INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT:
VOICES THAT CHALLENGE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Submitted by

Nereda Dawn White

Dip Education (Early Childhood), B.Ed, M.Ed (Management & Leadership)

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School of Educational Leadership
Faculty of Education
Australian Catholic University
Research Services
Locked Bag 4115
Fitzroy, Victoria 3065
Australia

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified or been awarded another degree or diploma.

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This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics committee.

Signed: *Nereda White*   Date: 12/02/07

Nereda Dawn WHITE

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on deepening our understanding about Indigenous women's participation in contemporary Australian society by exploring their experiences in employment, careers, education and leadership. Since the purpose of this study is to explore how university education Indigenous women understand and make sense of it of their career journeys, the epistemological framework of the research is constructionism using an interpretivist approach. The particular interprevetivist perspective used is symbolic interactionism, but the research has also been guided philosophically by the Indigenous worldview and emerging Indigenous research methodologies which assert the right of Indigenous people to research in their own way.

The methodology adopted is a case study approach in keeping with the aim of the study. Data was collected by in-depth interviews to build the women's stories, focus groups, and researcher's journal. Throughout the study, there was a strong emphasis on observing ethical guidelines for research on and with Indigenous people. The research design aimed to honour cultural dimensions such as Indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing and culturally appropriate data gathering techniques.

The study found that Indigenous women are deeply committed to their personal and professional growth. However there are enormous barriers, both personal and institutional, to their success. Vestiges of colonialism such as racism, sexism, socio-economic and educational disadvantage remain entrenched in contemporary Australian society. Despite these obstacles, Indigenous women through their strength, resilience and determination, strive to make better lives for themselves, their families and communities. Their stories are significant in that they offer important insights into how Indigenous women can be supported on their career journeys.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Indigenous: When used in the Australian context, 'Indigenous' refers to a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, who identifies as an Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which s/he lives. Throughout the thesis, there are sections which refer exclusively to Aboriginal women whose experiences may be different to Torres Strait Islander women. Therefore, where the term "Aboriginal" is used, this refers specifically to Indigenous Australians of Aboriginal descent, identification and acceptance.

The term "black" is used in some of the previous literature when referring to African American people and in historical references to Australian Aboriginal people. It is included in some quotes and references in this thesis. In the interviews, some of the participants used the terms "black" to refer to Indigenous people and "white" to refer to non-Indigenous people. Their use of these terms is retained in their stories. I have also used the term "white" at times to compare and discuss the "Indigenous experience" rather than the using the term "non-Indigenous" which includes Australians of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Acronyms

ATAS	Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal (and Torres Strait) Islander Day Observance Committee
NATSIEP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

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1.1   **INTRODUCTION**

> *Black women's survival, cultural retention and ownership of their histories in the spite of the humiliations and cruelties which have dogged them down the generations, are ultimately a cause for quiet pride and enduring strength (Saunders & Evans, 1992, p. 6).*

This inspirational quote has guided me on my own personal journey into postgraduate study. It provided motivation for my master's dissertation and now has become an inspiration for my doctoral studies. It has greatly encouraged me in my attempts to write about Indigenous women in a way that shows their resilience in the face of much hardship and suffering.

The aim of this study is to provide a better understanding of the career development of Australian Indigenous women. The study seeks to explain how Indigenous women make sense of their employment, career, education and leadership experiences. This chapter provides a historical background to the development of the research topic and questions.

1.2   **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Like other Indigenous researchers (Bruno, 2003; Herbert, 2003, Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Phillips, 2003) I begin this thesis as a story, detailing two personal experiences: my sister Roslyn's story and my experiences with the National Indigenous Women's Leadership program, both of which I believe provide insight into some aspects of Indigenous women's lives. I also give part of my own personal and educational history and cultural background, as is the custom of Australian Aboriginal people. It also provides the reader with some understanding of myself, as an Aboriginal woman, learner and researcher, and the choices I have made with the writing of the thesis, the research design and the presentation of the women's stories and the findings.

I am an Aboriginal woman of the Gooreng Gooreng people of the Bundaberg area of Wide Bay, Queensland. These are the traditional lands of my maternal grandmother, Lena Horton. However, she and her family (her mother, my great grandmother known as Granny Clarke, her two brothers Riddler and Kingie Horton, and sisters Lilly and Queenie Horton) spent many years on Cherbourg Aboriginal mission[1] near Murgon, some three hours drive north-east of Brisbane, the capital of Queensland. This was a common experience of Aboriginal people who were taken from their traditional country and forcibly relocated on Aboriginal missions and reserves under the protection policies of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). My great grandfather, Thomas Horton was an Aboriginal man from Central Queensland - his exact group is not known. He lived and worked around the Bundaberg area with Granny Clarke, including some time on Walla Station where my grandmother Granny Lena was born. What we were told by our mother is that he was found dead in the bush, possibly murdered when his daughter, Granny Lena, was about nine years old. I grew up around my mother's family who are extensively linked to many Aboriginal communities in Queensland. Life was pretty hard but despite the daily struggles against poverty and racism, we managed to hold on to many of the core values of our cultural heritage through the years particularly those family links, an enduring relationship with the land and strong spiritual beliefs.

As an Australian Aboriginal woman born prior to the 1967 referendum, I was not blessed with the freedom of citizenship rights and responsibilities granted to other Australians. I grew up as witness to the oppression suffered by our people, particularly the women. Women like my older sisters, mother, aunts, grandmothers and female friends, who spoke privately about their concerns in Aboriginal women's circles, were excluded from the public arena either by being locked out politically and socially, or by their own choice.

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[1] Cherbourg is the oldest and largest Aboriginal community in Queensland. Originally, located at Durundur, the mission was later relocated to Barambah. In 1931, it became known as Cherbourg Mission. The current population of Cherbourg includes descendants of 40 different groups who were forcibly relocated from their own lands and well as the descendants of the Waka Waka people who were the original group from the area (Blake, 2001).

In my growing years I heard a lot about the importance of education in redressing the inequities faced by Aboriginal people and its role in bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. My own parents had been fieldworkers, domestic servants and labourers all their lives and had only received a primary education, the level beyond which Aboriginal people were not allowed to proceed. However, they believed it was important for their children "to get a good education". In her doctoral thesis, Herbert (2003) talks about similar perspectives and her mother's great desire for her children to experience a better life through being educated. Often, as she reports, education is viewed as life-saving:

> I know of others who, as a result of their own life experiences, come to see education as the panacea: the one thing that will save them, that will raise them (or their children) out of the desperate quagmire of poverty and enable them to take control of their life journey. (Herbert, 2003, p. 2)

I believe that this was very much behind my parents thinking and their hopes that their children would have better lives. Indeed, they had faith that by being educated we would be better prepared and be able to deal with the knocks and racism that had been such stumbling blocks to their own progression. My mother and I have had many talks over the years, including during the writing of this chapter, and she has confirmed that she and my father hoped that by being educated, we (their children) "wouldn't have to face the hardships that we did" (personal discussion). She also has spoken many times about how she and Dad insisted that the girls (five of us) were to be given the same educational opportunities as the three boys. This was despite comments and ridicule from relatives who believed it was a waste of time educating girls since they would only marry, stay at home and not use their education. I will always be grateful for their far-sightedness and fairness in this decision.

My parents instilled in their children many principles, and provided valuable learning experiences from practical skills such as learning to survive in the bush, fishing and crabbing, to learning to care for each other. They taught us

to be grateful for what we had and not to be envious of what we did not. Life was seen as an educational journey and one in which success was not measured by quantitative outcomes. Rather it was judged by the esteem in which you were held by others, such as whether you were thought to be a "good person". Part of my parent's belief about being "good" was about helping others - a practice probably encouraged by their strong Catholic background and Aboriginal kinship responsibilities. From an early age, I took on major responsibilities for helping in the house, caring for my younger brothers and sister and getting them off to school. I often returned home after school to prepare a meal for my parents and older siblings who were working in the fields. It was fairly natural for me then to choose a career that would enable me to help others along the same path that my parents had encouraged me.

For the past 15 years, I have been supporting Indigenous students on their educational journeys in Australian universities. Prior to this, I was an early childhood teacher and a public servant. But I began my working life as an eleven year old child working in the fields picking a variety of crops. The story of my journey from fieldworker to university lecturer is included in my master's thesis and also published in a book by Bin-Sallik (2000) called *Aboriginal women by degrees: their stories of the journey towards academic achievement.* My life experiences have provided me with a foundation for understanding and relating to other Indigenous people, and equipped me with the tools to help them embrace liberating opportunities such as university education. Although, I am only fairly new to the area of academic research, I have long pondered the plight of Aboriginal people in contemporary Australian society, striving not only to understand but seeking solutions.

My area of inquiry has primarily been focused on the experiences of Aboriginal women. For many years, I have been interested in how Aboriginal women overcome enormous obstacles in their personal lives and in the wider Australian society. Their strength and spirit is a testament to their great courage and determination. Yet there have been others of my sisters who have been unable to break out of their sad existences and continue to remain

in social circumstances that can only be described as tragic. Likewise, Herbert (2003) has struggled with the question of why some of our people seem able to move on while others remain "lost". Within my own family, I have seen examples of both, and I have sought to understand why this has happened, but also how this can be changed. I have also struggled with my frustrations about the lack of significant improvement in Aboriginal people's lives. My frustrations with what I have not been able to change have never been more painful then when my youngest sister, Roslyn was killed in July, 2005.

Her story is woven into the tapestry of my thesis because, importantly, it is a reminder of the context in which many Aboriginal women's lives are played out. It also highlights the difficult position that Aboriginal researchers, such as myself, face in telling the stories of our own people's struggles, identifying the problems faced by them, and trying to provide appropriate recommendations and possible solutions.

1.3   ROSLYN'S STORY

Roslyn was the youngest of five girls in a family of eight. As children, we experienced major trauma due to violence, alcohol, racism, and poverty. Yet we also managed to hold our family together with close bonds, mutual responsibilities, love and care.   Most of us, through getting a decent education, were able to break out of the downward cycle and build satisfying lives. Roslyn was a wonderful artist and she had a flair for home decorating and craft. In her early working life, she had worked in good jobs. She was an intelligent woman who loved reading and writing, as well as a great cook. In my father's words, she was a "good little gardener". But sadly, despite the fact that Roslyn had many talents, she was unable to see herself as anything more than a failure, as many of our women do. She married a violent man and endured years of abuse. Her only escape was through alcohol, an escape often used by Aboriginal people. She had two children, but later lost custody to her husband. For many years, she wandered aimlessly with no fixed abode, turning up or occasionally, ringing our widowed mother, or one of her brothers or sisters. We would collect her from roadside petrol stations, pubs

or rehabilitation centres where she at times tried "to dry out". She did try to change her life, "getting off the grog" at times, doing some courses but never quite succeeding. She went from one terrible relationship to another. The men with whom she became involved seemed to believe it was okay to beat and misuse her because of a perception that that was all she was worth and all she was used to. Perhaps Roslyn herself believed that as well. Her life was ended tragically during NAIDOC[2] week, 2005 in a tin shed not fit for human habitation on an Aboriginal mission. Surrounded by filth, stripped of her clothes in the freezing cold, all evidence of the person she was, destroyed or taken including her clothes, identity and bank cards. She died without dignity and without the presence of her family who never stopped loving her. This story is only too familiar for Aboriginal women in Aboriginal communities today - Aboriginal women being bashed and killed and becoming just another statistic. The depth of violence perpetrated on Aboriginal women mainly by their own partners and family members was highlighted by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence Report (2000).

Roslyn's death, not surprisingly, was heartbreaking for me. I was very angry not only about the circumstances of her death, but because despite all the work I had done with other Indigenous people, particularly women, I was unable to help the one person I needed to. I felt that I had failed her. This was so hard to accept, as when we were growing up I had assumed much of the responsibility for her care and the care of my younger brothers when my parents were working in the fields (White, 2000). Yet I was unable to protect her as a woman. I felt ashamed that I was successful, living in a nice house, having a good job and enjoying a good life whilst my beloved sister had lived and died in such terrible conditions. I questioned so many things … my faith in God, my work, the whole situation with Aboriginal people. I cried for my loss but also because of what is happening in our communities.

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[2] NAIDOC week is celebrated around Australia in the first full week in July to acknowledge the survival of Indigenous culture and contribution to modern Australia. NAIDOC refers to the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee which was originally responsible for organising national activities during NAIDOC Week. The week is now celebrated in the community, government agencies, schools, local councils and workplaces.

I know that I am not alone in this as many of our people continue to grieve for what is happening in their communities and to other people in their families.

At this stage, the writing of thesis became unbearable. I wanted to give everything up less than 6 months from submission, despite the years of hard work. I told my supervisor that I did not want to continue, that I didn't have the heart for it, that I was sick of being an advocate for Aboriginal issues - the burden was too great, a position that had been echoed by some of the women I had interviewed in my study. Some of the underlying issues emerging from the data analysis "cut too close" and I found it very difficult to work without weeping. So I "packed it up" and went home to my community to spend some time with my mother and two of my sisters. We took time out and went to stay at the beach that we had frequented when we were children. We found the place where Dad used to take us fishing and although there were more tourists now, the same sense of beauty and spiritual presence was still there. As I walked along the beach with my sisters and mother, stopping often to collect shells and to breathe in the sea air, we felt Roslyn's spirit reassuring us that she was okay, that she was with God, and our Dad, that she was free from pain and now in a better place.

On the morning that we were to leave, my mother asked us to construct a garland of wildflowers to throw out on to the waves in Roslyn's memory. Roslyn loved flowers and we shared at her funeral how she always tried to make a place homely by picking wildflowers and gum nuts. So we gathered a wreath of wildflowers, selecting beautiful colours of pink and yellow. A lady from a nearby house came and asked us what we doing and when we told her, she went back to her garden and returned with some lovely hibiscus to add to the bouquet. We had chosen a beautiful place on the beach. The morning sun was glinting on the water. It was sparkling and fresh, and just the right place to say our goodbyes. The walk down to the water was undertaken silently as we each were preoccupied with our own thoughts. Together we said a prayer and then threw the flowers out on to the still water between the breaking waves. We watched then as the garland slowly started to make its way out to sea.   As it began to climb each wave, we noticed that some of the

flowers began to break away from the main garland and seeing this Mother became upset and started to cry. But my eldest sister Karen to comfort her, said "oh look mum, see how the flowers are grouping … that must be us" and my other sister, Maxine, pointed out that the central piece was us as a family, and the different groups of flowers were the individuals making our own journeys. We identified five flowers together which represented the remaining four sisters with mum, then others which we believed to be our daughters and nieces, Roslyn's two boys, our brothers and nephews, all traveling slightly apart but going in the same direction being drawn by the current to the open water. And of course there was a single flower, making its own way and that was Roslyn. We always said she was her own person and walked to the beat of a different drum. We noted those flowers that traveled faster and remembered those younger ones who were still full of life and vigour, and the older slower ones taking their time. Some tackled the big waves full on, sometimes successfully, while others were tossed by the waves, pushed back only to have another go. Others sought the calm water drifting gently along. That scene was so symbolic for each of us who witnessed it - it reminded us that that is what life is like – each choosing their own path, the ups and downs of the waves but all trying to get to the same place. It was beautiful memory that Roslyn "gifted" to us that day to give us the courage to go on. What had started off as a painful ritual had become one of healing and hope. Aboriginal people draw on the land and sea as part of the healing process. Incredibly, it also connected with my current research, my perspective on how Aboriginal women's lives are played out, and a part of the conceptual map for my literature review which is detailed in Chapter 3.

I remembered back to when I was doing my Master's thesis and I had showed the diagram of the theoretical framework to Roslyn. I told her I didn't really feel happy with the two dimensional effect in black and white. She said: "Dawn[3], I can paint that for you". She was a gifted artist and although she was not an academic, the painting she did for me using Aboriginal symbols and designs to depict Aboriginal women's journeys in postgraduate study was included as

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[3] Dawn is my middle name and one often used by my family and friends.

a colour page in the front of the my thesis (I have included a copy of this painting in Appendix A of this thesis). Thinking about what she had done for me back then, I knew then that that if she were alive today she would want me to continue – she always said she was proud of her sisters. I wouldn't have a painting to go with the doctoral thesis, but the picture Roslyn "painted" that day on the beach after her death strangely fits with the theoretical diagram I had developed nearly two years before.

And so, comforted by this knowledge, I began to write again, drawing on the strength of my networks of Aboriginal sisters who had rallied around to support me in my time of grief and loss. I also received great encouragement and support from my doctoral supervisor who reminded me that by telling the stories of the women in my study, this might help other Indigenous women from being stalled in their efforts to overcome obstacles in life, as Roslyn had been. This was important to me because of my strong belief that the voices of Australian Indigenous women have been mostly rendered silent because of colonisation, their lives mainly being documented by others (Bruno, 2003; Herbert, 2003; White, 1998). As research participants, Indigenous women have also been studied many times over the years primarily by non-Indigenous researchers without proper acknowledgement and benefit (Bruno, 2003; Smith, 1999). It is only in recent years that they have been recognized as legitimate tellers of their own stories. Indigenous women's voices are therefore critical for not only a better understanding of their lives but so that their educational and career journeys are appropriately supported by employers and educational institutions.

1.4   JOURNEY TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Part of my current role as Co-Ordinator of Weemala, the Indigenous Support Unit of Australian Catholic University (ACU), McAuley at Banyo campus in Brisbane, is to contribute to the achievement of that goal through my work with Indigenous students. This research grew out of my master's study which explored Aboriginal women's experiences in postgraduate study. In my support role, I had come in contact with growing numbers of Indigenous

women completing undergraduate, and more recently, postgraduate degrees. My personal experience therefore had confirmed what the statistics were saying in that Indigenous women were coming to university to improve their life opportunities.

However, while Indigenous women appear to be successful in higher education, this success does not in turn guarantee access to career paths. This was confirmed in my Master's study: *Dreams, pathways and journeys: Aboriginal women in postgraduate studies* (White, 1998), where I found that the women I interviewed were disappointed that their efforts in achieving a postgraduate degree were not appropriately rewarded in the areas of employment and community leadership. I was particularly struck by the comments of one of the woman, Cheryl, who said after she obtained a Masters in Social work, that her postgraduate qualifications rather than helping her career, had ironically, "closed doors". She stated that despite her higher qualifications and experience, she often missed out on jobs to people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with lesser qualifications. She talked about the "white Aboriginal experts" who did not want to lose jobs to newly-educated "black" people. But she raised a more serious problem about Indigenous males who deliberately keep Indigenous females out of jobs. She contended that this is a major problem in Aboriginal communities and one that should be addressed. At the conclusion to that study, I presented recommendations, two of which are pertinent to the current study. These were:

Recommendation 19:
Women should be encouraged into senior management, teaching and research positions through a affirmative action programs, mentoring strategies and leadership programs (White, 1998, p. 143).

Recommendation 30:
Further research should be undertaken in the area of women's employment particularly in the area of employment of indigenous postgraduate students (White, 1998, p. 144).

Therefore, in making the decision to undertake doctoral studies, I felt compelled to investigate these issues through further research and to try to find some answers to the issues that were raised in my master's research. In particular, I wanted to investigate subjects of concern pertinent to Indigenous university educated women. Additionally, as part of my work with the university, I had been involved in presenting career workshops to a number of Indigenous audiences. I wanted to find out more about the employment, education, careers and leadership of Indigenous women and the connections between the four areas, particularly how leadership was impacted by the others. Therefore, when I decided to undertake doctoral studies, it was natural for me to pick up where I had left off in my masters study.

In 2006, there are approximately 114 Indigenous students enrolled at this campus across a range of courses. Ninety seven are women comprising 85% of the Indigenous student population at McAuley at Banyo campus. ACU National has approximately 315 students across NSW, Queensland, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, and are supported by three Indigenous Support units. Approximately 248 of these are women, comprising 78.7% of ACU's total Indigenous student population. The high proportion of Indigenous females studying at ACU may be related to the nature of the courses provided by the university. ACU courses are mainly in education, nursing, social sciences, arts, psychology and theology, disciplines which are regarded as the nurturing professions and which have traditionally attracted mainly women. However, this may not be specifically an ACU feature as a review of national statistics on Indigenous tertiary students has a revealed a similar trend. At the national level, Indigenous women comprise 69% of the total Indigenous university student population (5,579 out of a total 8,871) (Nelson, 2002). This highlights that Indigenous women are a significant proportion of the Indigenous student body at higher education institutions.

Focusing on Indigenous women's careers

When I began the doctoral journey nearly five years ago, I found the research

literature on women's career development covered many issues and concerns. But there were few empirical studies on Indigenous women and careers. This phenomenon is explored in more depth in the literature review (Chapter 3). This suggested to me that there was a great need for further research specific to the career development of Indigenous Australian women.

I began to question whether education, as my parents and many others believed, particularly a university education, was in fact a pathway to careers and better lives. Writers such as Herbert (2003) noted that, despite gaining academic qualifications, some Indigenous people remained unemployed. This situation creates a perception that university education is not necessarily valuable. I wondered whether I should be encouraging Indigenous women to take up study when I knew from personal experience that the journey was extremely difficult with many sacrifices to be made. Furthermore, there was no guarantee that the outcomes or benefits were worth that sacrifice. Yet I had seen numerous examples of Indigenous women graduating so the question for me had become how great was the possibilities of success? Having got their degree were Indigenous women fated to be second best, taking on less senior positions? I wanted to know what impact achieving a university degree had on the employment of Indigenous women and how it helped their career. I also wondered how Indigenous women develop their careers with their specific socio-historical, economic and cultural backgrounds, and how Indigenous women's experiences compared with those of non-Indigenous women, and Indigenous men. Most importantly, I wanted to know what meaning Indigenous women made of their work, careers, education and leadership.

1.5   THINKING ABOUT INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

In the late 1990s, leadership rather than education was being spouted as the solution to the "Indigenous problem". At this time, concepts of appropriate Indigenous leadership were being discussed publicly by Indigenous people such as Pearson (2000a) and Appo (2003a), who argued for the need for Indigenous people to take more responsibility in this area. The review of the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) conducted by Hannaford, Collins & Huggins (2003) raised concerns about the Indigenous leadership being displayed in communities and representative bodies such as ATSIC. It appeared that Indigenous women were being blocked in the area of leadership with most Aboriginal councils, community organizations with ATSIC regional councils being dominated and controlled by Indigenous males (Sanders, Taylor & Ross, 2000). The table below, which confirms this point, shows the percentage of women elected to ATSIC regional councils over a ten-year period.

Table 1.1:   Women elected to ATSIC regional council office, 1990-99

	1990	*1993*	*1996*	*1999*
Women elected	219	152	87	116
Total elected	788	573	375	387
Per cent	27.8	26.5	23.2	30

(Sanders, Taylor & Ross, 2000)

Furthermore, that leadership did not appear to making a noticeable difference to outcomes in Indigenous peoples lives. When I was doing my master's degree specializing in leadership and management, my studies had opened up to me a new world about women's leadership. This motivated me to explore what was happening with Indigenous women's leadership and, in the middle of my doctoral study, I was given a unique opportunity.

Indigenous Women's Leadership program

In December, 2004, I was invited to be one of 17 coaches to work with the inaugural National Indigenous Women's Leadership Program (NIWLP). The Indigenous Women's leadership program is part of a broader program called the Indigenous Women's Development Program (IWDP) which has received

$16.5 million in funding over a four year period to enable Indigenous women to develop their community leadership skills. There are three components of the IWDP including:

- *Indigenous Women's Leadership* – targeting women already making contributions in their communities and providing leadership training and opportunities to launch them into leadership positions more widely;

- *Men and Family Relationships* – providing an Indigenous men's forum to discuss issues facing Indigenous families and communities and to develop leadership strategies for reconnecting men with their responsibilities; and

- *Networking Indigenous Women* – promoting a network of mutual support and fostering links amongst Indigenous women (OIPC, 2005).

These program components are administered through the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-Ordination (OIPC), Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (OIPC, 2005).

