporal@griffith.edu.au

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will include (being interviewed face to face using semi-structured questions for approximately 30 to 60 minutes);
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand the risks involved;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research;
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without explanation or penalty;
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3735 4375 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and
- I agree to participate in the project.

Optional

☐ I agree to the digital recording of the research interview

☐ I agree to inclusion of my interview information in publications or reporting of the results from this research through the use of a pseudo/false name

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Appendix E – Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research Project: Indigenous Health Workforce Building: Indigenous Students and Academics interaction
Participants: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students and Academics

I will be interviewing using semi structured questioning in relation to these three questions. The three research questions I will investigate are:

1. Do academics consider the cultural background of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners when teaching health faculty courses and, if so, does this influence their behaviour towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners?
2. Do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students feel they have to modify their role (how they act) as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in order to achieve success within health faculty courses?
3. What expectations do lecturers have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

Introduction Questions for all participants
I will begin each interview with basic greetings such as asking how they are, did they get there okay, and would they like a glass of water and so on. At this stage I will go through the information sheet with them. I will read out and ask them to sign the consent form and make sure I turn on the recorder.

Then I will start the interview process with these questions.

General questions
Can you please tell me a little about yourself?
What is your name please? How old are you? What is your gender? Who are your people/ where are you from? Which degree course are you studying/lecturing in?

I will explain to each of the participants that I am going to ask questions about Identity, Roles and Expectations

This is will be the order of the questions to guide the interview for each of the individual participant from the four groups. Each participant will be interview individually.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Year students</th>
<th>Final year students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you see yourself?</td>
<td>How do you see yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person?</td>
<td>How do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in the health faculty feel their identity is perceived by academics? Why?</td>
<td>How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in the health faculty feel their identity is perceived by academics? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who have left the university</td>
<td>Academics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do you see yourself?  
How do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person?  
How do you identify yourself?  
How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in the health faculty feel their identity is perceived by academics? Why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you see yourself?</th>
<th>How do you identify yourself?</th>
<th>How do you see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples identity? Why?</th>
<th>What do you know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Year students</th>
<th>Final year students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What role do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in your community?</td>
<td>What role do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in your community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What role do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in the university and Why</td>
<td>What role do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in the university and Why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about the transition of this role for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person from community to university? Why?</td>
<td>What do you think about the transition of this role for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person from community to university? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students who have left the university</th>
<th>Academics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What role do you see yourself as an Indigenous person in your community?</td>
<td>What role do you see Indigenous people having in their community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What role do you see yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in the university and Why</td>
<td>What role do you see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having in University as students? Why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about the transition of this role for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person from community to university? Why?</td>
<td>What do you think about the transition of this role for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person from community to university? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Year students</th>
<th>Final year students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What expectations do you have of yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student? Why?</td>
<td>What expectations do you have of yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What expectations do you think the lecturer has of you as a student? Why?</td>
<td>What expectations do you think the lecturer has of you as a student? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students who have left the university</th>
<th>Academics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What expectations do you have of yourself as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student? Why?</td>
<td>What expectations do you have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at University? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What expectations do you think the lecturer has of you as a student? Why?</td>
<td>What expectations do you think the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students think you have of them as a student? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final Questions for all participants
What factors do you think affect dropout rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at university? Why?
Do you have any other thoughts or comments you would like to share?

End of Interview