Each year approximately 70 Indigenous community women are to be involved in the program so that by the end of the 4 year program, nearly 300 Indigenous women from communities throughout Australia will have undertaken leadership training. Activities funded under the Indigenous women's program are designed to enhance Indigenous women's leadership, representation, safety, wellbeing and economic status (OIPC, 2005). Participants in the program are expected to complete an intensive residential course where they learn strategies and techniques to improve their leadership, communication, networking, organisational and goal setting skills. On their return to their communities, the participants receive mentoring and support for their leadership development from designated coaches. They are also given the opportunity to plan and deliver a community leadership activity such as a community workshop or gathering which is funded by OIPC.

Opportunities to complete further development through formal training and leadership experiences are also made available. (OIPC, 2005)

My involvement with the Indigenous Women's Leadership Program

With my acceptance into the Indigenous Women's Leadership Program, I travelled to Adelaide (29 November – 8 December, 2004) and participated in a training program with other selected coaches and community leaders. At the training camp, we participated in an intensive leadership program which covered modules focussing on vision and goal setting; what good leaders do; self as leaders; presentation skills; women and leadership; Indigenous leadership; community and consultation protocols; developing a community gathering plan; working together in the community (OIPC Coaching Manual, 2004a).

The participation was very much focused on active involvement and practicing good leadership skills such as effective listening, facilitation, respecting all points of view and encouraging all group members to participate. We also participated in team-building and social events to build rapport between coaches and women. Although at this stage, the women had not been assigned to their coaches, there were important links being built and some of these became formalised later into coaching agreements. There were also loose alliances formed between coaches, some of whom took on co-coaching as a preferred way of operating. This was to ensure that particularly women from geographically isolated areas had more than one coach to draw on and to be available to attend their community activities.

Following the leadership training, I was asked to work with eight Indigenous women, seven of whom were shared with another coach. I worked with these women in their communities in South East Queensland and New South Wales including Cherbourg, Brisbane, Sunshine Coast, Cunnamulla and Gunnedah, providing coaching support and assisting them organise community gatherings and workshops. I was a guest speaker and facilitator at a number of these workshops which were held throughout April, May and June, 2005.

The women used the workshops to address issues such as domestic violence, foetal-alcohol syndrome, health and nutrition, teen pregnancy, homelessness, and career guidance for Indigenous youth. They also provided opportunities to celebrate Indigenous women's achievements in the community, to build women's self-esteem, to learn and practise Indigenous language, song and dance and to build networks by bringing young and older Indigenous women together in local communities.

As part of the leadership program, I also attended the National Indigenous Women's Leadership Conference in June, 2005 at Kurrajong, in the Blue Mountains near Sydney where 300 Indigenous women gathered from communities across Australia.

The National Indigenous Women's Leadership Conference June, 2005

The women, conference organisers and speakers came from all over the country, some travelling from very remote communities to attend. The young women (18-30) attended the first day by themselves, then, there were 3 days for all the women together and finally the last day for the leaders only. During the conference, we listened to some excellent speakers, including Pat Turner, Jackie Huggins, Jackie Katona, Leeanne Wilson who were Australian Indigenous women and Clarissa Balan, an international speaker from the Phillipines. These women shared their own journeys, talked about what they learned and gave good advice and encouragement to the women present about developing their own leadership. There were workshops presented and facilitated by Indigenous women each day centering on three themes: Healing, Leadership, and Effective Alliance Building. Each woman attending the conference was also assigned to a "Support Group" that met each day to discuss issues and to build friendships so that no woman was left alone at the gathering. Interpreters were there to assist some of the women who could not speak English and to share their words with the rest of the women.

Other activities included "topic tables" at lunch, a concert performance by Kerry-Ann Cox, an Indigenous singer, traditional dance session, an end of conference concert, and cultural activities throughout the conference.

Despite some small organisational problems, the national gathering was a powerful activity undertaken by Indigenous women. The bonding and networking was extremely powerful, friendships were formed, other friendships were strengthened, some were tested, but overall it will be remembered as a critical stage in the development of Indigenous women's leadership in this country. There was the promise of Indigenous women going away to do more things, planning more leadership activities, agreeing to work together and to keep the network strong.

Reflections on my participation in the leadership program

The six months spent on the leadership program, had an incredible impact on me, personally and professionally. At the time I heard about the program, I had been granted an Outside Studies Program (OSP) to conduct the data collection for my research. I was expecting to be off doing my study, working on my thesis and then moving smoothly into the final stage of my writing and hopefully submission. But then the Leadership program came along and it was too good an opportunity to pass up. It meant that I had to renegotiate my thesis timeframe but I believed that my participation in the program might be really important to the thesis findings and recommendations. I felt it would also lead to "life after the thesis" and might help me find my niche in life - discovering what it is that I wanted to do.

When I visited with my mentor and friend, Associate Professor Tracey Bunda, an Indigenous academic, at the University of Canberra during my OSP, she put the question to me "What is it that you want to do after the thesis?" During that week, I had been carrying around an advertisement asking for expressions of interest in the National Indigenous Women's Leadership program. Tracey encouraged me to apply for a coaching position. When I came back to Brisbane, I sat down and wrote an application. Separately and

unknown to me, my sister Maxine had seen the advertisement and she also was considering putting in an application. When she mentioned this to me, I told her I had written a quick application and posted it. She decided she would as well and I helped her finalise her application the night before they closed. Amazingly, out of over two hundred applications, she and I were selected amongst the eighteen coaches. There were also over six hundred applications for the leader's positions, seventy of whom were chosen to go to Adelaide. I tell this story, because I believe that things happen for a purpose and that my involvement in this program enhanced my research. It helped me to better understand the development of women's leadership within a diversity of contexts, the supports that Indigenous women need to develop leadership including networking and mentoring. It also gave me the opportunity to enhance my own leadership skills.

Although we had worked in similar areas, my sister and I had never really worked together. The leadership program gave us an opportunity not only to be involved in the same program, we decided to do co-coaching. This meant that for the 8 women we were involved with, one would be the main coach and the other would be the back-up coach. Other coaches adopted similar alliances. It turned out that we actually co-coached 7 women, and for the eighth woman, I shared coaching responsibilities with another coach. We developed a coaching plan which included a communication strategy to ensure that we kept in touch with each other and other leaders. This worked well and we had very good feedback from our leaders. It also strengthened our relationship as sisters, and as Indigenous women. She also helped me through a personal crisis, encouraging me to heal by burying myself in the Leadership program suggesting that perhaps my experience could help me connect with and understand women in similar situations.

The leadership program gave me a new purpose in life. I drew strength from my leaders and their efforts in bringing together their community gatherings and rejoiced with them when the events were realised. I tried to model good leadership, gave regular and positive feedback and allowed them to see more of me as a person. I grew through this process. Where previously, I had

clearly set the boundaries in terms of my professional and personal life, a tenet instilled in me by my non-Indigenous husband, I allowed my cultural traits to come through. I became friends with the women I coached and found that most of those relationships continued far beyond the coaching period. I let myself cry in the presence of those women, I laughed and told jokes when I was a guest speaker moving away from the formal approaches I had picked up as an academic. I sang karaoke at Cherbourg and I danced on stage at the National Conference. I reminded myself and the women that I was coaching that we need to walk in both worlds, retaining our Aboriginal culture, our ways of being, our special sense of humour whilst functioning successfully in a predominantly white world. Through revealing my humanness, I was able to connect with women out there. I think this is important for Indigenous people when they become educated so that they do not become isolated from their communities as some of the women expressed in the study. Herbert (2003) also talks about this tension and how university qualifications can lead to being rejected and being labelled as "flash black" or "uptown nigger". There were some very special times at the conference that made me want to spend less time in academia and more time in the community.

Healing Dance

On the first night, a small group of the Aboriginal women danced in the traditional way in the main auditorium. They were beautifully painted with traditional designs so that their breasts looked like they had on lace collars. I was so moved I had this urge deep within as I listened to the dance and chanting, to be up there dancing, too. I felt the moving of the spirit and I grieved for the loss of language and dance that my own group had experienced. The next day in my support group, I mentioned to the Kerrie Timm, (Group Manager, Leadership Development, OIPC) who was in our group, that there were many women who had cried during the conference, during workshops and at other times. Others in the group agreed and we talked about how it would be good for us to light up the bonfires outside and ask dancers from the previous night to dance again and teach others.

So that night, they lit up three fires. The women who wanted to learn the dances, most of them younger women, gathered at the small fire furthest away. The main group of women, over one hundred, of which I was one, gathered at the central fire. This was where the older women were seated on logs, singing and either cupping their hands together in rhythm or beating clap-sticks. A small group gathered at the third fire. It was bitterly cold and quite dark. The small group of dancers could only be seen as shadows but we heard their laughter and chatting over the roar of the fire as they were being painted. When they were ready, the singers at our fire called to them and the dancers signalled that they would begin. The chanting began again and we, the audience, stood silently watching, some of us daring to join in the rhythmic clapping and swaying gently to the music. Slowly the dancers emerged from the shadows, dancing towards us and the large fire. Every so often, the fire would swirl sending tiny embers up into the sky, at the same time lighting up the dancers who were moving forwards. I stood with my breath held and heart thumping at the sight. We could have been in another place, an ancient place, just us, the dancers and the singers. I recognised one of my nieces and knew the other to be there, I felt incredible joy and sadness together. I felt tears streaming down my cheeks. My spirit soared. I had become part of something very special. Then the traditional women cleansed the area, being careful not to leave their spirits in another's country. Afterward, we all left and went up to the conference centre to have a cuppa tea and talk. I sat with my nieces and they told me what it was like for them. They said they did not even feel the cold against their skin. I could see that they were deeply moved by their experience and I described for them what it was like for me as an observer. We talked about how important it was us for us to go back to the roots of our culture, re-learning the dances and the songs and just being with other Aboriginal women to refresh us spiritually. It shows that no matter how academic we become, we are still drawn to our Aboriginal spirituality.

This story is recounted as part of the thesis for a number of reasons. It reminds us that Indigenous women share an incredible bond that has not been diminished by colonisation or time. It acknowledges the importance of

Aboriginal spirituality that is still important in Aboriginal women's lives and that ritual, song and dance is very much part of that. It confirms that any project or study involving Aboriginal women must incorporate their culture and spirituality. This has important implications for the way in which a study is designed, data gathered and analysed and presented and justifies the choices I have made in researching and writing this thesis.

1.6   SUMMARY

This chapter introduces the thesis and offers a background to understand the research problem. It establishes a need to understand how Indigenous women negotiate their career development and how they are able to make meaning out of their career development. It details the purposes and significance of the study and provides a historical background to the development of the research topic and questions. It includes some of my own cultural, educational and work background to provide understanding for choices I have made with respect to the research design and methodology.

Chapter 2 presents the context for the research. It introduces the research problem, providing a justification for the study.

Chapter 3 is the review of the main bodies of literature underpinning the study and is structured into four parts: These were:

1. Indigenous women in the workforce;
2. Indigenous women and careers;
3. Indigenous women and education;
4. Indigenous women and leadership.

Chapter 4 details and justifies the design and methodology used in the research. It introduces the theoretical underpinnings of the study. A special mention is made of the Indigenous world view and its influence on the research process including choice of methodology, data gathering techniques and the perspective through which the data is viewed and analysed. The

research participants are introduced and the method of their selection detailed. This chapter explains the choice of case study to "tell" the women's experiences, the data gathering techniques and details the data analysis processes.

Chapter 5 presents the five individual women's career stories. Each woman's story is crafted against responses to the four areas identified in the literature review and the subsequent research questions that emanated from the literature. These were related to their employment, careers, education and leadership.

Chapter 6 presents the discussion and findings from the research. The research questions are again used to organise the results and to provide comment on the data. Throughout Chapter six, the findings from the women's stories are linked to the data obtained from the focus groups.

Chapter 7 provides a conclusion to the study. Firstly, it summarises the research, restates the purpose of the study and how the research was conducted. It provides a discussion on the implications for policy and practice to support the future career development and leadership of Indigenous Australian women in Australian society. It also provides recommendations for future research about and by Indigenous Australian women.

CHAPTER 2:   DEFINING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a socio-historical context in which to understand the contemporary issues for Indigenous women. Without this explanation, it would be difficult to comprehend the complexity of Indigenous women's career development in modern day society. Firstly, the positioning of Indigenous people in current Australian society will be detailed including their demographics, and indicators of their health and well-being. Secondly an overview of their education and employment experiences will be given, with some comparison made with the performances of their non-Indigenous counterparts. The chapter concludes with the articulation of the research problem, significance of the study, research design and its limitations.

2.2   INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The move towards independence and self-management for Indigenous people since the 1967 referendum has had mixed results. While there has been some improvement through government social policies and practices, and through reconciliation with non-Indigenous people, there has been little over-all improvement to the largely unsatisfactory positioning of Indigenous people in Australian society.

According to the key social and economic indicators for Indigenous Australia (Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, [OATSIA], 2004), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people simply do not enjoy the same overall standard of living as other Australians. As a group, they have the lowest economic status (Altman, 2000) and on every scale, they compare less favourably, particularly in the areas of health, employment and education.

Despite government and initiatives targeted to achieve better outcomes, Indigenous Australians are acknowledged as the most disadvantaged group in Australian society (Altman, 2000; OATSIA, 2004). This chapter explains

how this position impacts on Indigenous women's career aspirations and development.

2.2.1 Demographics

The statistical overview in this section applies to both Indigenous males and females. In the next chapter, the literature review, statistics specifically related to Indigenous women are identified. In 2001, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander[4] population was estimated to be 458, 520 or 2.4 per cent of the total Australian population. Approximately 40% was under the age of 15 years compared with 20% of the non-Indigenous population, meaning that the Indigenous population has a younger age structure (ABS, 2003). This is consistent with the statistics that show that Indigenous families are larger and have more children, and that Indigenous women are having babies at a younger age than non-Indigenous women. The data for 1998-2000 show that 79% of Indigenous women have babies before 30, compared to 52% of non-Indigenous women (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005). Child-care responsibilities are therefore important factors in education and employment. Another significant fact is that Indigenous life expectancy is twenty years less than for other Australians as the table below reveals.

Table 2.1: Life expectancy at birth (1999-2001)

MALES		FEMALES	
Indigenous	**Non-Indigenous**	**Indigenous**	**Non-Indigenous**
56 years	77 years	63 years	82 years

(Year Book of Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004b)

Research findings from Aboriginal groups in other countries report similar disadvantage within the major society as Figure 2.2 on the next page demonstrates.

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[4] Approximately 10% of Indigenous people were of Torres Strait Islander origin.
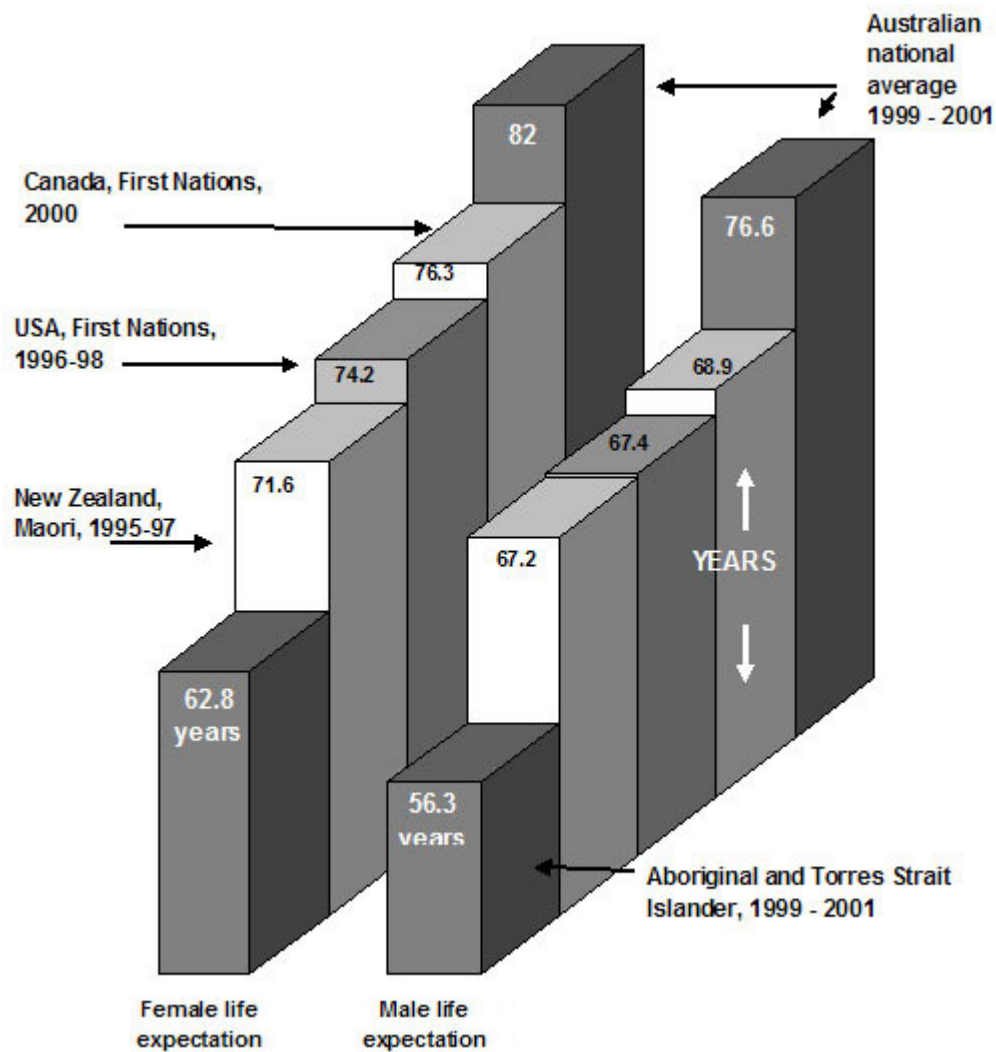
Figure 2.1: Comparisons of life expectancy for Indigenous peoples in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America (Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006)

The stark reality of a reduced life expectancy is that Indigenous people therefore have a decreased working in which to pursue their careers and to access retirement benefits such as superannuation. Other population characteristics show that one-parent families are found to be more common among the Indigenous population and more often these are headed by women. Indigenous families have more group households and this may be connected to their larger families and kinship responsibilities - a situation which contributes to over-crowding and breakdown of household facilities (OATSIA, 2004). Most Indigenous people actually live in major cities and

regional centres, however they make up a greater percentage of the population as their remoteness increases.

Table 2.2:   Location of Indigenous peoples by remoteness

	Indigenous peoples	**Non-Indigenous population**
Major cities	30.2%	67.2%
Inner regional	20.3%	20.7%
Outer regional	23.1%	10.1%
Remote	8.8%	1.5%
Very remote	17.7%	0.5%

(Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006, p. 4)

In respect to their health and well-being, Indigenous Australians experience poorer general health compared to the remainder of the Australian population, their social and economic disadvantage being contributing factors as is their lack of access to high quality health care (OATSIA, 2004).   Access to appropriate health services is exacerbated by the geographic location of the Indigenous population, 30% of who live in remote parts of Australia (OATSIA, 2004).   Over two-thirds (69%) of 1,216 discrete Indigenous communities[5] surveyed in 2001 were located 100 kilometres or more from the nearest hospital (Office of the Status of Women, 2003). Consequently, the greater health problems, lack of gainful employment and subsequent poor income, together with inadequate housing combine to be powerful obstacles in the lives of Indigenous Australians. Improving the health of Indigenous Australians involves "reducing levels of educational failure, the amount of job security and the scale of income differences in society" simply because "poor

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[5] A discrete Indigenous community is defined as a geographic location, bounded by physical or legal boundaries, and inhabited predominantly (ie. greater than 50% of usual residents) by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, with housing and infrastructure that is managed on a community basis (Office of Status of Women, 2003).

social and economic circumstances affect health throughout life" (OATSIA, 2004, p. 50).

Indigenous Australians are therefore disadvantaged, economically and occupationally. Unemployment levels are much higher than for other Australians and if they are employed, Indigenous workers are clustered in a narrow range of occupations and at lower levels, with few employed within private industry (ATSIC, 2000; Office of the Status of Women, 2003). Their lack of participation in the wider labour market limits their choice of career path and development. Furthermore, their employment experiences are often marred by racism and discrimination (Hunter & Gray, 1999). According the OATSIA 2004 report, stress in the workplace increases the risk of disease and workers' health and self esteem suffer when they are not given opportunities to use their skills or to have real input into decision-making. This is particularly true for Indigenous females.

2.2.2 Indigenous education and employment

The education of Indigenous peoples has been identified as problematic in laying foundations which are insufficient for future development.   The importance of education is encapsulated in the quote below:

> Lack of education robs an individual of a full life. It also robs society of a solid basis for sustainable progress because education is critical to improving health, nutrition and productivity. Education contributes to better health, and better education and health increase productivity that leads to economic growth (OATSIA, 2004, p. xvi).

To date, Indigenous Australians have had largely unsuccessful educational experiences (Nelson, 2002). There is a substantial literature detailing these experiences as well as the policy initiatives developed to address Indigenous people's educational disadvantage. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education policy (NATSIEP) was implemented jointly by federal and state governments on 1 January, 1990 to address the inequitable access,

participation and educational outcomes for Indigenous people. The 21 goals of NATSIEP focused on encouraging greater participation of Indigenous people in culturally appropriate learning experiences delivered in supportive learning environments (Nelson, 2002). These goals are included in Appendix B. Five years after its implementation, NATSIEP was reviewed and it was found that although significant improvements had been made, the participation and achievement levels of Indigenous people still lagged behind those for non-Indigenous Australians (Nelson, 2002). Following the review, the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) established eight priority areas for Indigenous education and training. These priority areas were:

- improving literacy;
- improving numeracy;
- improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students;
- increasing Indigenous enrolments
- increasing employment in education and training;
- increasing professional development of staff involved in Indigenous education;
- increasing involvement of Indigenous parents/community members in education decision-making; and
- expanding culturally inclusive curricula (Nelson, 2002, p.2).

As a further commitment to working with Indigenous people to overcome educational disadvantage, the Australian government endorsed the National Goals for Schooling in the 21st century which agreed that all children should leave school with appropriate literacy and numeracy levels (Nelson, 2002). In 2000, the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS) was implemented specifically to "achieve English literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students at levels comparable to those achieved by other young Australians" (Department of Education, Science & Training, 2005, p. 1). The strategy consisted of the following six key elements:

1. lifting school attendance rates of Indigenous students to national levels;

2. effectively addressing the hearing and other health problems that undermine learning for a large proportion of Indigenous students;

3. providing, wherever possible, pre-schooling opportunities;

4. training sufficient numbers of teachers in the skills and cultural awareness necessary to be effective in Indigenous communities and schools and encouraging them to remain for reasonable periods of time;

5. ensuring that teaching methods known to be most effective are employed; and

6. instituting transparent measures of success as a basis for accountability for schools and teachers

(Department of Education, Science & Training, 2005).

NATSIEP, the MYCEETYA priorities and NIELNS have had positive effects resulting in the increased participation of Indigenous people in higher education. Since success in the compulsory years of schooling is both a prerequisite for tertiary study as well as an incentive, by promoting the successful completion of primary and secondary, it was hoped that more Indigenous students would go on to take up university studies. In addition, the higher education sector was asked to take on more responsibility not only for the successful participation of Indigenous students but also for the training of potential teachers of Indigenous students in the school system.

Since, 1987, there has been a steadily increasing number of Indigenous people entering tertiary study (Encel, 2000). The data from the report by Nelson (2002) illustrates that the number of Indigenous students commencing higher education doubled between 1989 and 2001. From 1996 to 2001, there was a 15.8 % increase from 4,919 to 5,697 at the undergraduate level, and at the postgraduate level, there was a slight increase from 638 to 716. Overall, this is heartening, but in comparison to non-Indigenous participation, Indigenous people still remain under-represented in higher education. They also fail to occupy enough tertiary places in the non-traditional areas of study. The Nelson Report acknowledged the participation of Indigenous people in higher education as being vital to their future, emphasising that universities

play important roles in the development of Indigenous community leaders and by encouraging positive employment prospects for Indigenous graduates. In that report, Nelson (2002) emphasized that "higher education is crucial to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access improved employment opportunities and avoid welfare dependence" (p. x). Certainly, there is an expectation that being educated leads to employment and that having a job has economic and social benefits. However, the Indigenous labour force participation is much lower, and unemployment rates are much higher that for other Australians, as Table 2.3 below shows.

Table 2.3:   Comparison of Indigenous and other Australian workers (2001)

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION (15-64 YEARS)		UNEMPLOYMENT LEVELS (15 YEARS AND OVER)	
Indigenous	Other	Indigenous	Other
54%	73%	20%	7.2%

(ABS, 2004)

The level of unemployment increases with remoteness. Table 2.5 below shows this detail.

Table 2.4:   Labour force participation by remoteness, 2001

	Indigenous Australians	**Non-Indigenous Australians**
Major cities	57.3	64.3
Inner Regional	52.0	59.9
Outer regional	50.7	63.3
Remote	50.5	71.8
Very remote	46.2	78.1

(Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006, p.13)

Furthermore, 55 per cent of Indigenous persons reported in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS) that they obtained their main source of income from government, suggesting a high dependency on welfare payments (Altman, 2000; Trudgen, 2000). The social costs of unemployment include "low levels of social capital" and "social exclusion" (Hunter, 2000, p. vi) Consequently, inter-generational unemployment means that Indigenous families have little access to the economic and cultural resources of Australian society and "it becomes increasingly hard to break the vicious cycle of welfare dependency and unemployment" (Hunter, 2000, p. vi).

In 1999, in recognition of the particular disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people in the labour market, the National Indigenous Employment Policy (IEP) was introduced. The thrust of this policy was to generate more employment opportunities through such programs as the Community Development Employment program (CDEP), a "work for the dole" program implemented in Indigenous communities[6], and the National Indigenous Cadetship program which links university study with industry experience. This had led to an increased number of Indigenous people participating in education and employment (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2006).

However, Indigenous Australian workers are more likely to be found in narrower occupations, lower paying and less prestigious jobs. They occupy fewer managerial and professional positions than their non-Indigenous counterparts.   Indigenous workers are also more likely to be employed in Government jobs particularly in administration, and health and community services. The main occupations are labourers and related workers (OATSIA, 2004). Figures 2.3 and 2.4 following verify these points.

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[6] Nearly 25 per cent of Indigenous employment is in the CDEP scheme (Gray & Hunter, 1999).

Figure 2.2:   Indigenous employment by occupation - 2001
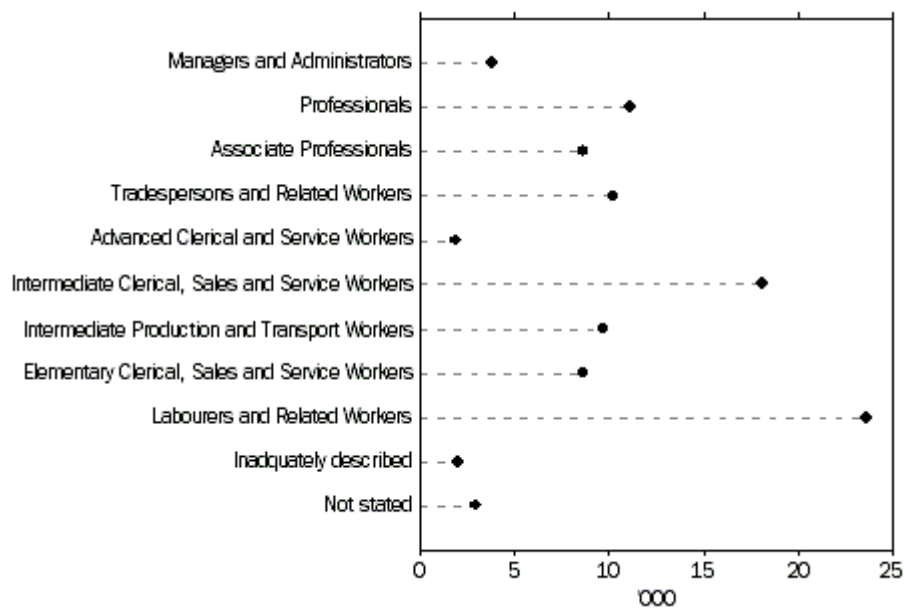
(Census of Population and Housing, 2001, Indigenous Profile, cat. no. 2002.0)

Figure 2.3:   Indigenous employment by industry, 2001
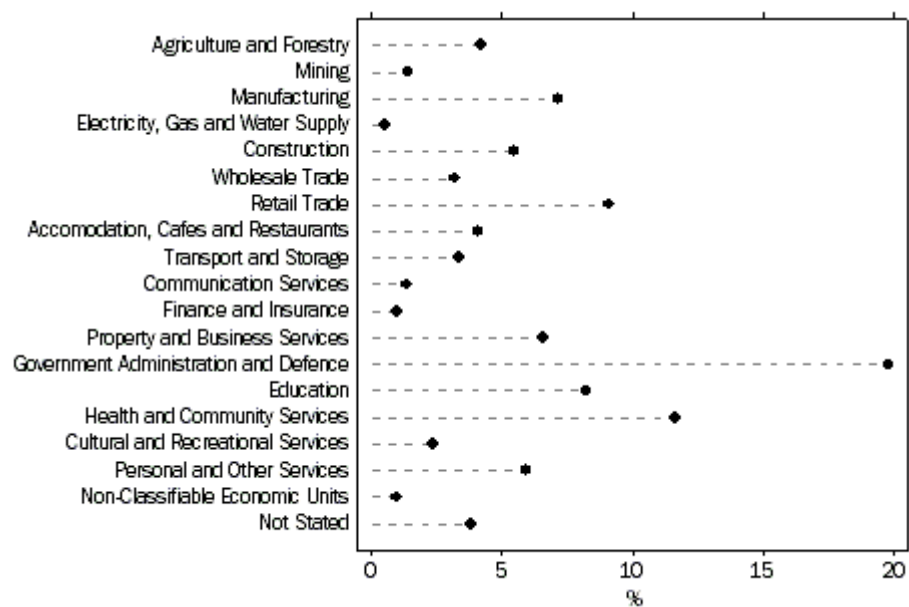
(Census of Population and Housing, 2001, Indigenous Profile, cat. no. 2002.0)

A comparison in Table 2.5 shows the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers on types and levels of work that both groups do.

TABLE 2.5: Employment of group by industry and occupation

Main industries		Main occupations	
Indigenous	**Non-Indigenous**	**Indigenous**	**Non-Indigenous**
Government admin and defence 20%	Manufacturing 12%	Labourers and related workers 24%	Professionals 18%
Health and community services 12%	Property and Business 11%	Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers
Retail Trade 9%	Retail Trade 9%	18%	16%

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004a).

More details of Indigenous women's experiences in employment are provided in Chapter 3, the Literature Review.

It is clear that despite improvements brought about by NATSIEP and NIEP, educational and employment outcomes for Indigenous peoples remain unsatisfactory (Nelson, 2002). The gap between the educational attainments of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students remains a serious concern and employment equality is still a long way off. Consequently, many Indigenous families remain in low socio-economic situations because of their inabilities to achieve quality employment and career opportunities.

2.2.3   New arrangements in Indigenous affairs

In 1989, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was established to provide advice to the Commonwealth Government on Indigenous Issues and as a national representative body for Indigenous people. It was also the key organisation for the delivery of Commonwealth funded Indigenous programs. However dissatisfaction with the functioning and leadership apparent within the organisation led to a review in 2003 to

explore how ATSIC might be more effective at the regional and national level (Hanaford, Collins, & Huggins, 2003). A key issue raised by the review was the lack of women's representation in ATSIC with the panel strongly criticising the organisation for its "failure to recognize the role played by Indigenous women is accompanied by inadequate leadership development and insufficient recognition of, and a reluctance to talk about issues related to families and women" (Hanaford, Collins & Huggins, 2003, p. 26).

Despite recommendations from the Review panel to retain ATSIC with a restructuring and refocusing of the organisation, it was abolished and in July 2004, the Australian Government instituted a new approach to the delivery of Indigenous services. Indigenous Co-ordination Centres (ICC's) were established in 2004 In the states and territories under the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination (OIPC) within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. The new arrangements were to focus on shared responsibility and mutual obligation partnerships between government and Indigenous communities. It also included a "whole of government" approach to ensure that services and funding to communities were co-ordinated and not subject to the overlap and gaps of the past. A National Indigenous Council (NIC) was appointed to provide advice to the Australian Government on Indigenous issues and strategies (Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination, 2004b). It was expressed that "governments alone cannot fix Indigenous problems" (p.1) and that through the new arrangements Indigenous individuals and communities would have an important part to play. However, the implication that Indigenous people have not taken responsibility prior to this, ignores the fact that they have been given little opportunity in the past to exercise that responsibility. Furthermore, "Indigenous" or "Aboriginal" problems are complex issues which have their roots in historical oppression and racism and these are not easily solved.

2.2.4 "The Aboriginal Problem"

There is constant debate about why the problems of Indigenous people remain unresolved in contemporary society despite the attempts at all levels

of government and by Indigenous people themselves to redress the inequities Indigenous people experience. On the surface, it appears that many communities continue to struggle due to inherent social problems perceived to be generated by the people themselves. Problems with alcoholism and domestic violence, and mismanagement of community funds aimed at improving communities, are often used as evidence of Indigenous people creating their own problems (Trudgen, 2000). In contrast, a more sustainable perspective is the assertion that the current situation of Indigenous Australian people is a direct result of colonisation and dispossession (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence, 1999).

The development of Indigenous women's careers is impacted by their place in Australian society and the socio-historical influences of the past 200 years of European domination. There is sufficient evidence in the literature to conclude that prior to the coming of the Europeans, Aboriginal women were economically secure and played important roles within traditional Aboriginal society. They were acknowledged to be the main food providers through their gathering skill, they cared for their kin, taught the children, practiced healing and contributed to the spiritual lives of their communities. As such, they were valued members of their groups. But this seemingly healthy and productive lifestyle came to an abrupt end with the "discovery" of Australian shores by James Cook and the ensuing arrival of the first fleet of British settlers in 1788.

The historical records of early Australia, and the anecdotal records of Aboriginal people, show that from that time traditional Aboriginal society was disintegrated by aggressive colonial acts including genocide, dispersal of groups, the removal by brute force from traditional lands and relocation on specially established missions or reserves. The women suffered particularly though being subjected to rape, sexual abuse and being forced into de-facto relationships to serve the needs of white men. Many became little more than slaves. (Behrendt, 1993; Maris & Borg, 1985). Much of the early conflict between Aboriginal groups and settlers was waged because of the stealing and ill-treatment of Aboriginal women (Miller, 1995).

Many Aboriginal groups, like my grandmother's family were taken thousands of miles from their country - an act which made it impossible for them to continue to practise their spirituality and custodianship of sacred sites. The mission life was extremely hard with little rations, poor housing, and inadequate medical supplies and treatment. The dormitory style accommodation separated children from their parents, impacting on parenting roles and depriving the children of their natural support systems. The older women were forced into jobs such as cooking on stations or working in the households of white families, and the men were used as farm labourers, or as stockmen on cattle stations. When children were around thirteen or fourteen, they were also sent out to work in similar areas. In the majority of employment, Aboriginal people received little or no pay. Their meagre earnings which were claimed to be sent back to support their families remaining on the missions under a "settlement maintenance levy" (Blake, 2001), were later found to be "stolen" and used by the authorities to undertake development, build hospitals and other infrastructure (Blake, 2001; Kidd, 2003). These stolen wages are currently subject to great tension between the descendents of those Aboriginal workers and the current Australian governments. Further information on mission life with respect to Aboriginal women is provided in Chapter 3, the review of literature.

If the acknowledgement had been rightly given, it could be said that without a doubt the early farming and cattle industry, together with the establishment of early settler households, was built on the backs of Aboriginal labour on land stolen from Aboriginal groups (Behrendt, 1993; Blake, 2001). Much of this history remained hidden or was denied in the official records, but since the 1970s, Australian history has been rewritten by historians such as Henry Reynolds who have provided fairer accounts. Supplemented by the stories of Aboriginal people about their lives "under the Act", Australians have now become more aware and are demanding to know the truth about the treatment of Australian Aborigines. This truth, whilst difficult for present day Australians to accept, nevertheless has done much to dispel the myth promoted by early Australian settlers and governments that there was no such oppression.

Furthermore, postcolonial oppression has not only shaped the misfortunes of Indigenous people but that it continues to create barriers to changing the status quo (Appo, 2003a). For Indigenous women, there are many questions about their lack of participation in the labour market and in the wider community, their current position in society and their need for appropriate training and education to overcome career obstacles.

2.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Since more Indigenous women than men graduate from universities through Australia, there is an expectation that these women would have access to better careers than they had before them gaining a university qualification. This is not so. The research will address this problem.

2.4 THE RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to explore how university educated Indigenous women negotiate their career development.

2.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This study is important because it contributes to the body of knowledge about Australian Indigenous women, to the theoretical understandings about career development of minority women's groups, and to the implications for policy and practice relating to the above. Despite an increased interest in Indigenous issues, there is little empirical research which has explored the links between education, employment, careers and leadership for Indigenous women. Yet the successful participation of Indigenous women in all these areas have been identified as central to their survival, growth and development as empowered individuals and leaders in both their own communities and the wider society.

Furthermore, an extensive search of the research literature has identified a lacuna concerning the career development of Indigenous women in Australian society. The research study will be an original contribution to the growing

body of knowledge about Indigenous women's experiences and provide insight into what encourages successful careers for Indigenous women. Better participation of Indigenous women in education and employment will also contribute to a better understanding by Indigenous women themselves about their own career development.

In particular, the voices of Indigenous women have been largely ignored. One aim of the thesis is to provide a voice for a particular group of Indigenous women who have been marginalized within the tertiary sector, and within the broader Australian society. It is hoped that this study will provide an insight into how successful careers for Indigenous women can be supported by the Indigenous Support unit within the university they are attending.

2.6   SUMMARY

This chapter presented the context for the research project. It examined the socio-historical influences on the contemporary lives of Indigenous women. It gave a broad overview of the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians and included a discussion of health, employment and education. Specifically it outlined the participation of Indigenous people in higher education. Finally, it presented the research problem, the research purpose and significance of the research. The next chapter will outline the literature review.

CHAPTER 3:   **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the career development of Indigenous women. It illuminates themes relevant to the study and explains how the research questions were developed. It identifies gaps in the literature that this particular study may assist in filling. Firstly, the literature concerning Indigenous women generally is presented to provide a broader context for understanding Indigenous women's career experiences. Secondly, the literature review will focus on four specific bodies of literature that are relevant to the proposed study about Indigenous women's careers: Indigenous women in the workforce, their careers, education and leadership.

Consequently, the literature review is organised under these themes. The linear sequence of the literature review is outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Sequence of the literature review

3.3   Indigenous women still going strong 　　　3.3.1   A statistical portrait of Indigenous women 　　　3.3.2   Location of Indigenous women in Australian society 　　　3.3.3   Being strong: the identity of Indigenous women 　　　3.3.4   Oppression from within our own communities 　　　3.3.5   Racism, sexism and Indigenous women **3.4   Indigenous women in the workforce** **3.5   Indigenous women and careers** **3.6   Indigenous women and education** **3.7   Indigenous women and leadership**

3.2   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept map of the literature (Figure 3.2) illustrates how it informs and illuminates the purpose of the research. The conceptual framework that underpins the literature review was developed from an intense consideration of the contextual background to the study and synthesis of literature.   I personally had great difficulty in developing a diagram that I felt could appropriately represent the literature and the purpose of the research. Shapes and symbols were critical considerations. As with my master's study, I believed that the use of boxes to discuss Aboriginal life were western constructs which had served as a colonial tool throughout history to categorise and label and debase Indigenous people (White, 1998). Pamela Croft, an Indigenous artist in her doctoral thesis also describes boxes as representations of compartmentalisation and 'fitting into the box" as part of the western infrastructure "denigrating notions of wholeness which recognises the mind, body and spirit (Croft, 2003, p.86).

At the same time I acknowledged that Indigenous women's lives are played out in a western dominated society. From the reading of the literature, I was encouraged to develop a conceptual framework that expressed that Indigenous women were constrained by those western constructs but that they still retained parts of their culture and through appropriate development their recovery would subsequently lead to recovery of their status within Indigenous communities and the wider Australian community. There was no doubt in my mind that the expression of that concept had to be drawn from an Indigenous perspective and an Indigenous world view. A pictorial overview and explanation of the conceptual framework that guides the review is provided in Figure 3.2.

In traditional Aboriginal art, concentric circles are used to represent how individuals are linked to one another, the land, law, the environment and their life experiences through *the Dreaming* (Caruana, 1989; White, 1998). Other Indigenous peoples also use the circle as a sacred symbol to represent and understand life and to reflect spiritual and healing and the deep connections

between people (Bruno, 2003). Figure 3.1 shows some of these symbols used in Aboriginal central desert art.
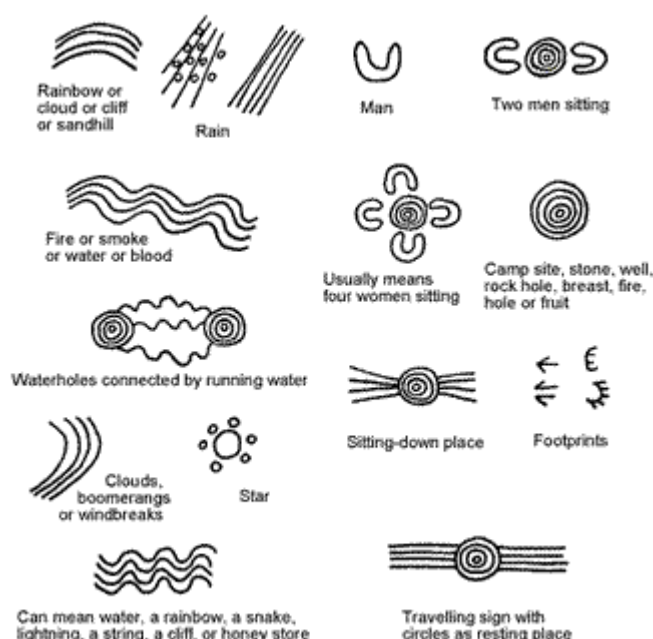
Figure 3.1: Symbols used in Papunya Central Desert art (Bardon,1991)

The conceptual diagram for this study (Figure 3.2) shows that the epic journeys of Indigenous women into employment, careers, education and leadership are carried out against a backdrop of many challenges. Indigenous women must negotiate a return to traditional status through their career journeys, an achievement which in turn impacts on a rebuilding of Indigenous communities, personal empowerment, and the restoration of strong Indigenous leadership that was evident prior to colonization. The shapes of the symbols have been purposely chosen to reflect a transformation from western constructs to Indigenous concepts. For example, the boxes towards the bottom of the figure (work, education, careers, leadership) and the pillars to the left and right side (philosophical underpinnings and socio-historical underpinnings), represent the western constructs that are both barriers and tools that the women must overcome and negotiate to achieve their goals. Indigenous women's position in Australian society, placed at the bottom of the figure, is drawn as a "softened" rectangle to emphasise their resilience and retention of Indigenous culture within a dominant white Australian society.

The journey of Indigenous women with respect to their work, careers, education and leadership, is portrayed as a vertical climb to highlight the hierarchical structure of Australian society, within which Indigenous women are relegated to the bottom rung (Gool, 1997). Moreton-Robinson (2000) argues that Indigenous women's positioning in Australian society is due to "the common experience of living in a society that deprecates us" and "white race privilege" (p.xvi) which obstructs Indigenous women from improving their status in Australian society. In keeping with the purpose of the research, colonialism and post-colonialism are the surface elements – what are depicted above the waves. They are more obvious, while the undercurrents and deeper structures (racism, sexism, erosion of Indigenous women's status) that oppress Indigenous women are located below the surface. All the elements are linked together, and impact on, and reinforce one another, as are understood in the Indigenous worldview. The assumption that all life is interconnected and dependant on each other, and therefore that we do not exist in isolation is a belief shared by other Indigenous people (Bruno, 2003; Croft, 2003; Steinhauer, 2002; Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

The three circles at the top of the figure represent the successful negotiation of Indigenous women's careers. Indigenous women's career development is a foundation for collaborative partnerships and reconciliation which leads to the rebuilding of Indigenous communities. It is also linked to the recovery of Indigenous women's status, the core of which is personal empowerment, and strong Indigenous leadership, a key aspect of which is Indigenous community leadership. All circles are interconnected which shows their influence on, and from one another.
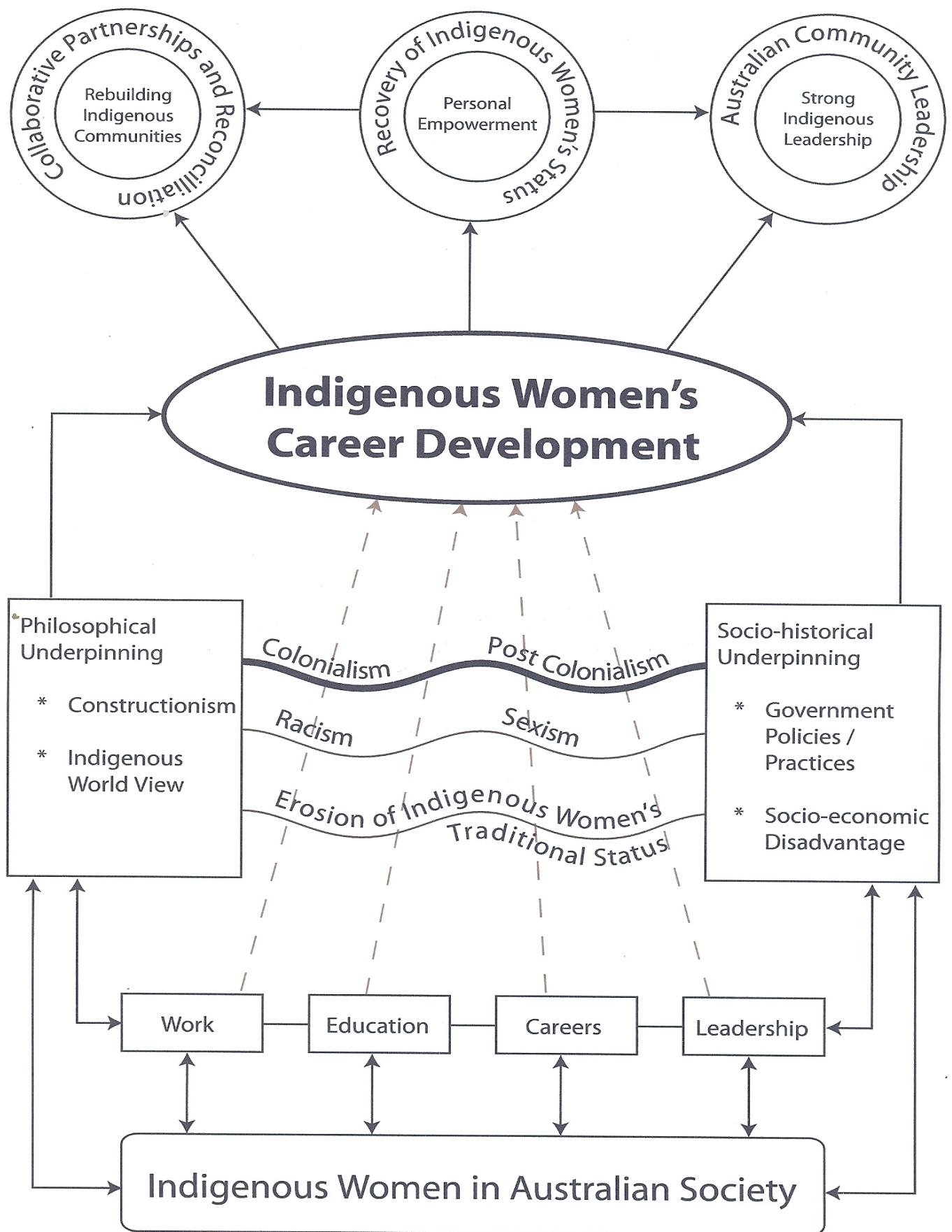
Figure 3.2:   Conceptual Framework of the literature

The figure shows a conceptual framework with the following elements:

Three circles at the top:
- Collaborative Partnerships and Reconciliation — Rebuilding Indigenous Communities
- Recovery of Indigenous Women's Status — Personal Empowerment
- Australian Community Leadership — Strong Indigenous Leadership

Central oval: **Indigenous Women's Career Development**

Left box: Philosophical Underpinning
* Constructionism
* Indigenous World View

Right box: Socio-historical Underpinning
* Government Policies / Practices
* Socio-economic Disadvantage

Wavy lines labelled: Colonialism, Post Colonialism, Racism, Sexism, Erosion of Indigenous Women's Traditional Status

Lower boxes: Work, Education, Careers, Leadership

Bottom box: **Indigenous Women in Australian Society**

3.3 INDIGENOUS WOMEN STILL GOING STRONG

3.3.1 A statistical portrait of Indigenous women

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women make up nearly 51% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population which according to 2001 census figures was estimated to be 458,520 persons or 2.4 per cent of the total Australian population. Of that figure, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women together were believed to number 216,000. This was 2% of the total women living in Australia (Office of Status of Women, 2003).

The age profile for Australia's Indigenous women is much younger than for other Australian women with over one third (37%) of Indigenous females aged under 15 years, compared to one fifth (20%) of all Australian females. Only 3% of Indigenous women were aged over 65 years, compared to 14% of all women (Office of Status of Women, 2003). See figure 3.3.

Source: Source: ABS, 1998, Experimental projections of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population, 30 June 1996 to 30 June 2006, (Cat. no. 3231.0) and ABS, 2001, Australian Demographic Statistics Quarterly, June Quarter 2001, (Cat. no. 3101.0)ABS. Cat. nos. 3231.0 and 3101.0.
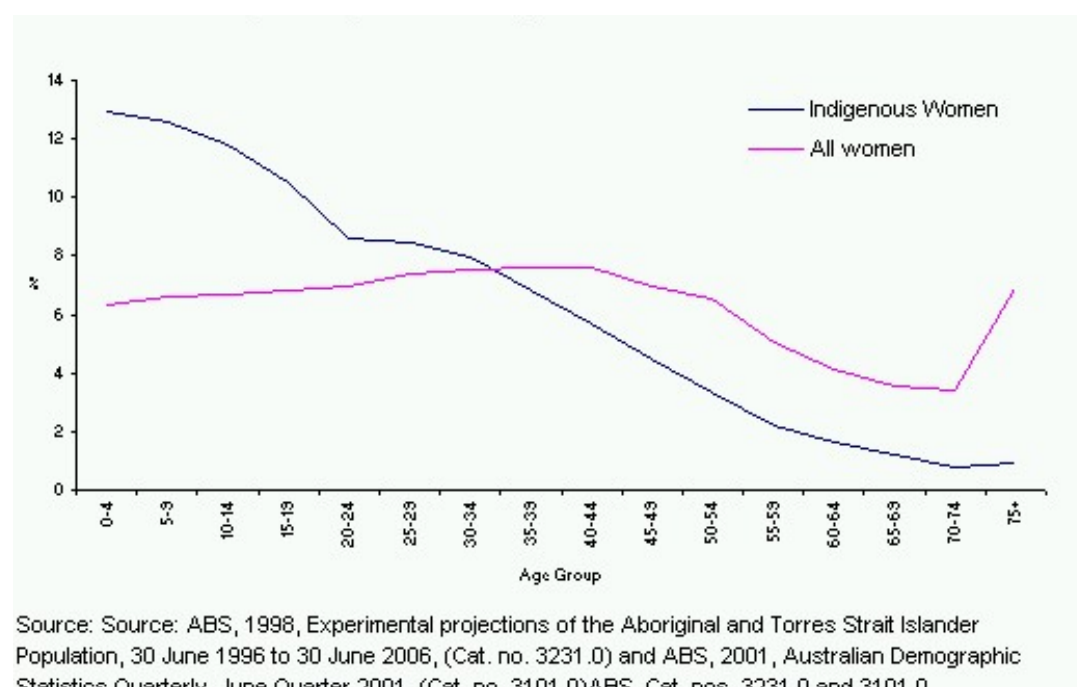
Figure 3.3   Age structure: Indigenous and all Australian women

3.3.2 Location of Indigenous women in Australian society

This section of the review describes the position of Indigenous women in contemporary society. It highlights their current status and discusses their changing roles from traditional times, through the transition periods of protection and assimilation to present day. It will critique previous research on Indigenous women and emphasise the importance of appropriate research to provide a voice for a marginalised group of women. In doing so, it will also tell of the incredible strength of Indigenous women who despite their current disadvantage and the many barriers they face, continue to pursue personal and professional aspirations.

There is a growing body of literature which has emerged in recent years to confirm that Indigenous women's place in traditional society was pivotal to Indigenous life. Aboriginal women were the major providers of the food for the family. Whilst the men hunted the larger game, the women through their daily gathering of roots, berries and small game contributed to 80% of the group requirements. They also had important roles in terms of rearing children; healing the sick; passing on lore and administering the law; maintaining sacred sites and practising spiritual rituals (Bin-Sallik, 2000; Brock, 1989; Gale, 1978; Kelly, 1990; White, 1998). There was a division of labour according to gender, but women's roles were not subordinate (Behrendt, 1993) but rather complementary (Berndt & Berndt, 1985; Bin-Sallik, 2000). Knowledge and practices specifically related to women were known as *women's business* and excluded men as participants and observers.

Ronald and Catherine Berndt were anthropologists who conducted research for forty years with Aborigines from many parts of Australia. They wrote in their classic text "The World of the First Australians" (1985), about how past writers, mostly male, had emphasised a dichotomy between men and women's spiritual activities, leading men to be classified as "sacred" and women as "profane" (Berndt & Berndt, 1985, p. 256). The Berndts observed that women played parts in rituals directed by men, but also had their own as well, which men were not

allowed to witness (Behrendt, 1993). Furthermore, much sacred ritual and symbolism related equally to men and women. Aboriginal Dreaming stories featured female ancestral spirits who were frequently described as more powerful beings than their male counterparts (Berndt & Berndt, 1985). The extract from the following story of the *Kuniya and Liru* illustrates this point:

> While the Kuniya people were staying at Ayers Rock, however, life did not remain peaceful. A party of venomous snake men, the Liru, were travelling around in the Pitjantjatjara country causing a lot of trouble. The Liru camped at Katatjuta (Mount Olga) and then decided to approach Ayers Rock to attack the Kuniya. They were led by the great warrior Kulikudgeri, and travelling in a large group they crossed the sand hills and arrived at the camp of a powerful Kuniya woman named Pulari. Pulari had separated herself from the rest of her people as she had just given birth to a child. Enraged and desperate to protect her child, she sprang at the Liru with her child in her arms, spitting out the essence of disease and death, or arukwita. Many of the Liru were killed, but they continued to attack. A young Kuniya warrior challenged Kulikkudgeri to a fight to the death and the Liru man, after an arduous battle, fatally wounded the Kuniya man who crawled away over the sandhill. Kuniya Inkridi, the mother of the slain youth, then rose in a fury and struck Kulikudgeri a great blow on the nose with her digging stick. He died in agony, his blood streaming over the surface of the land, leaving stains on the rock that remain today. Kuniya Inkridi mourned for her lost son. She covered her body in red ochre and sand and wailed into the night. She spat out arukwita, the essence of death and disease, and any man approaching that site today will be stricken. (Isaacs, 1980, p. 35-37).

Aboriginal women played an important role in traditional life that was not acknowledged or understood by the newcomers, who tried to accommodate Aboriginal women's status within European patriarchal frames of references. Accordingly, Aboriginal women's roles in traditional society were overlooked or else distorted due to a male bias in early reporting that "rendered the Aboriginal woman invisible and subordinate" (Choo, 1993, p. 82). Tindale, who

constructed the well known map of Aboriginal Australia, divided the land into categories according to the practice of male circumcision (Behrendt, 1993; Brock, 1989). Consequently, Aboriginal women's importance in traditional society was devalued (Behrendt, 1993) and Aboriginal women were considered like European women to be of inferior status. This together with a belief that Aboriginal women were of low sexual morals led to a generally negative view of Aboriginal women (Richardson, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; White, 1998).

Since first contact between Aboriginal people and European colonisers, Aboriginal women have been relegated the position of inferior beings. Considered less than Aboriginal men and inferior to white women, even more so to white men, Aboriginal women have been forced to endure a history in the post contact period that was dominated by abuse, exploitation, hardship, poverty, racism and discrimination (Choo, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Under Protection and later Assimilation policies, Aboriginal women found that their traditional roles evaporated. They no longer were responsible for supplying food for their families because basic rations of tea, flour and salt were provided on the mission. Since many were removed from their traditional lands and relocated on missions and reserves, they could no longer practise their daily food gathering exercises. Their parenting responsibilities were taken from them, as their children were either placed in children's dormitories or sent away to institutions and foster homes (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). As educators, they were replaced at the mission schools by teachers. They were forbidden to speak their languages and practise their culture. Consequently, this made it difficult for them to pass on their language, stories, art, dance, customs, marriage arrangements, healing and spiritual practices. On the reserves, Aboriginal women were frequently sexually abused by white male managers and traded for sexual favours with other officials (Behrendt, 1993). Aboriginal women and girls sent away to work, often returned pregnant to their former masters (Behrendt, 2000; Blake, 2001).

The experiences of Aboriginal people "living under the Act"[7] and stories of their survival are only currently being discussed more openly by the general Australian public. Yet there are many Australians who still do not accept what it was like for Aboriginal people living on the mission, being placed in institutions, having their meagre wages stolen and children removed and put in orphanages or foster homes (Hollingsworth, 2006). Apart from communities that were located close to missions, most of the Australian public's knowledge of settlements was limited to vague information provided by contrived media and government reports (Blake, 2001). From personal experience, talking with students, and through personal conversations in social gatherings, I am constantly concerned by the level of ignorance and denial, or worse comments in regard to taking children away, that it was "for their own good". There are still only a small percentage of current Australians willing to say "sorry" for what has happened to the First Australians. Clearly, Aboriginal people have failed to win the support of the Australian people in their fight to regain their rights as owner-dwellers in this land.

3.3.3 Being strong – the identity of Indigenous women

Despite a history of oppression, Indigenous people worldwide have remained strong. A number of empirical studies (Bruno, 2003; Gool, 1997; Richardson, 1993; White,1998) have highlighted the "strength and resilience" of Aboriginal women in the face of colonization and oppression. They have also noted their quiet strength, pride in identity and determination to bring about change for the better for their families and communities (Bin-Sallik, 2000; Bruno, 2003). Bin Sallik's (2000) collection of 12 narratives of university educated Aboriginal women called *Aboriginal women by degrees*, of which I was privileged to be a contributor, is an example of Aboriginal women's achievements in the face of family responsibilities and life challenges. That strength is best described as being grounded in cultural and spiritual connections, sharing and family as the following quote shows:

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[7] "Living under the Act" was a term used to describe the lives of Aboriginal people who were subject to special acts of parliament such as the 1897 Queensland Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act which was used to control all aspects of their lives.

We had no money. Nature was our bank. We looked after its capital and drew on its interest. Our social organisation and ties were, and still are, so strong. They underpin our daily lives. Our extended family was the human side of our world. It gave us support. We developed as a people by interacting within that family. Sharing also took place at a deeper level than the food and material products of our skills. Sharing was so strong on the spiritual level. There were also the sensitive and emotional levels of sharing with a language of silence. We were never afraid of silence (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 2000, p. 167).

Indigenous women have recognized the need to be strong and have understood that strength to be drawn from other women. Bruno (2003) speaks of how "the words of our grandmothers are inspiring to Aboriginal women" (p. 14) and the importance of listening to the Elders. My own beliefs were articulated in my chapter in Bin-Sallik's book. In speaking of my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother I said: "It is easy to believe in the strength that has found its way down the generations to women of my generation. We need it to survive the hard times!" (White, 2000, p. 94).

That strength is perceived as an integral part of the Aboriginal women's identity which is derived from the input and influence of other women so that "mothers, grandmothers and other female relatives provide a 'cultural core', passing on knowledge which is the basis of identity" (Keen, as quoted in Gool, 1997, p.19). However, the cultural identity of Aboriginal women has "suffered a series of crises" brought about by a history of oppression and perpetuated by racism and negative stereotyping (Gool, 1997, p. 24). Furthermore, negative portraits and ill-treatment have left some Aboriginal people with a deep sense of "shame" (Gool, 1997, p. 23). In addition, oppression leads to questioning one's own "worth, identity and sense of belonging" (Bruno, 2003, p. 63). Accounts of conditions and treatment of workers found that most Aboriginal workers were "treated like dirt" (Blake (2001, p. 130) or "little better than animals" (Blake, 2001, p. 31), one thirteen year old being forced "to have his meals on the tankstand like a dog" (p. 131). The impact of such treatment

has permanent effects on Aboriginal people, so that today they "may well have limited aspirations and low self esteem" and "expectations of racism and rejection by the wider society" (Gool, 1997, p. 5). The self-identity of Indigenous students and its impact on their achievements in education are discussed in Section 3.6: Indigenous women and education.

Historically, the Aboriginal identity has been constructed by others. Legal historian John McCorquodale in his analysis of over 700 pieces of legislation, found 67 different definitions of Aboriginal people recorded throughout Australian history (Johnson, 1991). Many of these definitions were associated with skin colour or derogatory forms of address. Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still subject to being defined by others as the Commonwealth definition below shows:

> An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent; who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives (Department of Science, Education & Training, 2006).

However Aboriginal people themselves have found ways to redefine themselves through revitalization of the culture and languages, land ownership claims and native title and by usage of local names such as

- Murri (Queensland);
- Koori (New South Wales; Victoria);
- Nyoongah (SW, WA);
- Yolngu (northeastern Arnhem Land) (Author's personal knowledge).

These connections to place and to people establish a sense of belonging (Crump, 2001). In particular, Indigenous women emphasise their identity through their cultural connections by referring to one another as sisters, sister girls or by the language term "tiddas". (Author's personal knowledge)

3.3.4 Oppression from within our own communities

An issue rarely discussed but one that needs addressing is the oppression of Indigenous people from within their own communities. This concept is labelled "the oppressed oppressing" which occurs when colonized people take on the attributes of the colonizers and begin to oppress each other (Bruno, 2003). Aboriginal people oppressing each other, as a direct result of colonization, has taken several forms, one being oppressive forms of leadership and control as exhibited in community management and community organisations. This occurs when individuals or families gain control of community resources and use their power for their own personal gain and that of their family members. This may have implications for such things as allocation of housing and employment to the point that some members of the Indigenous community are being denied assistance or opportunities thereby maintaining their disadvantage (Appo, 2003a; Pearson, 2000a). Pearson (2000a) concludes that the manipulation and corruption of Aboriginal values and relationships has resulted in a system in which involves exploitation and manipulation and a flawed system of governance in Aboriginal communities, a feature of which is the "concentration of power and resources in certain families and denial of power and resources to other families" (p. 48).   A consequence of nepotism and family fighting is that much energy is wasted in disputes that prevent communities and individuals from making progress (Pearson, 2000a).

Another disturbing feature is the oppression perpetuated against Indigenous women by Indigenous men in the form of domestic violence. Family violence has been linked to "disempowerment with its roots in colonization" and dispossession (Aboriginal Women's Taskforce into Domestic Violence, 2000; Cooper & Morris, 2005). Colonisation has had long lasting impacts on the lives of Indigenous people creating "complex and cumulative forms of traumatic stress that may be articulated as physical, emotional and spiritual distress; misuse of alcohol and other drugs; and violent behaviour arising from a rage that is directed towards the self and other close family members" (Astbury, et al., 2000).   Phillips (2003) says "turning the pain inwards" or

towards those closest occurs as a result of having no recourse, grieving or healing processes to deal with oppression. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence (1999) revealed that the level of violence in Indigenous communities is much worse than is reported or openly acknowledged. Many Aboriginal women are reluctant to speak about the abuse they suffer (Monture-Angus, 1995; White, 1998) for a number of reasons including fear of further violence, their unwillingness to take action against their partner, and anxiety about reporting to authorities. Domestic violence undermines women's ability to reach their potential and participate fully in employment, careers, educational and leadership opportunities.

3.3.5 Racism and Indigenous women

Since white settlement, Indigenous Australians have experienced extensive and persistent racism from white Australians (Martin, 2003). Although much overt racism has been arrested, it is still deeply embedded in Australian education, legal, political and social structures (Hollingsworth, 2006; Moreton-Robinson, 2003). The evidence suggests that Indigenous women experience racism differently from Indigenous men, and that they experience sexism differently from Australian women (Hollingsworth, 2006). For some, racism is the most problematic, whilst others find racism and sexism equally oppressive (Pettman, 1992; Moreton-Robinson, 2003). Racism and sexism are formidable barriers to the rights and freedoms of Indigenous women.

The strong relationship between racism and sexism in Australia is based on a dominant patriarchal system which devalues Aboriginal women and other Indigenous women (Huggins, 1994; Pettman, 1992;Smith, 1999). Racism and sexism are not idiosyncratic phenomena but "articulate and are articulated through structures of power in society" (Pettman,1992, p. 54). This dynamic has been especially manifest in the sexual domination of Aboriginal women from the beginning of white settlement (Jebb & Haebich, 1992; Moreton-Robinson, 2003)). This 'gendered racism' has produced stereotypes of Aboriginal women in terms of their sexuality (Pettman, 1992, p. 72). The image of a 'morally permissive Aboriginal society' is a stereotype which has muted the realities of

'rape, abduction and exploitation', and the 'interplay of racism and sexism and the powerlessness of Aboriginal women' (Evans as cited in Jebb & Haebich, 1992, p. 29). Female workers who were hired from the missions to work as domestics were often subject to sexual harassment and exploitation as if it were "part of your duties, part of the deal" (cited in Blake, 2001, p. 132).

The stereotyping of Indigenous women as promiscuous is still current and partially explains the continued exploitative harassment and sexual abuse experienced by Indigenous women (Pettman, 1992; Moreton-Robinson, 2003). Indigenous women must also cope with sexism from within their own communities. Indeed, 'black male chauvinism" may well be a major cancer which attacks the fabric of Aboriginal communities (Huggins, 1994). This is exacerbated when Indigenous men are challenged by assertive, upwardly mobile Indigenous women whose careers appear to be impeded by their own Indigenous men. The stress of attack from within their own group is a difficult experience for Indigenous women who explain that: "It is not easy being a black woman at the top of a white bureaucracy. The hardest part has been dealing with chauvinist males (mostly black) who are threatened by a woman having this much power" (O'Shane, in Huggins, 1991, p. 8).

The struggle that Aboriginal women experience in nurturing careers is increased by their perceived lack of support from their "white sisters". In the struggle against sexism, Aboriginal women find it difficult to join with white women because colonial history has identified them as treacherous to Indigenous women. Indeed there is evidence that they were more brutal bosses than their husbands, inflicting inhumane treatment on Aboriginal women in domestic service (Huggins, 1994; Ward, 1987). This "gendered racial oppression" (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 24) has also been experienced by black women in other contexts (hooks, 1981; Huggins & Blake, 1992).

3.4   INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

The racism that Indigenous people generally experience is partially prevalent in employment and the workplace. Indigenous people are not represented in the

general employment opportunities. They are mainly found in "identified" positions in Government departments, related agencies, and Indigenous community organizations. If they do find employment, Indigenous people are impeded by lack of opportunities in career development. They are more often relegated to less skilled jobs, and are subjected to discrimination, racist attitudes and practices by staff and their employers (Hunter & Gray, 1999). As a result, when faced with such barriers, Indigenous people are reluctant to apply for or remain in mainstream employment (Hunter & Gray, 1999). Consequently, the unemployment rate of Indigenous people is four times the national average, compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

In particular, Indigenous women's participation in the work force and the wider community have been characterised by discrimination that has disadvantaged them both as women and as Indigenous people (Goodall & Huggins, 1992; Runciman, 1994). Their unequal position in Australian society has been highlighted in research reports (Daylight & Johnstone, 1986; Runciman, 1994). To redress these inequities, Indigenous women for many years have demanded opportunities to have more control over their lives and to be more independent of welfare "in accordance with their traditions, chosen way of life and (their) cultural identity" (Daylight & Johnstone, 1986, p. 4). Having a job is seen as a step towards gaining that independence, but the journey is not an easy one.

In 2000, approximately 47,500 Indigenous women aged 15 and over were estimated to be in paid employment with 8,300 unemployed - a labour force participation rate of 43%. In comparison, the labour force participation rate for Indigenous men was 64% and non-Indigenous females and males were 55% and 73% respectively. Unemployment rates recorded for Indigenous women in 2000 was estimated to be 15% compared to 20% for Indigenous males. This was still higher than for non-Indigenous males at 7% and non-Indigenous females at 8% (Office of the Status of Women, 2003). See figure 3.4.
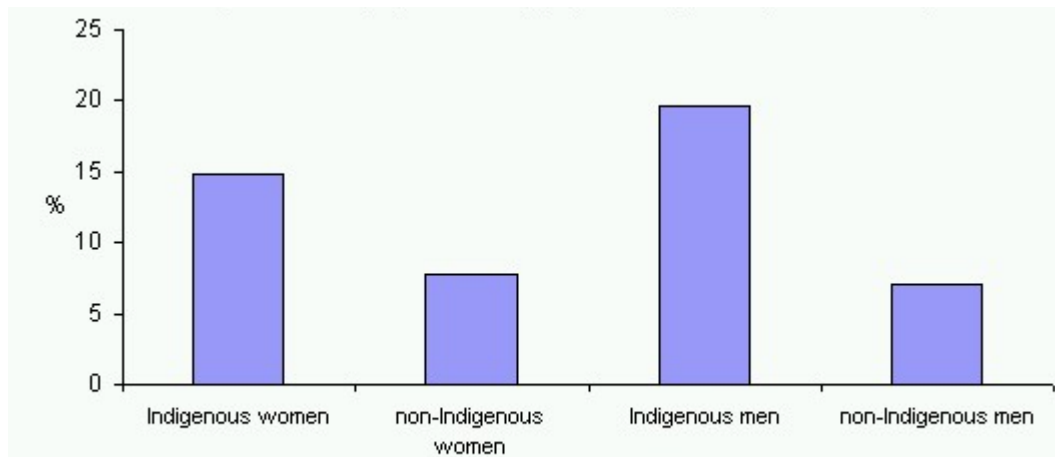
Source: ABS, Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

Figure 3.4: Unemployment rates, population aged 15 years and over, 2000 (Office of the Status of Women, 2003).

Australian 2001 census data relating to where Indigenous women are employed revealed that they are mainly found working in industries such as Government Administration and Defence (19%), Health and Community Services (19%), Education (14%) and Retail Trade (12%). For non-Indigenous women, these were similar areas of employment except for Government Administration and Defence (Office of the Status of Women, 2003). See Figure 3.5 for a comparative distribution.

Source: ABS, 2001 Census of Population and Housing, customised data
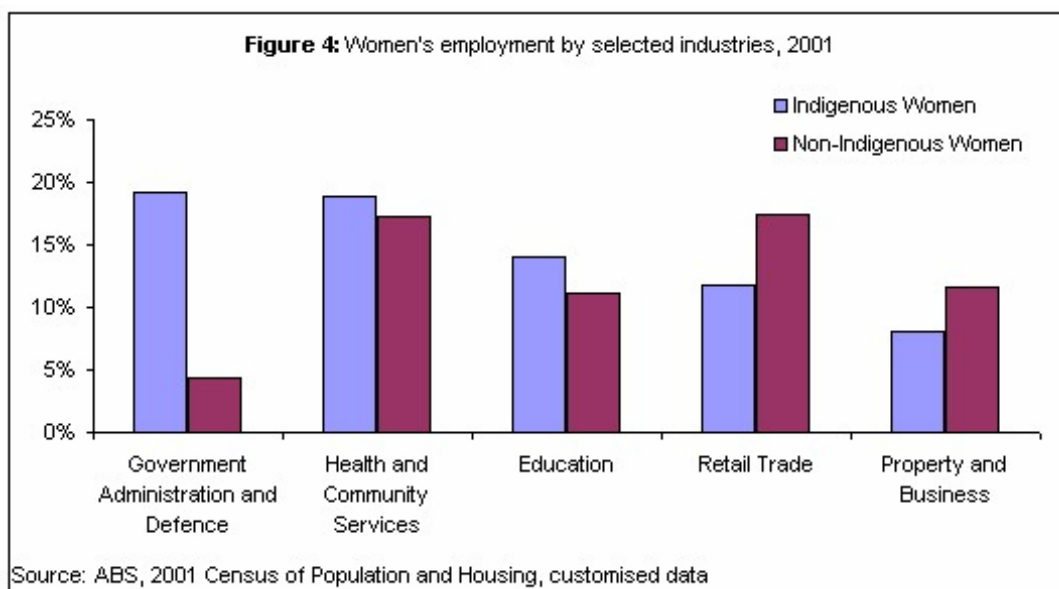
Figure 3.5: Women's employment by selected industries, 2001 (Office of Status of women, 2003).

Moreover, there is a distinct gender distribution in the type of work that Indigenous people do. Men tend to have manual labouring jobs, while Indigenous women are more likely to have clerical positions (ATSIC, 2000). Few Indigenous people are employed in top level professional and para-professional areas. Compared to non-Indigenous women, more Indigenous women are employed as labourers or clerks and less as professionals or managers (Runciman, 1994). An analysis of the above data raises concerns about the high unemployment rates and low labour force participation rates of Indigenous women. It also poses questions about why employed Indigenous women are clustered into such a narrow range of occupations and service industries.

The main barriers to successful labour market participation for Indigenous women have been found to be lack of education and qualifications, geographical location, racism, and family obligations (Runciman, 1994; Hunter & Gray, 1999; White, 1998). Marital status is an important determinant of employment and contributes to a disincentive to work (Gray & Hunter, 1999). Indigenous women's childcare and other family responsibilities discourage them from looking for work (Hunter & Gray, 1999). Marriage, early pregnancy, and kinship were similarly reported as significant socio-cultural factors impacting on black Zimbabwean women's educational advancement (Gregory, 1998).

An analysis of the childcare needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families within Brisbane and environs concluded that many Indigenous parents may be reluctant to send their children to non-Indigenous child care services for cultural reasons. The care of children has always been seen as the responsibility of family and extended family (Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy, 2001). Secondly, the majority of non-Indigenous childcare services were found to be culturally inappropriate and did not make Indigenous people feel welcome. The report recommended more places be set aside for Indigenous children, the development of appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources for use in childcare centres, employment and training of more Indigenous people in child care services and the provision of information to Indigenous families about childcare services

available in their area. Given that Indigenous women have large families, and become mothers at younger ages, the lack of appropriate childcare facilities is a major factor in Indigenous women's participation in employment. It also has ramifications for education, careers and leadership.

Regardless of these disincentives, Indigenous women place high priority on education and employment for achieving equity and building better futures for themselves and their families. Many Indigenous women are returning to study to increase their job opportunities, to obtain recognised qualifications and to increase their confidence and skills (Daylight & Johnstone, 1986). Yet even with professional qualifications, appropriate employment is not always forthcoming due to entrenched racism and the stalling of careers by sexist obstructions, both within Indigenous communities and in the wider society (White, 1998). A university degree is no guarantee of employment (Gray &Hunter, 1999; Herbert, 2003). This phenomenon is examined in the Section 3.6, Indigenous women and education. Also, long-term and intergenerational unemployment has generated a sense of fatalism amongst some Indigenous people who have become resigned to their circumstances (Hunter, 2000). The effort of trying to be educated or trying to secure employment is that it may be articulated into a "what's the point" or a "why bother" attitude when the barriers appear to be unsurmountable.

It has been argued that many of the barriers that Indigenous women face can be described as "part of a larger pattern of systematic discrimination and the continuing association of women with child care and home maintenance responsibilities" (Runciman, 1994, pp. 8-9). Furthermore, labour market participation, lack of employment opportunities and appropriate career support in contemporary society can be attributed to the influences of a colonial past which has discriminated against Indigenous women on the basis of their Aboriginality and gender (Runciman, 1994).   This double oppression compounds to prevent Indigenous women from achieving careers of substance.

As a result of entrenched sexism and racism in employment, few Indigenous women are employed in the private sector and Indigenous women continue to

be clustered in lower paid, lower status public sector employment (Office of the Status of Women, 2005; Runciman 1994). When employed, in the public sector, Indigenous women also face discrimination because of the tendency to promote and appoint Indigenous men to more senior positions even though there may be Indigenous women who are more qualified and senior in length of service. This latter practice mirrors what happens to many non-Indigenous women in their efforts to move into senior management positions (Goodall & Huggins, 1992).

Therefore, given the evidence that poor experiences in the workforce influence career prospects of university educated Indigenous women, the following became the first specific research question: What experiences do Indigenous women have in entering and maintaining their position in the workforce?

3.5   INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND CAREERS

A career is no longer defined as a linear progression within a single organisation, but today is more broadly understood as a "lifelong process of work-related activities" (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005, p. 168). However, while the definition has changed, the approaches to understanding career development has not, in that career literature and career development theory has been based predominantly on the career experiences of men. There has been a lack of the recognition of differences between the way women and men's careers evolve, and the contextual elements which impact on women's careers (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). This is despite the reality that more women are working and contributing to the economic lives of their families and communities.

More Australian women are participating in paid work than ever before. In March 2005, 69 per cent of women aged 15-64 were in paid work. However, while the gap is closing, there is still disparity between rates of pay for men and women. In November 2005, women earned 84.8 per cent of men's full time average earnings (Office of the Status of Women, 2003). It appears that

although more women contributing to workforce numbers, it has not meant equal workforce participation for women.

Furthermore, what has been revealed is that although women's participation in the labour force has increased dramatically over the last ten years, there has been little change in the type of work women perform and their status in management positions. In contrast to the wider range of occupations enjoyed by men, women generally are still concentrated in narrow areas such as community services, trade, manufacturing and clerical areas (Bellamy & Ramsay, 1994; Phillips & Imhoff, 1997).

This historical concentration of women's employment in these occupational areas is attributed to "glass wall barriers" which prevent women (and some men) from moving between functional areas or from service division into line management (Still, 1995, p. 107). A study on the stereotyping of U.S Business Leaders found that women hold 50.3 per cent of all management and professional positions yet only 7.9 percent of 500 top earners and 1.4 percent of 500 CEOs are women (Nierenberg & Marvin, 2005). The study also confirmed previous research which shows that senior women executives consistently point to gender-based stereotyping as a major barrier to their advancement. Another study undertaken jointly by Catalyst[8] and UK-based organisation Opportunity Now[9] entitled *Breaking the Barriers: Women in Senior Management in the UK* (2000) was used to compare the previously researched experiences of women in senior management in the United States and Canada. In all three countries senior women identified male stereotyping and preconceptions of women's roles and abilities as problematic to their career progression. This suggests that the glass ceiling is still firmly in place.

In the Australian context, the overall position of Australian women in senior management is poorer than for women in other developed countries. Table 3.2 was constructed from figures obtained from the Australian Government

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[8]Catalyst is a leading research and advisory organisation working with businesses and professions to build inclusive environments and expand opportunities for women at work (Catalyst, 2006)

[9] Opportunity Now is a business-led campaign that works with employers to realise the economic potential and business benefits that women at all levels contribute to the workforce. (Opportunity Now, 2006)

Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) and provides an international comparison of the percentage of women executive managers and boards of Directors.

Table 3.2:   An international comparison of women executive managers and board directors

Country	Women executive managers	Women board directors
Australia	10.2% (2004)	8.6% (2004)
United States	15.7% (2002)	13.6% (2003)
Canada	14.0% (2002)	11.2% (2003)
South Africa	14.7% (2004)	7.1% (2004)

(EOWA Australian Censuses of Women in Leadership, 2004)

More detailed census figures reported for the top 200 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange at 30 June, 2004 (EOWA Australian census of women executive managers, 2004) reveal that women are seriously under-represented at senior levels in these companies.

- Women hold 10.2% of Executive Management positions (compared with 8.8% in 2003)

- 42.0% of companies have <u>no</u> women executive managers (49.1% reported in 2003)

- Women hold just 6.5% of all line positions identified (up from 4.7% reported in 2003)

- 62.1% of women occupy support positions as opposed to line positions that ultimately lead to CEO or Board appointments, (compared with 31.4% of men in support positions)

- 37.9% of women executive managers are in line positions compared with 68.6% of men

The under-representation of women at senior level in management has been attributed to a number of behavioural and personal factors such as family commitments; interruptions to careers; sexist attitudes and behaviours; and structural impediments particularly within organisations, that together and separately impact on women's potential to achieve their full potential as managers (Adler, Laney & Packer, 1993; McMaster & Randall, 1995). Furthermore, structural and societal obstacles such as deficit theories about women's inadequacies and incapacities as well as expectations about women's roles, and societal patriarchal power structures, discriminate against women generally (Ozga, 1993). The literature concludes that to help women achieve their management potential, they require encouragement, and support through development and training, mentoring and networking as well as addressing organizational issues such as gender stereotyping and promotional opportunities (Nierenberg & Marvin 2005; EOWA, 2004).

In managing careers, women have often had to make choices between home and career, or constructed "accommodated careers" as they juggle family and career roles (Limerick, 1995, p. 69). Although men, as well as women, are now making career decisions which take into account family commitments and lifestyle choices, it is women who more often feel the overload of balancing work and family commitments (Alderton & Muller, 2000; Marshall, 1984). Contextual factors such as family responsibilities and family structure play a significant part in women's careers as they continue to juggle primary child-caring responsibilities, demands of workforce participation along with other career development issues (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). Multiple role research has found that women experience a higher level of role overload which impacts on their health and well-being (Alderton & Muller, 2000). Consequently, the cost of balancing multiple roles makes managerial positions unattractive or unattainable for many women but especially for Indigenous women whose cultural obligations to family are embedded within a complex kinship system.

If women are generally absent from management positions then Indigenous women are more so. Obstacles to their career advancement are often subtle

and systemic. Indigenous women do not have access to the same networks as do non-Indigenous women or men. Furthermore, they are often discouraged from pursuing career advancement due to their lack of confidence and family and community responsibilities which impact on their work and careers (Gool, 1997).

There is extensive literature on the barriers that women face in their career development and the importance of what careers mean to women. Past studies on women's career development have focused on gender issues including career aspirations, choices and decisions, barriers to women's career development, progress in chosen fields and experiences in leadership and management (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). Current literature suggests that traditional career development theories have limited applicability to minority groups and women, and that there is a paucity of career development research on women from culturally diverse backgrounds, especially Indigenous women (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). No comprehensive theoretical model of career development has been developed for racial and ethnic minorities (Prosser, 2001) nor has the similar needs of women within those groups been adequately addressed (Hackett and Byers, 1996). Existing career theories fail to consider the influences of cultural values, ethnic and racial identity and the intersection of gender/race/ethnicity with the career development of culturally diverse groups of women (Prosser, 2001).

Issues of culture and gender in women's work and careers are important since gender, race and class impact on the occupational choices an individual makes, and on the career paths of non-white women (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). Family, societal and cultural values can also influence career choices (Arthur, & David-Petero, 2000) and determine the careers of Indigenous women. Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998, p. 87) describe this as choosing "from a menu of limited options dictated by our gender, class, race and cultural backgrounds". Consequently, career paths are not easily achieved by women from minority groups trying to succeed in a dominant society.

Racism and sexism are inextricably linked and together limit opportunities by creating barriers for these women achieving their potential. Breaking the glass ceiling becomes an onerous task: "White women are limited by a glass ceiling, which can be broken, but black women face an unbreakable plexiglass" (Simpson, 1996, p. 186) or a 'lucite'[10] ceiling (Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998). Furthermore, the structured inequalities of our society (race, ethnicity, gender, class, able-bodiedness and sexual orientation) advantage those considered "norm", these being "middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied white women" (Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998, p. 88). It is this group on which the majority of career development literature is focused (Hite, 2004).

Within the research reviewed, there is a growing body of literature that examines the experiences of black women in career development. However, much of the research on black women's career development has been on African/Asian/Hispanic American women. While some of their experiences are similar to Indigenous Australian women, their differing histories and cultures, make it difficult to generalise their experience to the Australian context. Indigenous Australian women have closer links with Native American women and Canadian Aboriginal women, in terms their history of dispossession, spiritual ties with land, incarceration on reserves and the current state of communities. However, the survey of empirical studies concluded that there was also a distinct lack of research on the career needs of those groups as well (Still-Gohdes,1997). Canadian Aboriginal women are repeatedly forced to choose between observing cultural practices and their jobs or educational programs. In doing so, many "walked away from good jobs" (Kenny cited in Forbes, 2000).   This creates conflict between retaining their spiritual support and "getting ahead in the modern world" (Kenny, 2002). Kenny (2002) found that there was a great need for support for Indigenous women to achieve their educational and career goals without sacrificing their cultural ties - hard decisions faced by Indigenous women globally.

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[10] Lucite is an acrylic product that is incredibly strong that can be seen through but will not break like glass (Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell, 1998, p.89)

There is a dearth of literature relating to the career aspirations of Indigenous Australians and more specifically to Australian Indigenous women. For example, Poole and Langan-Fox's 1997 publication *Australian Women and Careers* does not touch on culture or mention Indigenous women. In addition, Bourke, Farrow, Tucker & McConnochie's (1991) publication on career development for Indigenous people refers only to the career development of staff in Indigenous higher education with no differentiation for gender. However, Crump (2001) in discussing educational and vocational counselling for Indigenous high school students provides some valid points about their low aspirations due to lack of role models and limited awareness of the range of career structures. Furthermore, Crump also points out the strong family influences on Indigenous students career choices; their reluctance to leave their communities and their low-self confidence that often results in poor interview performance.

Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998) in criticising the lack of research and literature on diversity issues in women's career development, conclude that further research in this area is necessary to change the face of career development literature. Similarly, Hite (2004) identifies the increasing need for research that considers gender and race when exploring career progress. It is this significant gap in the literature which the current research seeks to address.

Australian Indigenous people and career research

Two particular studies relating to Australian Aboriginal people and careers have importance for the current research on Indigenous women's careers. Gool (1997) explored the career aspirations of young Indigenous women, two groups of Aboriginal high school students. This study revealed that the "structural edifices within white Australian society" discriminated against Aboriginal people in education and employment and that these structural disadvantages were directly related to colonization, dispossession and racism. Gool's study also affirmed the importance of Aboriginal identity and culture to the career aspirations of young Indigenous women.

Garvey (2000) examined the factors affecting the career progression of ten Australian Aboriginal doctors, including four women. All participants were graduates from the University of Newcastle's medical program. As with the current study, Garvey provided an overview of the current disadvantage of Indigenous Australians, linking their current status to the need for training for Indigenous doctors as well as the difficulties that these doctors might face in achieving professional qualifications. The study outlined the issues affecting the participants as Aboriginal students in medical schools, and later as professional doctors. In addition to the issues affecting Indigenous students generally, Indigenous medical graduates found pressure on them to work in small towns and remote communities or work in Aboriginal health, which they described as an "internal obligation" to work with Aboriginal communities (p. 133). The participants reported that they were "swamped" by family, community and university expectations (p. 135) and most felt that there was a higher expectation of them, both as students and doctors, to be "twice as good" in their performances (p. 136). The graduates also were subject to racism and stereotyping with respect to themselves as doctors (their identity and competence) and the status of Aboriginal health. For example, some reported that they were subject to racist comments and generalizations about Aboriginal health, which they attempted to defend but often felt they were ill-equipped to do so. Other findings from the study, show that the graduates suffered additional stress in their professional lives due to the racism as well as the conflict between the workplace values (medical) and personal values (cultural). The challenge for them was to "straddle both worlds" and "talk white but think black" (p. 144) reinforcing the concept of the differing world views of Indigenous people.

Likewise, Arthur (1999), researching career aspirations and the meaning of work in the Torres Strait Islands of Northern Australia, found that Islanders have a different understanding of the meaning of "work" and "career". Arthur's research concludes that prior to European contact, the Islander concept of career might have included the change of status of boy to warrior and then later with the introduction of pearling to the Torres Straits, might have included

their recruitment to pearling boats by their older brothers or uncles. In a similar manner, girls achieved added status at adolescence. Arthur also writes that the historical construction of careers for Torres Strait Islanders has been unique in that their career paths have meant that they have had to leave the islands either temporarily or permanently to obtain work (Arthur, 1999). For those that have remained behind on the islands the work is mainly concentrated in health and education, where the island women are the larger number of employees, and that the greater number of managers are non-Indigenous people. This leaves little scope for career options in a community where unemployment rates are high and the Community Development Employment Projects Scheme (CDEP) has come be regarded by many as an acceptable career (Arthur, 1999).

A follow-up study by Arthur, Hughes, McGrath and Wasaga (2004) interviewed 59 of the 105 participants from the original cohort. The later study revealed that support from "members of their social networks" such as family and friends, and mentors was seen by the participants as helpful in achieving goals. The importance of post school qualifications was also highlighted. Some of the islanders expressed an interest in making commercial fishing a career, not only because it brought good returns but because it fitted with the "island" way of life. Most of the people interviewed indicated they did not receive enough information about careers to enable them to make choices and that they valued getting that information from "people who had direct knowledge" about them, rather than from institutions or departmental officers (Arthur, Hughes, McGrath and Wasaga, 2004, p. 4).

Indigenous Australian women's work and careers are impacted by racism and the legacies of a colonial past (Pettman, 1992). This both discourages and stops them from moving out of historically constructed positions of servitude into management roles and supervision of "white" workers (Huggins, 1992, 1994; Tripcony, 1995; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Walker, 1993). The few who succeed are subjected to further racism as well as sexism, extra pressure on performance expectations and additional burdens of responsibility (Nkweto Simmonds, 1992; Weiner, 1995). For female black managers, the

stereotypical attitudes towards black females, encourages lack of respect and sexual harassment in the workplace (Pettman, 1992; Walker, 1995). Black managers believe that they receive less support in accessing career building opportunities than their white counterparts and that lack of these valuable opportunities severely limits their promotional chances (Hite, 2004).

Indigenous women employment experiences do little to promote their careers. They are often stuck in lower level jobs with limited opportunities for advancement in their careers. They are thwarted in their career development by the barriers that most women face within a patriarchal system. Given these challenges, it is important to understand how university educated women negotiate their access to a professional career path. Consequently, the second specific research question is: How do Indigenous women move from being a member of the workforce to pursuing a career?

3.6   INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND EDUCATION

Education is often seen as the key to improving Indigenous labour market outcomes. This is based on the belief that increased educational attainments allow Indigenous Australians to improve their labour market opportunities by increasing their skills and competencies, self-esteem and confidence. However it is doubtful that formal education achievements single-handedly, succeed in improving jobs and careers for Indigenous people. Rather that educational policies and initiatives need to be considered and combined with other policies aimed at combating Indigenous labour market disadvantage (Gray & Hunter, 1999). The lack of success of Indigenous people in the area of work and careers is a complex issue, not simply due to lack of educational qualifications and living in areas where there are insufficient jobs. It is compounded by the quality of schooling for Indigenous learners, racism and discrimination, and lack of support in the workplace (Gray & Hunter, 1999; Crump, 2001).

Over the past twenty years the educational achievements of Indigenous Australians have produced mixed results. In some areas, there has been

significant progress, whilst others show little improvement. For example, the successes have included*:*

- Increased participation in early childhood and primary schooling;

- Year 12 retention rates have shifted from single digit to about 32 % in 1998;

- The involvement of Indigenous parents and communities in education has increased;

- Indigenous participation in university courses has increased from 5084 in 1991 to 7341 in 2001;

- Participation rates of Indigenous 15 to 24 year olds has reached levels about the same for other Australians (NIELNS Supporting Statement, 2000-2004)

In 2001, there were 56,988 Indigenous females in full-time school education, compared to slightly more Indigenous males (58,477). In keeping with the younger age-structure of the Indigenous population, just over two-thirds (68%) of Indigenous females in full-time education were in primary school, compared to 57% of all female students. Most Indigenous female students attended government schools (88%), compared to 69% of all female students (Office of the Status of Women, 2003).

However despite these improvements, lack of preschool participation, poor literacy and numeracy rates, lower participation in secondary school, poor retention from Year 10 to Year 12 (still only 43.6 per cent compared with 76.2 for non-Indigenous students), fewer and lower-level qualifications and consequent higher unemployment are still areas of concern (NIELNS Supporting Statement, 2000-2004). The lack of success in schooling has a profound impact on Indigenous student's identity, often into adulthood. Purdle, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Gunston & Fanshawe (2000) reported that a positive self-identity encouraged Indigenous learners to have a greater commitment and connection to schooling and that this in turn led to better participation, retention and success. The study also concluded that important influences on the shaping on young Indigenous people's identity were the

family and wider Indigenous community; significant people within the school such as teachers and Principals; school systems and activities including the curriculum, alternative programs and cultural activities; role models especially Indigenous role models; and the wider community (media, police). It was believed that a positive student identity was fostered in schools where Indigenous students felt they belonged, where teachers were warm, supportive and had positive expectations of the students, where the curriculum was relevant and meaningful and they received support and encouragement from family, peers and community (Purdle et al., 2000, p. x).

Despite these revelations, the education system has not responded in any significant way to addressing the learning needs of Indigenous students. What this means is that educational success has not been achieved across the board and that increasing educational attainment has not resulted in the anticipated positive outcomes in employment level (Gray & Hunter, 1999). An examination of the higher education participation validates this assertion.

From 1992 to 2001, the Indigenous people participating in higher increased significantly from 5084 to 7341 individuals. In the five years from 1996 to 2001, there was an increase of 15.8 percent in Indigenous undergraduates from 4919 to 5697 and in Indigenous postgraduate participation an increase of 12.2 per cent from 638 to 716 (Nelson, 2002). Table 3.3 provides an overview.

Table 3.3:   Indigenous students in higher education, 1992 to 2001

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
U/grad	3991	4152	4523	4909	4919	5274	5463	5770	5596	5697
P/grad	344	414	506	581	638	722	791	762	674	716
Enab*	749	992	1221	1303	1399	1464	1535	1469	1077	928
Total	5084	55558	6250	6793	6956	7460	7789	8001	7347	7341

*Enabling and non-award programs. (Department of Education Science and Training Higher Education Student Statistics Collection).

In 2001, 2,319 Indigenous women commenced study in higher education courses, their enrolments comprising 65% of Indigenous higher education

commencements. Thus Indigenous women substantially outnumbered Indigenous men with an increase of 4.7% on the number commencing in 2000. Another interesting feature of the statistics is that while commencements for Indigenous women increased over the period 2000-2001 [4.7%], commencements for Indigenous men declined [-3.8%] (Office of the Status of Women, 2003).

In addition, 670 Indigenous women completed higher education courses, almost double the number of Indigenous men (356). Nineteen per cent of these women completed a diploma or other award course, 60% completed a degree, and 21% completed a higher degree such as a postgraduate diploma, masters or doctorate (Office of the Status of Women, 2003).

An examination of the area of study found that women generally were less likely to complete courses in business, administration and economics, engineering and surveying, and science. They were found to be more likely than men to complete courses in arts, humanities and social sciences, health and education. Specifically, Indigenous women completed higher education courses in arts, humanities and social sciences [33%], education [28%] and health [23%] (Office of the Status of Women, 2003). Figure 3.6 depicts this trend.
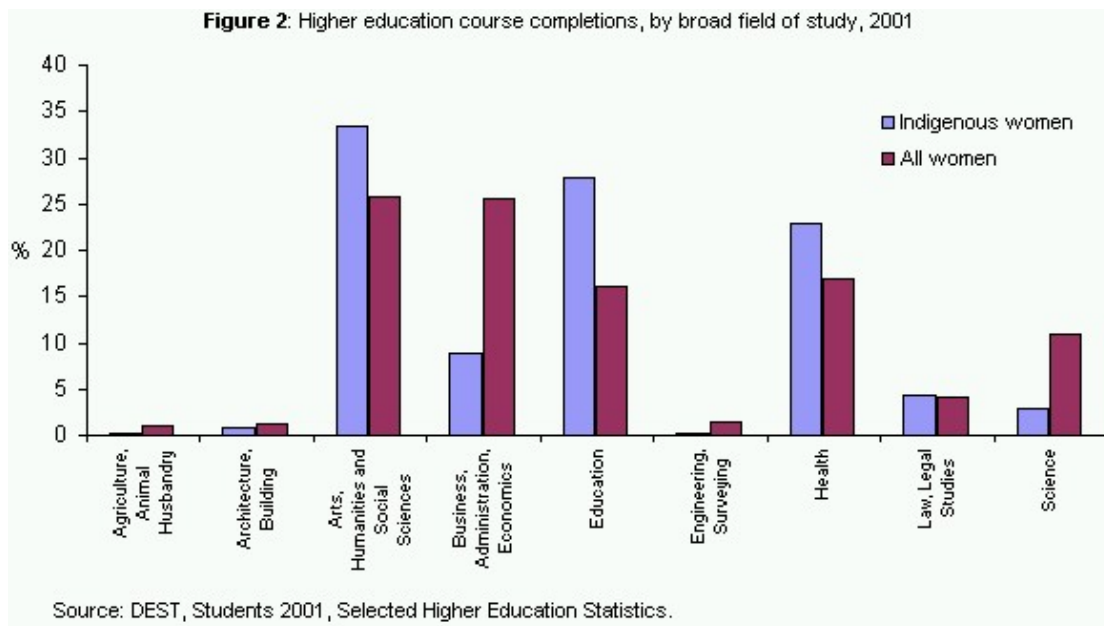
Figure 3.6: Higher education course completions, by broad field of study, 2001.

This information confirms that more Indigenous women than Indigenous men are participating in higher education and that they are successfully completing courses. Even though they are clustered in the more traditional areas of study, it would be expected that Indigenous women would be achieving employment from the success of their studies and potentially with better prospects than Indigenous males.

However, having a tertiary qualification is not necessarily an advantage and does not improve employment prospects. Research has shown that there has been no significant effect on the probability of employment for Indigenous graduates (Gray & Hunter, 1999) giving an impression that university education is not valuable (Herbert, 2003). This is a disappointing result given the great obstacles faced by Indigenous female students who are a unique group with diverse needs.

A profile presented by Encel (2000) has described some of the characteristics of the typical Indigenous student attending university as being:
- Likely to be older than a non-Indigenous student;
- More likely to be female;
- Less likely to have previous qualifications;

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- More likely to be admitted through special entry schemes;

- Less likely to enrol on-campus and more likely to be studying in a mixed mode capacity (mixture of internal and external such as away from base courses[11])

- On average take longer to complete their course

An understanding and appreciation of these qualities is a starting point for universities to develop practical strategies to assist Indigenous female students to be successful. Indigenous women's attempts at study are hampered by the lack of childcare, the difficulties of meeting academic requirements whilst maintaining family and community commitments and dealing with financial, health and personal issues. Furthermore, they are often faced with institutional racism, culturally inappropriate curriculum, and lack of institutional support (White, 1998). From the literature it is unquestionable that Indigenous people face enormous barriers in their pursuit of university qualifications, but they also respond well to positive university experiences (Bin-Sallik, 1991; Bourke et al., 1996; Bunda, 1998; Herbert, 2003; Nelson, 2002; White, 1998). In particular, positive relationships with teaching staff, the particular support by the Indigenous support units and flexible methods of study, have been emphasised by students in making a significant difference to whether they successfully complete their courses (Herbert, 2003).

Despite the many obstacles, Indigenous women have sought to better their position in their communities and in Australian society by taking up education. Education is perceived as the way to move forward from welfare dependency. However, even when Indigenous women achieve educational qualifications including university degrees, employment outcomes are often unsatisfactory. Therefore, it is important to explore how university experiences and qualifications have influenced the career prospects of Indigenous women.

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[11] Away from base allocations are paid to higher education institutions to assist Indigenous students studying through a combination of distance education and face-to-face teaching methods. Students study by distance mode from their home communities but also attend a number of residential blocks on campus (Nelson, 2002).

Consequently, the third specific research question is: How does a university education assist Indigenous women with work and career opportunities?

3.7 INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

An extensive study of the literature identified that there was little contextual and empirical information on Indigenous people and leadership and more specifically, Indigenous women and leadership. It is this lacuna in the research that the current study addresses. Only one study on Indigenous Australian leadership was identified, that being Cranney & Edward's (1998) concept study which led to the establishment of the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre (AILC). The Centre was established in 1999 to foster the development of leadership ability and skills of Indigenous peoples through leadership training courses, and the development of educational materials to support leadership training. Up to 2005, one hundred and sixty-one Indigenous community members, ninety of whom were Indigenous women have attended leadership courses in cities and regional centres (M. Yettica-Paulson, CEO, AILC, October, 2005).

In recent years, Indigenous issues have become more prominent within Australian society. In response to the demands for Indigenous control over Indigenous affairs, Indigenous people have endeavoured to take on a much more active role in decision making. At the fore-front has been the negotiation of native title and land rights, and associated heritage protection. Also, Indigenous people and communities are more involved in policy development and program implementation in areas such as housing, education and health – their participation is now a significant aspect of Indigenous community life and community capacity building. This has highlighted Indigenous leadership and the need to "encourage, support and prepare more emerging leaders" (Cranney & Edwards, 1998, p. 3).

Since 2001, it became apparent that Indigenous communities and governments had become disenchanted with the current Indigenous leadership. Many believed that the existing peak Indigenous body, the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) had failed to deliver improvements in Indigenous communities and that it was engaged in nepotism and corruption (Appo, 2003c; Richardson, 2003). Despite its significant budget, ATSIC as a body had limited success in alleviating the poor health of Indigenous Australians, the high levels of alcohol and drug abuse and the serious levels of violence in communities, the over-representation of Indigenous people in correctional centers, and the over-all welfare dependency of Indigenous people (Appo, 2003c; Pearson, 2000a). Because of concerns about the dysfunction and possible conflicts of interest within the organisation, in 2003 the federal government created ATSIS, as the separate administrative body of ATSIC. With the separation of powers, the ATSIC board was no longer responsible for the allocation of funding grants and became purely a policy making body. The decision generated opposition from sectors of the Indigenous community, which believed it to be a regressive step in Indigenous self-determination and management. However, there were just as many who welcomed the action, saying that a change in leadership and management was desperately needed "when the old ways, the old career system, fail to produce the results that we want in our communities" (Appo, 2003b, p.14).

Furthermore, paramount to these changes was the expressed need for the dismantlement of the "Aboriginal industry" which had maintained the status quo - malpractices of management and poor leadership which had crippled Indigenous community organizations and councils (Appo, 2003a, 2003b). A major concern was the claim that some community leaders had gained leadership positions "through fear, favour or corruption" (Appo, 2003a, p. 14). Indigenous leaders such as Pearson (2000a), called for a radical overhaul of the welfare system existing in Indigenous communities which has led to despair, helplessness and dysfunction in many Indigenous communities. Moreover, Pearson expressed that "central to the recovery and empowerment of Aboriginal society will be the restoration of Aboriginal values and Aboriginal relationships – which have their roots in our traditional society (Pearson, 2000a, p. 20).

A major challenge facing Indigenous community recovery is that current models of leadership which have dominated governance in Indigenous communities have "arisen from the colonial experience and the experience of institutional life in the reserves" (Pearson, 2000, p. 49). Pearson outlines four models which he believes have contributed the social breakdown and welfare dependency that is evident in many Indigenous communities today. First is the *White Dictator model*, the classic model which was articulated through the "iron-fisted" control of the Mission Manager or equivalent. This model of leadership demanded unquestioning obedience and is based on "white leadership and Aboriginal passivity" (p. 50). Second is the *Black Dictator Model*, similar to the previous model but with a black person in the dictator role. Aboriginal people use this model of governance "to concentrate power to themselves" (p. 50). The change of dictatorship from white to black is encapsulated in the phrase well known to Indigenous people "same horse, different jockey". The third model put forward by Pearson is the *White Saviour/Servant Model*. This is a prevalent model of governance in communities where white people with good intentions believe that they are making the right decisions for Indigenous people by saving and serving. The fourth model of governance is the *Black Saviour/Servant Model,* a black version of the third model and one which is the predominant approach of community leadership. The core problem of all four models is that they promote passivity and welfare dependence. They are also hierarchical with the leadership at "the top of the tree" (p. 57) and thus do not encourage Indigenous people at the community level to take responsibility for issues of concern as well as the future of their communities.

Leadership is not a new concept to Indigenous people. There are numerous Dreaming stories which tell the tales of Aboriginal heroes and heroines. Many stories also relate the courage of Aboriginal warriors such as Pemulwuy, Jandamurra, Dundalli and Yagan who in the early days of first contact rose up protest in against the white invaders (Dodson, 2003). Then there were there were the early freedom fighters like William Cooper, Yorta Yorta Elder who petitioned the King of England for Aboriginal representation in parliament; (Dodson, 2003); Jack Patten who organized in Sydney the 1938 "Day of

Mourning Conference and Protest"; Aboriginal leader Charles Perkins, organizer of freedom rides in the 1960s, which contributed to the holding of the 1967 referendum; and activists such as poet Kath Walker (Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal tribe). These early leaders emerged to challenge racism and to demand the rights of Aboriginal people. They were outstanding leaders of the old order - visionaries who led in the face of adversity, while others followed.

While such leadership pioneered Indigenous rights, there is a need for contemporary leadership which is able to take on the challenges of a rapidly changing world. This leadership requires being able "to work confidently and with influence in two worlds" (Cranney & Edwards, 1998, p. 5). Patrick Dodson, former Chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, in the Williamson Community Leadership Program Lecture (1998, May 11) emphasises the importance of community leadership when he says:

> For Aboriginal leaders, the social and moral obligation that comes with community leadership is life-long … leadership, moral, visionary and practical leadership, is to be found in every Australian community group, in every industry, in every sector.

Pearson (2000a, p. 37) argues that any successful new approach to community leadership approach must incorporate a "shoulder to shoulder" encouragement, a sharing of and devolution of power that gives "hands on" power to members of the community. Furthermore, Pearson advocates a system of governance that incorporates key values such as cooperation; unity; respecting rights; sharing power; taking responsibility; encouraging others; supporting each other. It would be seem that these values are in keeping with Indigenous traditional values, and women's styles of leadership characteristically described by the literature (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Previously, women's leadership was perceived as weak and undesirable, but in more recent years, the potential benefits of women's leadership and management is slowly being recognised. There has also been more recent

acknowledgment within the discourse of women's leadership about issues of social class, gender, race and ethnicity since women are not a homogenous group nor are "Indigenous women and women of colour" (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Indigenous Australian women were valued leaders in traditional society, particularly in groups that were based on matrilineal descent. However, the destruction of Indigenous society through colonisation altered Indigenous women's roles. While Indigenous women remain today as stalwarts of Indigenous culture and family life, they receive little recognition and opportunities as community leaders. Indigenous males have adopted the less admired characteristics of the patriarchal system in the form of a male-dominated leadership to the detriment of Indigenous females and Indigenous communities.

Indigenous women are often represented in leadership roles at the local level, but not at regional and national levels which are more the domain of Indigenous men. Some women who participated in the AIATSIS report told of how "established male leadership" made it difficult for their ideas and knowledge to be recognised (Cranny & Edwards, 1998, p. 17). The lack of voice and limited participation of Indigenous women in decision-making, also was a problem for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's Task Force on Violence (1999) who made recommendations that Community Councils and Local Government Shire Councils be comprised of fifty percent women members. In addition, the Task Force recommended that Indigenous women's input at all level of government be made possible by the establishment of a Queensland Indigenous women's network.

Although Indigenous women have regularly requested the opportunity to be involved in negotiations on issues that impact on their lives, families and communities, their requests have been denied. This situation has led to the development of a number of leadership projects that have brought Indigenous women together to undertake leadership training, to discuss women's issues and to promote women's leadership in communities. Programs specifically for Indigenous women include:

- The National Indigenous Women's Leadership program run by OIPC (previously detailed in Chapter 1);
- The Loorukin Indigenous Women's Leadership program established to address the lack of representation of Indigenous women in senior management and executive officer positions in the Northern Territory Public Service;
- Koori Women Mean Business helping Koori women build their capabilities as businesswomen;
- Black Women's Action in Education.

In addition to the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre programs, other general activities programs and projects promoting Indigenous leadership include:
- The Koori Communities Leadership Program;
- The Lingiari Foundation based in Sydney and committed to developing Indigenous leadership in communities;
- Elders Council or groups in communities;
- Koori Youth Leadership project (Victoria Health Promotion Foundation);
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Institute, Queensland Department of Education;
- The Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership: A partnership of the people of Cape York, the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments, and Griffith University. Noel Pearson is Director.
- The National Indigenous Youth Leadership Project
- Student leadership for Koori Kids (SLIKK)

Indigenous women can also be involved in women's leadership opportunities through such avenues as the Commonwealth Government's Office of Status of Women who administers the National Women's Leadership initiative and a National Women's Development Programme; the Queensland State Government's Office for Women activities; and the initiatives of the Australian Government's Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency. Indigenous women's participation in these broader programs and initiatives

has not yet been evaluated and is an area for further discussion and research. Specifically, Fitzgerald (2003, p. 13) endorses research that values and recognizes "Indigenous ways of knowing, acting and leading" which the current study does.

Despite such initiatives, much needs to be accomplished before Indigenous women can be actively engaged in community leadership and change. Furthermore, Indigenous women's leadership roles should be acknowledged as extensive and taxing. Adopting a leadership role requires a substantial amount of time and energy (The Office for Women, 2005). This means that women must face considerable pressure in balancing their work, family, community and leadership commitments. They are expected to represent their communities and to work as agents of change, challenging existing power structures creating for them a double bind (Fitzgerald, 2003). Indigenous women are recognized as strong leaders within their families and communities, but the cost of that leadership is not often acknowledged (The Office for Women, 2005). Indigenous women need to be supported in leadership aspirations since "the responsibilities of leadership for women in our communities are all-encompassing, incorporating everything from dealing with domestic violence to sending the children to school. Just identifying the extent of these responsibilities is exhausting" (Huggins, 2004, p.1).

Huggins (2004) emphasises the challenges facing Indigenous women in the leadership role, the core of which she believes is racism and sexism. To combat the "simultaneous oppressions" of racism and sexism, Indigenous women need to be proud of their identity and to maintain their "deepest connection and priority to Indigenous people", as Huggins does herself when she says: "When I look in the mirror each morning, I see a black face. As I look a bit longer, I see the face of a woman (Huggins, 2004, p. 2).

It is therefore important to understand and support Indigenous women's career development and to encourage them into positions of leadership both within their own communities and Australian society. Therefore the fourth

specific research question is: How do Indigenous women develop their leadership in contemporary society?

3.8   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the literature reviewed and in keeping with the purpose of the research which is to explore how Indigenous women negotiate their career development, the research questions below were formulated.

Research Question 1:

> What experiences do Indigenous women have in entering and maintaining their position in the workforce?

Research Question 2:

> How do Indigenous women move from being a member of the workforce to pursuing a career?

Research Question 3:

> How does a university education assist Indigenous women with work and career opportunities?

Research Question 4:

> How do Indigenous women develop their leadership in contemporary society?

3.9   SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the literature related to the career development of Indigenous women. A synthesis of the literature presented the experiences of Indigenous women generally, including their position in Australian society, to provide a backdrop against which their careers could be understood. It also explored four themes in the literature that were pertinent to the study: Indigenous women and work; Indigenous women and careers; Indigenous women and education; and Indigenous women and leadership.   Next, it explained how the research questions that were used to guide the study

evolved from these themes. Throughout the review, gaps in the literature were identified that this particular study may assist in filling. The following chapter introduces the research design and methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER 4:   DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and justify the research design chosen to explore how Indigenous women negotiate their career development. First, the theoretical underpinnings of the research are outlined. Next, the methodology and research methods used in the study are described and justified. This is followed by a description of how the data were analysed. Finally, the ethical considerations of the study are addressed. The chapter concludes with an overview of the research questions.

4.2   ESTABLISHING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Philosophical assumptions that guide research are related to beliefs about "the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 157), what the knowledge of the world means to those concerned, and how that knowledge is understood and gained through people exploring their meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In order to understand the meanings that Indigenous women make of their careers, that being the purpose of the study, the epistemological framework of constructionism was adopted as the most appropriate. As well as drawing on the traditions of constructionism, the study included the Indigenous world view to allow the Indigenous researcher to work with a group of Indigenous women in their own ways. This approach recognizes that often other epistemologies are legitimate to explore "truths" and reality of people "outside the dominant paradigm" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 260).

The research design also needed to consider the impact of previous research on Indigenous people so that the intended research did not further exploit or damage a particular group who has already been over-researched (Smith, 1999), but rather honoured the participants who had agreed to share their meanings and consequently their intimate thoughts and reflections. This was relevant for the choice of data collection strategies, the presentation and analysis of the data, and ethical considerations to ensure that these were

congruent with the cultural requirements of the women. Table 4.1 details the research design and the links between the theoretical underpinnings of the research and the choice of methodology and data gathering methods.

Table 4.1: Theoretical Framework of the Study

EPISTEMOLOGY	**Constructionism**
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	**Symbolic interactionism** **Indigenous construct**
METHODOLOGY	**Case study**
METHODS	**In-depth Interviews** **Focus groups** **Researcher's journal** **Personal documents**

4.2.1 Epistemology: Constructionism

Since this research is focussed on how university educated Indigenous women understand and make sense of their career journeys, the epistemology known as constructionism (Crotty, 1998) was chosen to underpin the study. The basis of constructionism is that truth or meaning is not discovered, rather it is constructed (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000). As human beings engage and make sense of the world in which they live, they develop "subjective meanings of their experiences" (Cresswell, 2003, p. 8). In this sense, knowledge is not acquired passively – we create mechanisms – "concepts, models and schemes" to understand our experiences and then "continually test and modify" these constructions as we have new experiences (Schwandt, 2000, p.197). These meanings are developed through interactions with other people and are "transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42), hence the term social contructionism.

Furthermore, the construction of meaning has historical and socio-cultural dimensions to it (Schwandt, 2000) which impact on the basic nature of human beings. The ways in which the world is understood is through "social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people" (Gergen as cited in Schwandt, 1994, p. 127). People construct meaning through social interaction and cultural frameworks such as shared understandings, practices, language (Schwandt, 2000), and then use those meanings to interpret their social world - to make sense of their lives. Consequently, human beings see and interpret their world through cultural lens, whereby cultural worldview brings some things "into view for us and endows them with meaning", while leading us to ignore others (Crotty, 1998, p. 54).

The Indigenous worldview is reflected in the meanings that Indigenous people attach to themselves, as well as their relationships with others and the environment. The essence of an Aboriginal worldview is in the inter-relatedness of people, nature and land, expressed by Aboriginal people as *The Dreaming. The Dreaming* is a spiritual connection which is embedded in all aspects of daily life, and which is traditionally passed down the generations through the process of storytelling and enacted through law, kinship structures and custodial obligations to the land and sea (White, 1998). Indigenous people's interpretations of the world, and hence their realities, are different to non-Indigenous people's because of "their experiences, histories, cultures and values" (Rigney, 1997, p. 114). Therefore, for the Indigenous researcher and participants involved in this study, it was important that the choice of research paradigm and methodology was "culturally congruent" (White Shield, 2003) with the Indigenous worldview. Further detail of how these understandings were included in the study, are found in Sections 4.3, 4.5, and 4.8.

4.2.2 Theoretical perspective: Symbolic Interactionism

An interpretive approach to the research is considered suitable in exploring the career experiences of Indigenous women. Interpretive research reflects a concern with the "meanings people attach to things in their lives" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 7) and is a holistic way of understanding people's perceptions, values and beliefs and how this influences their behaviour

(Charon, 1998). Furthermore, it provides those being researched with the voice to challenge the structures and inequalities in society which impact on their lives.

The aim of interpretive research is to understand how individuals in a social setting construct the world around them (Glesne, 1999), what meaning is relevant to them and how they experience daily life (Neuman, 2000). Interpretive research is particularly interested in how meaning is acquired among people who share a meaning system and how they maintain social reality by interacting with others in ongoing processes of communication and negotiation (Neuman, 2000).

In this study, the particular interpretive theoretical perspective informing the research is symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism comes from the work of social psychologist George Mead, and later the work of Herbert Blumer. According to symbolic interactionsim, humans become social beings through their interaction and communication with others (Hollingsworth, 1999). There are three principles that are catalytic to using symbolic interactionism. First, the way humans behave towards people and objects in their environment are based on the meanings they give to these things. Secondly, communication is a symbolic process since communication takes place through language and symbols. Thirdly, meanings are developed through social interaction and modified through interpretation (Blumer, 1969).

From symbolic interactionsim, reality is always seen through perspectives which filter how everything is perceived and interpreted (Charon, 1998). The whole reality cannot be revealed as individuals are limited by their own perspective. However, perspectives are socially constructed and can change as humans interact with others throughout the lifespan (Charon, 1998). Symbols such as language and rituals facilitate this process (Hollingsworth, 1999). Language is significant because "a sensitive understanding of people's lives requires shared symbols, meanings and vocabularies" (Madriz, 2000, p. 840). Meanings are developed through group experiences and lead to the development of self or identity (Hollingsworth, 1999).

Symbolic interactionism has been used in a small number of studies to understand the lives of African Americans, but has rarely been used to frame Australian Aboriginal life. However, in a study by Ariotti (1999), symbolic interactionism was considered relevant to underpin a collaborative ethnography on the social construction of "Anangu[12]" disability. This choice was based on the shared meanings that Aboriginal groups have; their use of symbols to communicate those meanings through social interaction or group behaviour; and the understanding that these interactions take place in natural everyday settings (Ariotti, 1999).

Symbolic interactionism is therefore considered appropriate for this particular study because it is used to explore Indigenous Australian women as a unique and distinct cultural group based on their common heritage, historical and contemporary experiences. While the participants bring their own unique perspective to the study, they have in common perspectives with other participants because of shared cultural, gendered and historical experiences. Consequently, it was appropriate for this study to adopt a symbolic interactionism in order to understand the meanings that university educated Indigenous women make of their career development experiences.

4.2.3 Theoretical perspective: Indigenous construct

Indigenous people argue that they are the most researched group in the world (Gower, 2004; Rigney, 1997; Smith, 1999) and that quantum of research has not provided positive outcomes for themselves and their communities. Rather it has been of more benefit, academic and financially to the mainly non-Indigenous researchers (Brady as cited in Rigney, 1997). Much of that research conducted has been intrusive, based mainly on scientific testing and quantitative analysis. Many researchers sought to prove the inferiority of Indigenous people and through biased testing found exactly what they wanted to find (Martin, 2003). Appropriation of Indigenous knowledge has taken

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[12] Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people in the cross-border section of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern territory refer to themselves as *Anangu* (Ariotti, 1999)

place by using methodologies and procedures that were culturally insensitive and inappropriate (Gower, 2004). In addition, past and present studies on Indigenous communities have attempted to analyse the problems without exploring the full context in which people live (White, 1998). These practices have worked together to present negative views of Indigenous people.

Furthermore, research has been inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism (Smith, 1999, Phillips, 2003), the *colonial analogy* likening the relationship between the researcher and the researched to that of oppressor and oppressed (Ladner, 1987). The fundamental problem is that *neo-colonialism* prevents the accurate observation and analysis of 'black' life and culture and the impact of racism and oppression on 'black' people (Ladner, 1987, p. 77). Colonial history is believed to have played a part in constructing dominant research epistemologies and methodological practices (Rigney, 2001). Furthermore, it is argued "racialised research structures" (Rigney, 2001) have contributed to the oppression of colonised people, so that research has been "very much a colonial discourse" (Martin, as cited in Wilson, 2003, p. 164) Ironically, the academy has also raised consciousness of that oppression in what Rigney (2001) terms the "journey of contradiction" (p. 8). It is evident that there must be a new way to research the experiences of "black" people that takes account of the socio-historical context in which their lives have been constructed. It also must be underpinned by Indigenous world views, Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of gathering and sharing information (Steinhauer, 2002; Wilson, 2003).

A number of Indigenous researchers (Atkinson, 2000; Steinhauer, 2002; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2003) have argued for an Indigenous research paradigm, which is inclusive of Indigenous worldviews and cultural practices. This is because some of the major paradigms are incompletely congruent with an Indigenous epistemology (Steinhauer, 2002). Consequently there is a need to look to different epistemological frames to "describe the experiences and knowledge systems of peoples outside the dominant paradigm(s)" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 260). Indigenous researchers (Atkinson, 2000; Bruno, 2003)

have struggled with trying to incorporate Indigenous research within traditional western research frameworks as I did in designing the study.

Indigenous epistemologies have been referred to in various ways such as Indigenous research methodology or methodologies (Steinhauer, 2002; Wilson, 2001); Indigenous research paradigm (Wilson, 2003); culturally instrinsic paradigm model (White Shield, 2003) and Indigenist methodology (Rigney, 1997). Some Indigenous researchers have referred to Indigenous knowledge and spirituality frameworks to dialogue with research such as Smith's (1999) Kaupapa Maori Research; West's (2000) Japanangka Teaching and Research Paradigm, and Atkinson's (2000) use of *Dadirri,* the concept of "deep listening" from the Ngangikurungkurr people of the Daly River area, in the Northern Territory. Although the terminology varies, what is consistent is that Indigenous researchers are preferring to use new approaches to framing Indigenous research which are an alternative to, and separate from the dominant or traditional research paradigms. A holistic approach to Indigenous research was put forward in report by the Status of Women Canada (2006). This model proposed included honouring past, present and future in interpretive and analytical research processes; the interconnectedness of all of life; and the spiritual, physical, emotional and mental aspects of the individual and community in all areas of the research. The model influenced the design and conduct of the current study.

Therefore, the research design aimed to honour cultural dimensions such as Indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing and culturally appropriate data gathering techniques. This study about Indigenous women's careers purposefully incorporated an Indigenous research perspective into all aspects of the design and conduct of the research, including using an Indigenous researcher.

4.2.4 The Indigenous Researcher

In order to change the construction of Indigenous knowledge through western-based research, Indigenous people must be more involved in "defining,

controlling and owning" research to "construct, re-discover and/or affirm their knowledge and cultures" (Rigney, 1997, p. 115). Being Indigenous does not automatically mean better representation, however Indigenous researchers tend to be more aware and respectful of cultural matters and protocols (Rigney, 1997). Certainly it generates a richer relationship if the researcher understands the "cultural protocols, values, and beliefs of the Indigenous group with which they are studying" (Steinhauer, 2002, p. 172) as it adds to the trust and confidence between the researcher and the research group.

With respect to research on "'black" women, it has been suggested that research by "'black'" women themselves is the most appropriate way of obtaining information about "black" women's lives, experiences, issues and concerns (Ladner, 1987). The experiences of the "black" woman researcher bring another dimension to the research including "the attitudes, values, belief … a 'black' perspective" which is central to her identity" (Ladner, 1987, p. 74). This can be useful in establishing rapport with the participants, sharing cultural meanings and understandings when interviewing, interpreting the data and crafting the story. In this study, because of the "boundedness" of the study context, the author-researcher knew most of the participants.

Given that "Indigenist" research is about giving voice to Indigenous people, using Indigenous researchers takes research "into the heart of the Indigenous struggle" (Rigney, 1997, p. 119). However, because 'black' women researchers are often part of the struggles of 'black' people within a dominant white society, it is sometimes difficult for them to be objective about the research (Marshall, 1994, p. 109). The "black" female researcher often finds herself caught between two worlds occupying the "outsider within status"- being regarded as an outsider but having the insight of "insider" (Smith, 1999). This duality creates conflict for her as part of a "white" research academy but also being a member of the group that is marginalised and oppressed. Ladner (1987, p. 79) emphasises that there is no 'value-free sanctuary' for "black" women researcher particularly when their work is about representing what "black' women's lives were like in the past, and what barriers they have to overcome today in order to survive in the most difficult circumstances.

The "insider" research status emphasised the need for the current research to be properly constructed using methodology that was sound, to reduce bias and to ensure that the data collected and analysed was quality material and not skewed by the prejudice of the researcher (Phillips, 2003). But at the same time, it was important to allow the voices of the women to be heard in the most powerful way. To enable this to happen, one of the most important decisions was the choice of methodology.

4.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: CASE STUDY

This research aimed to gain a better understanding of the career experiences of a specific group of Indigenous women. Therefore, a case study approach was adopted to orchestrate the data gathering strategies. The term "case study" has been used generically to describe investigations of an individual, group, or phenomena (Sturman, 1997) as a bounded system, "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries "Merriam (1998, p. 27), or as an "intregrated system" (Stake as cited in Bassey, 1999, p. 27). Case study is also known to be a "unit of human activity embedded in the real world" which can only be understood in the context within which it occurs (Gillham, 2000, p. 1).

The purpose of case study is to illuminate a particular phenomenon or to provide insight into the lives of those being studied (Merriam, 1998). A case may be defined by a social unit, a small group such as a specific group of people (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as in this study. The context of the case is not always a physically setting: it may also be a social or historical context (Cresswell, 1998, p. 63) and is selected because it is an "instance" of some concern or issue (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). Essentially, case study involves the exploration of a "bounded system" through detailed, in-depth data gathering, using multiple sources of information rich in context (Cresswell, 1998, p. 61), the end result being "thickly descriptive" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 179).

Selecting the case to be studied requires the researcher to justify the selection by establishing a rationale for the sampling strategy and for collecting information about the case (Cresswell, 1998). In a case study, the case may consist of a single individual, or a preferred a group of individuals so that depth can be obtained through "within- and among-case analysis" (Cresswell, 1998, p. 66) as this study does.

The advantages of case study are to be found in its "uniqueness and capacity for understanding complexity in particular contexts" (Bassey, 1999, p. 36), but it is also weakened by the difficulties of generalising from a single case (Simons, cited in Bassey, 1999). Academic criticisms of case study are that they "lack rigour", take too long, are costly to conduct, and "result in massive, unreadable documents" (Yin as cited in Bassey, 1999, p. 34). Other limitations of case study include issues of reliability, validity and generalisability (Merriam, 1998) since the case focuses on a single unit or instance (Merriam and Associates, 2002) and the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. It must be remembered that case studies are only a "slice of life" and not the whole (Merriam, 1998, p. 42) and therefore, there is a need to be cautious about making too much or too little of the findings.

Despite the criticisms of case study, Punch (1998) believes that properly conducted case studies have valuable contributions to make to research in three main ways. These are summarised below:

- Firstly, we can learn from the study of a particular case in its own right. The case might be unusual, unique and not yet understood so an in-depth understanding is valuable;

- Secondly, only the in-depth case study can provide understanding of the important aspects of a new or persistently problematic research area;

- Thirdly, the case study can make an important contribution in combination with other research approaches (Punch, 1998, p. 155).

A case study approach which provides insights, illuminates meaning and extends the experience for the reader (Merriam, 1998) is a particular useful tool in engaging non-Indigenous people in the experiences of marginalised and oppressed groups such as Indigenous women. From an encounter with the case, readers can vicariously experience the deeper meanings to the lives of the case study participants (Merriam & Associates, 2002). A particular strength of case studies which fits with the current study, is that they can provide "powerful stories to illustrate specific social contexts" (Grbich, 1999, p. 190). These points reinforce case study as an appropriate methodology for the current research.

This case study focused on a group of Indigenous women in order to understand how they negotiate their career development. The case was bounded by this particular group – Indigenous women, who are university educated and the issue of careers. It is unique in its exploration of the topic and required an in-depth study to fully understand how these women understand the meaning they make of their career development experiences. Merriam (1998) stresses the value of unique or atypical cases that reveal knowledge we would not otherwise have access to. Finally, the study utilised multiple methods to gain a detailed understanding of the case and to "capture the complex reality under scrutiny" (Denscombe, 2003, p. 38).

4.4 PARTICIPANTS

To understand a particular phenomenon, a research cannot study all relevant people intensely and in depth (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Once the case has been identified, then the sample within the case needs to be selected before the data gathering can take place (Merriam, 1998). Appropriate sampling decisions strengthen the soundness of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), and therefore are critical. These samples are drawn from the wider population and are identified by the boundaries of the phenomena

which distinguish between people to be studied, and those to be excluded (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). In this study, the population is naturally bounded by their ethnicity and gender, by their educational qualifications and the phenomena being studied, that being Indigenous women's careers.

4.4.1 Selection of the participants

In keeping with the design of the research and its purpose, it was decided to have two cohorts of Indigenous women, the first being focus group participants, and the second being individual Indigenous women selected for in-depth interviewing. From 1989 to 2005, there have been 75 female graduates from ACU McAuley. A letter of invitation detailing the research project was sent to each of these graduates inviting them to participate in a focus group. A copy of the letter is included in Appendix C. As the focus groups were to be held in Brisbane, due to time and cost restraints, it was expected that through a process of self-selection, approximately 30 women might be available for attendance, necessitating two initial focus group meetings.

Originally, it was planned to use the Weemala Indigenous Unit graduate database to locate the addresses of graduates as a starting point for the letter of invitation to participate in the study. Since that database contained only the last recorded address of the graduates as students, it was expected that many of those addresses were no longer applicable. Therefore, the researcher planned to check the list of addresses with other Weemala staff, students and Indigenous community contacts, since many are related or interconnected in some ways, to find current addresses of those graduates. This is a normal cultural practice with the choice being left up to the addressee as to whether they want to respond to the request for new information/address or indeed to the invitation when received. Since the graduates were no longer part of the Weemala student body or the university, it was felt there would be no pressure on the graduates to be involved in the project. They simply had to respond negatively, or not at all. However, the ethical approval given to the project was made on the basis that the

researcher did not actually do the mail out, or have any contact with the database printout. This is because student information is considered confidential by the university and not to be used for other purposes without prior permission.

Subsequently, the original database was used and the result from 75 graduates was minimal, given that some of the addresses were over 10 years old. However, five women agreed to attend the first focus group, and three came to the second group. Approximately 6 letters came back unopened. Two women rang the Weemala Unit to say they would have like to have been involved, but had other commitments at the time such as being away from Brisbane. It was agreed to do a third focus group with another two women in Toowoomba at their request. In all, 10 women took place in the focus groups, four of whom, were selected for in-depth study.   Several graduates contacted the researcher after the event, to express disappointment about not receiving their invitation which appeared to have gone astray.

Five of the graduates were selected as individual cases and were invited to participate in in-depth interviews. Four of the women attended the focus groups - two were from Group A and two from Group B. The fifth woman had not attended the focus groups but had indicated an interest in being part of the project.

The case study was therefore bounded to include only female graduates from Australian Catholic University in Brisbane. This is because they had completed their courses and hence were more likely to be focused on gaining employment or currently working. It was felt that they would also be able to reflect on the influences of their university education in accessing employment and career opportunities.

The process adopted to select the five women for in-depth study was purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was chosen to identify the five Indigenous women with a university education who were likely to provide rich information about their career development (Merriam 1998, p. 60). The type

of purposeful sampling used was "maximum variation" sampling which involved identifying five cases that represented the widest range of characteristics of interest for the study, but which also identified common patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994 p. 28). Consideration was given to the discipline area or profession, age and cultural background (Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) reflecting characteristics of the current Indigenous student population at ACU McAuley. It was believed that this selection would provide a broader understanding of Indigenous women's career development and assist in the validation of the research. Table 4.2 provides details of the participants selected for in-depth study.

Table 4.2: Research Participants

Name	Age	Most Recent ACU Qualification	Employment Situation
Dana	Mid 20s	B.Ed.	Pre-school teacher
Danielle	Mid 30s	B. Nursing.	Nurse
Krishna	Late 40s	M.A. Leadership.	Manager, Charity Organisation
Margaret	Mid 40s	B.Bus.	Administrative Officer, Government Department
Maxine	Early 50s	B. Teach/B.Ed.	Co-ordinator, Cultural Centre

4.5   DATA COLLECTION

The data collection techniques in this study were guided by the research design. Since case study is the strategy in this research for exploring the phenomenon of interest, multiple methods were used to conduct the exploration, and to cross-validate and ensure the reliability of the data. They included focus groups, in-depth interviews with five individual women, a

review of any personal documents relevant to the participants selected for in-depth study, and a researcher's journal. These were chosen with the research questions in mind and consideration of how best to obtain the data to answer those questions. The focus groups informed the area of questioning in the individual interviews. The data collection procedures were inclusive of cultural factors, gender issues and ethical issues relating to Indigenous research. In particular, the use of interviewing and focus groups was relevant to the "oral traditions and interactions" (Status of Women Canada, 2006) in Indigenous communities. Oral traditions were maintained through interviews and group discussions.   Additionally, since an aim of the research is to privilege the voices of Indigenous women, then this premise dictated that the data collection methods used were those that allowed those voices to be heard. The Data collection was as follows:

1.   Focus groups (10 Indigenous women) were held to discuss issues relating to topic. Interview questions were formulated from the focus group discussion to guide the individual interviews.

2.   Individual interviews were conducted with 5 Indigenous women.

3.   The researcher kept a journal to make observations and reflections prior to, and after the interviews, during the data analysis and write up.

4.   Personal documents relevant to the participants selected for in-depth study were reviewed.

5.   Participants' stories, based on the 5 Indigenous women's interviews, were constructed, and checked several times by the participants.

4.5.1 Focus groups

Although focus groups have been used often for marketing research, recently their use has been adapted as tools in social research (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Focus groups consist of 4-12 people brought together by a facilitator, usually the researcher, to discuss a selected topic in a non-threatening environment (Wilson, 1997). The value of using such groups is that natural discussion occurs between people who know and feel comfortable with one another leading to naturally occurring data (Kitzinger, as cited in Wilson, 1997). This assumes that an "individual's attitudes and beliefs do not form in a

vacuum" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 114), and by listening to others, individuals begin to form their own understandings of the phenomenon. Focus groups are also valuable because of the amount of time saved in interviewing a number of participants at the same time, and they are cost effective requiring fewer transcripts (Morgan, 1988; Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Another benefit of focus groups is that they can be used in the early stages of a research project to generate questions (Litosseliti, 2003), as they did in the current study.

The purpose of the focus group is to enable participants to explore their perceptions, attitudes, feelings and ideas about the topic and to encourage group interaction. The emphasis is on group interaction and group dynamics to uncover "data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in the group" (Morgan, 1988, p. 12) and to allow participants to engage in dialogue, share ideas, opinions and experiences, and even debate with each other (Madriz, 2000). Indeed, it is this sharing which creates socially constructed experiences described by Denzin (as cited in Madriz, 2000, p. 841) as "interpretive interactionism".

Focus groups have been identified as an important tool in feminist research, especially when working with women from marginalized groups such as Indigenous women. Not only do focus groups draw on traditional cultural practices such as women's social gatherings and support networks, women have used conversation historically as a way to cope with their oppression (Madriz, 2000). Furthermore, focus groups provide participants with a safe environment where they can explore ideas, beliefs and attitudes together with others from the same socioeconomic, cultural and gender backgrounds (Madriz, 2000). Consequently, group communication can be a "conscious-raising experience" when women become aware that their individual problems are also structural, and shared by other women (Madriz, 2000, p. 842) and when the topic has "social relevance and revolves around existing community and social relationships" (Litosseliti, 2003, p.38).

Participants in focus groups are more likely to relate their feelings, responses and experiences with others whom they share common frames of reference (Kidd & Parshall, 2000), in this case, a group of women from the same cultural group. Research methods such as focus groups are eminently suited to the oral traditions of Indigenous peoples. Indeed, it is believed that "focus groups are talking circles in Aboriginal society" (Status of Women Canada, 2006). Moreover, if the facilitator is of the same race or ethnic background as the participants, the participants are more likely to be willing to be involved, and rapport within the group is enhanced (Madriz, 2000).

However, despite their perceived strengths, the conduct of focus groups is not without problems. The researcher has less control over the interview process and the data generated (Morgan, 1988; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Concerns also surround interference of group culture on individual expression, the dominance of individuals or small groups, and the difficulty of discussing sensitive topics in group situations (Fontana & Frey, 1994). However, this did not prove to be a problem in the current study due to the Indigenous cultural protocols. The participants are well used to Indigenous women's circles and networks, and the communication protocols for engaging in group discussion. In addition, the presence of the Indigenous researcher who has a background in facilitating Indigenous community groups (See Chapter 1) meant that the discussions were well managed, at the same time ensuring that the level of moderation did not interfere with the group processes (Morgan, 1988). The effectiveness of the focus groups was also encouraged by careful planning and organisation, as advised by (Litosseliti, 2003) and included the following:

- Making sure the participants knew the focus group details by letter and following up with a phone call;
- Preparing the venue prior to the arrival of the participants with appropriate equipment such as a mini-tape recorder; butchers paper (Focus Group A only); researcher's journal for field notes;

- Providing refreshments to allow group to settle, and to cater for latecomers;

- Introducing the project at the outset including its aims; advising the participants about confidentiality and their options for withdrawing at any time;

- Obtaining signed consent forms for participation (Appendix D) and profile information on each participant on arrival;

- Confirming with participants the time allocated for focus group discussion and advising the group when the focus group was drawing to a close;

- Asking for final comments, and then inviting participants to contact the researcher following the focus groups if they had any concerns or further information to contribute.

Following the focus groups the data was analysed and a letter sent to the focus groups participants with a summary of preliminary findings including developing themes. This was approximately 2-3 weeks later.

Despite some weaknesses, focus groups are a useful tool for interpretive research and their effectiveness is further enhanced when used in conjunction with other data gathering techniques (Morgan, 1988; Punch, 1998). In the study, two initial focus groups were conducted. The first group, identified as Group A consisted of five participants, and the second group, identified as Group B was a group of three participants. These were held in Brisbane at the researcher's home, a venue negotiated with the women. A third focus group, Group C, was conducted later, at the request of two women living outside Brisbane. It was held at the Kumbari/Ngurpai Lag Indigenous Unit at University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba. The two women attended this focus group. A third woman was invited but was unable to attend on the day.

In the current study, focus groups were linked to individual interviews as suggested by Morgan (1988) and Punch (1998). The focus groups were used to develop the questions for the individual interviews in agreement with

Litosseliti (2003). The extensive data from the focus groups was used in conjunction with the data from the in-depth stories to build the case. Chapter 6, reports the findings and discussion of the study based on an analyses of focus group and interview information.

4.5.2 In-depth interviewing

Interviewing is one of the main data collection tools in interpretive research and was the primary instrument in this study. Practically, interviewing is a useful method of gaining large amounts of data quickly (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It is a flexible and can be adapted to a wide variety of situations (Punch, 1998). However, interviewing is not merely about asking questions and receiving answers (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Described as a "conversation with a purpose" (Kahn & Camell, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108), interviewing is considered one of the most powerful ways of understanding others (Punch, 1998). Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander (1995, p. 22) write that to understand people, "we must discover the content of their minds – the beliefs, wishes, feelings, desires, fears, intentions" and how they interpret the world around them (Meriam, 1998, p. 72). Furthermore, in-depth interviews allow us to understand not only how "people construct their realities, how they view, define, and experience the world" but it is through the interview process that people actually construct knowledge and meaning (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 101). This data collection tool, therefore, fits with the theoretical underpinning of the study.

Constructivist thinking is providing a qualitative dimension to career education and career counselling, by allowing individuals and groups to reflect on their life stories in interviews, to understand themselves and to make changes (Gibson, 2000). In the narrative process, people construct their own meanings about their "past and present experiences in a variety of life roles" Brott (2005, p. 140) and by considering the themes generated from these meanings, are able identify preferred ways of being (Brott, 2005), and from that find work and careers that are meaningful to them. Thus the constructivist approach has implications for career development. *Guiding circles*, a career development

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tool for working with Aboriginal people in Canada, uses this life story approach by encouraging Aboriginal people to talk about their own life story and make connections to a career path in a meaningful way (McCormick, Amundson & Poehnell, 2002).

Interviewing permits the researcher "access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher" (Reinharz, 1992, p.19). Just as importantly, through the interview process, participants develop new insights, interpretations and understandings of their experiences (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This aspect is important for studies of women, and marginalised groups, whose voices have been excluded from previous research, and relates back to the purpose of the research. Furthermore, when women speak for themselves, "they reveal hidden realities", new experiences and perspectives which "emerge to challenge the 'truths" of official accounts (Anderson, Armitage, Jack & Wittner,1990, p. 95) . In keeping with the purpose of the research which is to explore the lived experiences of Indigenous women, in-depth interviewing was considered appropriate to be used in this study.

Cultural issues are also of significance for the current research with Indigenous women. These include the nature of the relationship between the participants and the researcher, cultural factors relating to oral storytelling in Indigenous cultures (Croft, 2003); concepts of time from the Indigenous worldview and the cultural aspects of questioning (White, 1998). Open-ended questions were used to elicit information from the participants in accordance with the cultural protocols for obtaining information and knowledge from Indigenous people (Eades as cited in Chrisite, 1985). Direct questioning in communication with Indigenous people was perceived to be rude and inappropriate, whereas indirect questions allowed privacy, and the opportunity to give only the information regarded as necessary (White, 1998).

The interviews were conducted at various sites to suit the participants and included the researcher's home, the researcher's office in the Weemala Indigenous Unit, the participant's home or workplace. The interviews lasted

approximately 1 hour and were recorded on cassette tapes. They were later transcribed by the researcher, to provide a full and accurate record of the interviews. It is sometimes recommended to paraphrase and make summaries of interviews, mainly because of the volume of data and the time taken to transcribe (Bassey, 1999). However, in this study, the interviews were transcribed in their entirety, to allow the researcher the opportunity to be immersed in the participants' stories whilst transcribing, but also to ensure that the women's words were not changed or watered down. At times when words were difficult to hear or to comprehend the researcher was able to refer to her research journal notes for clarification. The transcriptions were kept on computer, with hard copies used for coding in the data analysis, stored together with the tapes. Tapes were labelled with each woman's information and dates of interview, and safely stored with the transcripts in a locked filing cabinet. No other persons had access to the data and extracts from the transcripts were only read by the researcher's supervisor as part of the emerging thesis.

4.5.3   Research journal

A research journal was maintained throughout the study, containing topics and issues discussed in each interview and focus group. This enabled the researcher to keep track of what has already been covered and to follow up items of interest in future conversations (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). It also allowed the researcher to reflect on the research process, to note emerging themes, issues of concern and action that needed to be undertaken. The research journal provided a record of what the participants did not say – the non-verbal communication, silences, the tone of language and emotions expressed. This is particularly important for Indigenous Australian people, whose non-verbal communication styles are culturally distinct from non-Indigenous Australians (Eades, 1985). The research journal also recorded out-of-interview encounters and informal meetings that often generate rich and useful data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) as well as meetings with "critical friends".

4.5.4 Personal documents

Personal documents that describe an "individuals actions, experiences and beliefs" (Bogdan and Biklen, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 115) in their own words or writing, can bring a richness to an existing study because they reveal perspectives without the interference of research (Merriam, 1998, p. 115). Personal documents which familiarise the researcher with the language and words of participants, can be accessed conveniently, thus saving time and expense (Cresswell, 1994, p. 150). They can also provide further information, verify emerging themes, and provide objective sources of data which are believed to be less intrusive (Merriam, 1998, p. 126).

In recent years, there has been an abundance of Indigenous writers who have told their life stories (Rintoul, 1993). In the current study, the researcher in extending the invitation to participants to be part of the research requested permission to access any personal documents and published material that had relevance for the current research. Four of the participants, Maxine, Margaret, Dana and Danielle had their educational stories published in *Weemala, the Spirit Within*, a publication which celebrated the success of Indigenous students at Australian Catholic University (Nolan, Evans and White, 2004). Extracts from these stories were included in participant's stories and in the findings and discussion chapter of the current study to validate accuracy of stories and to enrich the final narrative.

4.6   ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data analysis is a "dynamic and creative process" through which researchers try to gain a deeper understanding of what they are studying (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 141). Data analysis is ongoing in interpretive research with researchers keeping track of emerging themes, reading and re-reading field notes and transcripts, and developing concepts to make sense of their data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Case study work generates a significant amount of raw data which must be condensed into meaningful information (Bassey, 1994, p. 70). Because case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single bounded unit", communicating an in-depth understanding of the case is critical in case data analysis (Merriam, 1998, p. 193). The first step in interpretive analysis is generally undertaken by reading the interview and focus group transcripts and immersing oneself in the data to become familiar with it in an intimate way (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Maxwell, 1996). However, as previously mentioned, this process of immersion was actually started during the transcription stage of the study. Whilst listening to the women's words, the researcher was forming understandings about emerging themes which were also noted in the research journal. The transcripts from the study were read and reread a number of times by the researcher as suggested by Taylor and Bodgan (1998). This allowed the researcher to know the data so well that the process of data analysis became much easier.

Data analysis was undertaken using *within-case analysis* where each single case is treated as a comprehensive case, and then using *cross-case analysis* to build a story across a number of cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was reported in Chapter 6 Findings and Discussion. Cross-case analysis provided a "unified description across cases" (Merriam, 1998, p. 195) and a synthesis of the cases studies. In this study, data analysis was undertaken simultaneously with data collection, data interpretation and report writing, using a constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). This process was ongoing throughout the data collection, and report writing stages. Figure 4.1 on the following page provides an overview of the data analysis process that was used.

INTERACTIVE PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data collection

Data display

Reflection on Data

ITERATIVE   *SIMULTANEOUS*

Data Coding

Data distillation (reduction)

Generation of Themes

Story interpretation

Conclusions and Report
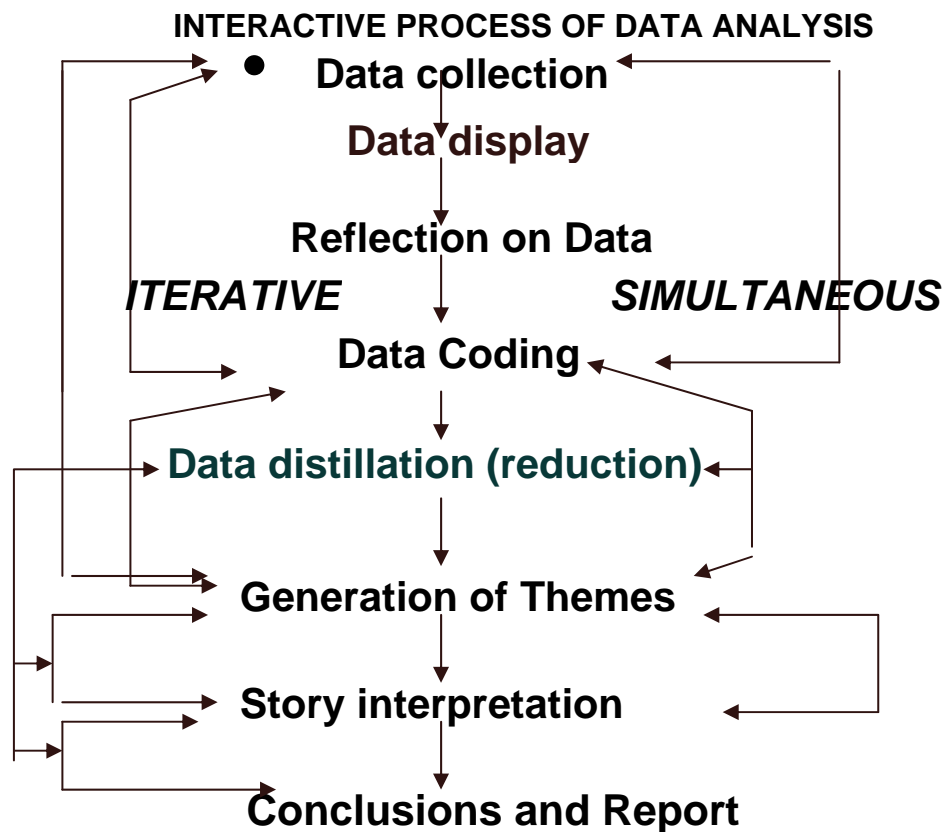
Figure 4.1: Data analysis process

The data for each focus group and individual interview were organised for analysis under the four areas identified in the literature review: Indigenous women and employment; Indigenous women and careers; Indigenous women and education; and Indigenous women and leadership. Within these categories, the data in the individual cases were prepared for analysis by organising it into categories using a coding system. Two levels of coding were used (Merriam, 1998). This was achieved by firstly developing a list of coding categories. Open coding of interview transcripts was employed during the first pass of collected data to locate themes, and to assign initial codes or labels. The codes were written in the margins of the transcripts using coloured highlighters to assist with identification and differentiation. As the data was coded, the coding scheme was refined by adding, collapsing overlapping categories and redefining categories until a group of major themes emerged (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This process was undertaken over an extensive period as the data was read and re-read. The refinement process including writing the themes up on butcher's paper and

putting them on the wall. As the transcripts were re-read and categories and themes reconsidered, these changes were noted. When the final set of themes was established, a final pass of the data was undertaken to organise the data under the four areas from the literature review, but more specifically under the research questions. These are detailed below:

Table 4.3:   Themes for Chapter 6 (Findings and Discussion)

Research question 1: **What experiences do Indigenous women have in entering and maintaining their position in the workforce?**	• Becoming part of the workforce • The Indigenous woman's reflections of self as worker • The complexities of working • The cultural demands of working
Research question 2: **How do Indigenous women move from being a member of the workforce to pursuing a career?**	• Indigenous woman's reflections on what a career means for them • Career Choices • Cultural framework for Indigenous women's careers • Complexities of an Indigenous woman's career • Sabotaging careers
Research question 3: **How does achieving a university education assist Indigenous women with work and career opportunities?**	• Coming to university • Motivation to study • The university environment • Complexities of being a student • Consequences of being educated
Research question 4: **How do Indigenous women develop their leadership in contemporary society?**	• Indigenous women's leadership, past and present • Indigenous women's reflections of themselves as leaders • Complexities of leadership • Restoring Indigenous women's leadership

After Chapter 6 (Findings and Discussion) was completed there were some minor changes with the theme headings to provide greater consistency between the four areas of employment, careers, education and leadership.

4.7   VERIFICATION

Being able to trust educational research that is valid, reliable and ethically produced is important to educational practice (Merriam, 1998). In case study, trustworthiness rather than reliability and validity, establishes the integrity of the research. Ensuring trustworthiness in the current study was therefore an important consideration in all aspects of the research design including the way in which data was collected, analysed, interpreted, and presented (Merriam 1998). Considerations such as prolonged engagement with the data; persistent observation of emerging issues; checking of data with sources; triangulation of data leading to analytical statements; use of critical friends; provision of a clear audit trail in the case record, all contributed towards the trustworthiness of the research.

In the current study, verification was achieved through triangulation of data, immersion in the data, member-checking, and a case analysis meeting (Merriam, 1998). The latter involves the researcher meeting with one or more critical friends or colleagues to discuss the progress of the case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The concepts of validity and reliability were used to evaluate the authenticity of research. Validity is the extent to which research is found to be what is claimed to be (Bassey, 1999), that the data or field records were true as to what occurred, and that the analysis of data was conducted correctly (Carspecken, 1996).

It can be made by establishing a 'strong chain of evidence' and making links between the research questions, data analysis, and conclusions drawn from the data (Borg, Gall & Gall, 1999). This was achieved in the study by laying an 'audit trail' – providing a complete documentation of the research process used in the case study as suggested by Borg, Gall and Gall (1999).   An important component of the validity check was through triangulation.

Triangulation is the use of two or more methods of data collection to gain a better and clearer understanding of a phenomenon or the particular people and the setting being studied (Burns, 1990; Stake, 2000). In this study, triangulation was achieved through the comparison of data obtained from focus groups, individual interviews, and personal documents. In addition, a reflective journal was kept by the researcher throughout the research. 'Member checks' were undertaken with the participants to confirm or clarify stories. Also, fellow researchers were used to look at notes and coding for discrepancies and researcher bias in the case analysis meetings.

The reflection of the researcher on their own role as "constructors and interpreters of social reality" is called reflexivity (Borg, Gall, & Galll, 1999). It entails monitoring and reflecting upon the researcher-researched relationship and how they affect the story being told (Glesne, 1999). A clear up-front value position, together with a sound research design reduced researcher biases and helped to validate the current study. In fact, LeCompte and Preissle (1993) believe that the familiarity and cultural background of the researcher has value for the research project, whereas western-trained researchers may find difficulty in making sense of and asking questions about unfamiliar phenomenon. This had relevance for the current research with the researcher and participants all being Indigenous women.

4.8   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical research requires balancing the value of advancing knowledge against protecting the basic rights of the individuals concerned. Such issues as privacy, confidentiality, protection from harm, informed consent, ownership of data, and how findings are to be reported and/or published must receive careful consideration (Bassey, 1999).

All participants received a letter of information detailing the study and their rights as participants, including the right of withdrawal at any time. They all signed a form indicating that this information was provided to them prior to their

participation in focus groups and in-depth interviews. Participants were also asked if they preferred anonymity. This was important since the population of Indigenous people with university qualifications is small and this is further reduced by considering the number of female Indigenous graduates from Australian Catholic University. However, disguising people and organisations is not always easy, since even in 'disguised' reports, anonymity is not always the best approach (Bassey, 1999). Therefore providing a pseudonym for the participants did not necessarily guarantee that their identity would be protected, since it would be fairly easy to determine from their stories, current positions and family information whom were the individual women. It was agreed therefore to use the proper names of the participants with their agreement, and to ensure that their stories did not contain any material that might cause them harm or embarrassment. This was achieved by getting the participants to check their stories several times and to suggest changes. After checking her story, one of the women asked that she be given a pseudonym for family reasons, and another asked for the name of her son to be omitted. Those requests were honoured. Where sensitive material was critical to the study, it was reported as part of general discussion and in such a way that individual people could not be identified.

Ethical considerations should include general ethical issues in research and specific ones that relate to the site or participants involved (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) guidelines (2000) were developed because of concerns over the years expressed by Indigenous people about the exploitative nature of previous research and the desire of Indigenous people to have more control over the research process. A number of Australian universities such as University of South Australia, Curtin, James Cook, and Murdoch universities have developed their own ethical guidelines for Indigenous research. Most of these guidelines draw on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnson, 1991) which adopt the following principles for research affecting Indigenous people. These include informed consent; benefit to the community; recognition of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights; and appropriate use of research results as agreed

with the community. Although Australian Catholic University does not have its own specific Indigenous ethical guidelines, ACU's Indigenous Research Advisory Group (IRAG) has endorsed the AIATSIS guidelines (Author's personal knowledge). Therefore these guidelines, which have been accepted nationally by research institutions and Indigenous communities as informing best practice in research, provided guidance for the current study.

In conducting this research, feedback was sought from all the participants on their satisfaction with the research process, and the presentation of their story. Elders were also consulted with respect to some aspects of the research. For example, I had to seek permission from my mother who is a Gooreng Gooreng Elder, to tell my sister Roslyn's story, and to include references to her life with my father, and information about my grandparents and great-grandparents. Her place of Eldership gives her the authority to speak on such matters. This was also out of respect for those family members who have passed on, since Aboriginal cultural practices are quite specific about references to those who are no longer alive.

My role as an Indigenous researcher has involved many ethical responsibilities, including the obligation to present the stories of the participants in a way that honoured them as Indigenous people. These responsibilities were an important part of the research design and the implementation of the study so that the research framework, data collection methods, presentation of the women's stories, the discussion and findings respected Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. I was also conscious of the importance of reciprocity, a traditional concept by which Indigenous people have obligations in terms of sharing (Edwards, 1988, Berndt & Berndt, 1985) but also which had relevance for the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). When people give their time to contribute to the research projects there is a certain obligation to reciprocate as long as this fits within the constraints of maintaining the researcher's role. In this regard, I was able to provide some of the women information about current Indigenous women's leadership activities and postgraduate studies, and I assisted Maxine with her leadership coaching application and Danielle with scholarships to study medicine.

Another ethical consideration, and an important one to the integrity of the project, was my relationship with the participants. Since all participants were graduates of ACU and I had been Co-ordinator of the Weemala Unit for 10 years, it was likely that I would know most of the women. There were three women in the focus groups that had completed their degrees prior to my employment at Weemala, but I knew them from community contacts. Two of the participants, were related to me – Maxine is my birth sister and Dana my birth daughter. At first, I was concerned about using them in the study because I felt these relationships might contribute to researcher bias or a skewing of the data. However, after deliberation, I believed that my relationship with both of the participants would not compromise the study due to the soundness of the research design which included triangulation methods to validate the data, an audit trail to establish the case records and the up-front declaration of the researcher. I also consulted with my supervisor, critical friends for their views, and Elders for wisdom and guidance. The Elders assured me that it was appropriate for me to be trusted with the women's knowledge and stories, and moreover that the data was likely to be richer, as it was obtained with trust and confidence in the researcher. This is in keeping with our ways, and the "insider" position in research. The process of working with women I believed I knew intimately was a learning process for me. If I had any presumptions that I knew all there was to know about the women, particularly Maxine and Dana, I learned quickly that these women had stories that I only knew in part. In sharing their thoughts and meanings, they were sharing parts of themselves. I discovered that my sister had suffered greatly from feelings of low worth for many years, and my daughter was able to articulate her learning problems and become a responsive teacher to children in her care. I learned that Danielle was a healer with aspirations to bring together traditional and holistic medicine; that Krishna had created a career around her family needs, and that Margaret had discovered her identity through her studies. These revelations came from hearing the women's words in their own voices, and my being the instrument of facilitation did not cause any ethical dilemmas. Rather, my being known to the women, a woman of their "circle", and an Indigenous sister, provided a safe environment for them to talk at a deeper level.

Ethical clearance was also obtained from the ethics committee of the university.

4.9   LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

Limitations to study have already been discussed with respect to the possible weaknesses of case study, focus groups, reliability of the data collection and researcher bias. In addition it is acknowledged that the case study was set in a specific context that being a single university. Therefore, the notion of reliability of the study, that is the extent to which it can be replicated, does not fit with this case study. The study could be done again, but may not necessarily achieve the exact same result. However, a number of the participants have studied at other universities, and it is believed that the soundness of the research design has enabled the generation of rich and authentic information that will shed light generally on the important phenomena of Indigenous women's career development.

4.10   OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Table 4.4 on the following pages provides a summary of the research design adapted from (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, pp. 51-53) which outlines the plan for how the research questions are connected to the data, the gathering tools for collecting information, and a timeline for the research process.

Table 4.4: Overview of the research design

Research Question	Purpose of question	Data required	Source of Information	Timeline
Question 1. What experiences do Indigenous women have in entering and maintaining their position in the workforce? Areas for stimulus questions - patterns of employment; - racism and sexism; - job satisfaction; - barriers and opportunities.	To understand the position of Indigenous women in the workforce	Employment details Career histories Women's perspectives	Interviews Focus Groups Personal documents	Individual Interviews (Oct-Nov, 2004) Focus Groups (Sept/Oct 2004) Personal Documents (July, 2004)
Question 2: How do Indigenous women move from being a member of the workforce to pursuing a career? Areas for stimulus questions - patterns of development; - sequencing; - significant events - barriers and supports; - context of career development.	To examine the context in which Indigenous women develop careers	Employment details Career histories Significant events	Ongoing Data analysis Member Checks	Data analysis (Sept 2004 – Feb 2005) Member Checks (Nov-Dec 2004

(continued)

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Research Question	Purpose of question	Data required	Source of Information	Timeline
Question 3: How does achieving a university education assist Indigenous women with work and career opportunities? Areas for stimulus questions Supports -　home, work colleagues, community; 　- professional development; 　- education and training 　- opportunities, mentoring. Barriers　-　balancing lives; 　- organisational barriers; 　- glass ceiling; 　- education and training Career advice	To identify the links between a university education and work and career opportunities	Supporting factors Barriers Personal experiences	Interviews Focus Groups Personal documents Ongoing Data analysis	Individual Interviews (Oct-Nov, 2004) Focus Groups (Sept/Oct 2004) Personal Documents (July, 2004) Data analysis (Sept 2004 – Feb 2005)
Question 4: How do Indigenous women develop their leadership in contemporary society? Areas for stimulus questions: - Indigenous women's leadership - networks and support; - leadership training; - links to careers	To understand how Indigenous women's leadership can be promoted through education	Personal experiences Networks	Member Checks	Member Checks (Nov-Dec 2004)

CHAPTER 5:   THE WOMEN'S CAREER STORIES

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the individual career stories of five Indigenous women. It provides a particular view of women's experiences in the areas of work, careers, education and leadership in the continuing process of their lives, and therefore does not present each woman's career life story in its entirety. Thus it reflects the meanings that the women attach to these specific experiences and their reflections on their growth since. An overview and presentation sequence of the career stories is detailed in Figure 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Overview and Presentation Sequence of the Career Stories

Name	Age	Area of study	Area of work
5.2 Career Story 1 - Margaret	Mid 40s	Business/Behavioural Science	Admin Officer, Public Service
5.3 Career Story 2 - Krishna	Late 40s	Education/Leadership	Manager Administrative/ Community Service
5.4 Career Story 3 - Maxine	Early 50s	Education	Manager, Cultural Centre
5.5 Career Story 4 - Danielle	Mid 30s	Nursing	Nurse
5.6 Career Story 5 - Dana	Mid 20s	Education	Preschool Teacher

5.2   CAREER STORY 1:   MARGARET

Margaret is in her mid-40s and is undertaking full-time studies while working full-time in an administrative position. She is married with four children, the older two from a previous marriage, and two younger ones from her current marriage. Margaret is currently living and working in Brisbane, but grew up in Toowoomba.   She was born in Singapore when her father was in the Australian Army.   Prior to being married, her mother worked as a secretary, but after the marriage, did not undertake paid work. Due to her father's army postings, Margaret spent much of her early years overseas in Asian countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong. She says of that experience "it was great".   The family returned to Australia in the early 70's, when her father was posted to service in Vietnam.   During his absence, Margaret and her mother lived in Toowoomba, firstly in the army barracks, and later when her father returned, in a house that her parents purchased "on the range". After completing year 7, she attended a local high school and then at the insistence of her father became a nurse. She had considered being a receptionist but in discussion with her father, he said "why don't you do nursing". In some ways, she felt it was more of a command rather than a suggestion, and that she had no choice so she agreed with him, went nursing and "loved it".   She acknowledges the influence of her father in her choice of career, commenting on how this is not always accepted, "You know how children go against their parents … but I agreed with him".

Her first nursing job was at the Oakey Hospital, near Toowoomba. At 17, it was also her first real time away from home, living in the nursing quarters. In the 22 years that followed, Margaret practised nursing in both public and private health. During that time she married twice and had her four children. After many years in the same profession, one day she decided she wanted a break from nursing so went into catering. She worked for Qantas catering for a short time as a cold larder chef, then she had her own catering business. Margaret went back briefly to nursing, but realised that she wanted to do something else with her future. In order to do that, she came to the realisation that she needed to get a better education.   She heard from a nursing

colleague that the Australian Catholic University was offering a Diploma in Business specifically for Indigenous people, and she decided to apply.

Margaret's choice of course was motivated by two things. Firstly, she desired a change in career. She wanted to do business and work in an office. Secondly, she wanted to undertake a course that had an Aboriginal cultural component. At this point in time, she was exploring her identity and wanted to know more about her Aboriginal heritage. The opportunity to be with other Indigenous people was also a determining factor. In her words, she says "I wanted to know the history and reading books was okay, but I needed experience and other Indigenous people … the course had exactly what I needed – all the business stuff and the Indigenous stuff" together.

After her first semester of study in the Diploma, Margaret applied to Centrelink for an administrative position and began as a Customer Services Officer. She agrees that her studies, together with her past working experience enabled her to secure this position which she currently occupies. After working for Centrelink for 12 months, she applied for an Indigenous staff scholarship to enable her to study full-time, and to complete the course in the shorter timeframe. Margaret remembers her excitement at winning this scholarship provided nationally to 10 Indigenous applicants per year. "It gave me a real boost; I never dreamed in a million years that I would get it". She credits the Centrelink scholarship as a major event in her career.

On completion of the Diploma, Margaret was encouraged by her lecturers and the Weemala Indigenous Unit staff to continue her studies in the degree program. She felt her excellent results in the Diploma had given her the confidence to further her education. Her initial experience with study ignited a love of learning, so that "after being out here and learning that, you want more. I need to know more". She has now completed a Bachelor of Business in Management, is currently finishing a Bachelor Arts majoring in Behavioural Science and intends to start Master of Business Administration.

Search for identity

Margaret's search for her cultural identity was one of the factors which influenced her decision to study. Prior to this, she had not known about her Aboriginal background. For most of her life, she had been led to believe that her mother's family were of European background. She was an only child and her family consisted of her "grandmother, two aunties and an uncle and my cousins". During the process of completing a family history six years ago, she found out about her Aboriginality. She had known about her father's German background, but did not know anything about history of her mother's father. She grew up being told that "he was a dark Welshman". But when she started constructing the family history, she found "everything started coming up with Aboriginal tied to it … so I started thinking, something's wrong here … I contacted Archives and Canberra. Turns out he wasn't a bloody Welshman, he was actually Aboriginal". News of this information when shared with her mother, and then the rest of the family, "ripped the family in two", causing a division that has not been repaired.

In reflecting why this family secret was hidden, Margaret believes that her Aboriginal identity had been deliberately kept from her, because of the "shame" of being of Aboriginal descent and having to deal with the racism from others when that knowledge becomes public. "I knew from my grandmother's reaction … the spitefulness, and things that were said that it was true. They knew about it but didn't want to know about it. My mother was brought up to believe her father was Welsh. He had dark skin, dark looks but looked more Greek or Italian. My mother's aunties and uncles were a big family secret. My grandmother was kicked out because she married a black man".

Finding out that her grandfather was of Aboriginal descent had a huge impact on Margaret. She maintains that she has never been a racist person and that she doesn't "look at colour of skin, just see(s) the person inside". Knowing that she is Aboriginal, she says doesn't make her feel any different as a person, but it does feel complete. Since coming to university, Margaret has

done all she can to find out "her Indigenous heritage from an Indigenous point of view, not from a white point of view". She describes her previous life as "everything before was from a white man's eyes, now I have found another side".

As with many Aboriginal people, discovering her identity has brought out a lot of emotions in Margaret including sadness and anger not only for herself but for her Grandfather and what he had to endure. "It's cruel, it's sad and I went through all the emotions … anger, hatred … knowing that my granddad was Aboriginal and that generations before him suffered and endured". Margaret finds she still gets upset that her great-grandmother had to get a "piece of paper" to get married. "I don't think any human being has to be treated like that … it makes me angry". Part of the reaction, she acknowledges is related to the fact that she grew up never knowing what really happened to Aboriginal people. The denial of Aboriginal history is what "made (her) upset most of all". She talked about going to school and hearing about the discovery and settlement of Australia, how the settlers worked hard, "you don't hear of what really happened … the other side … the indignities that the Aboriginal people suffered".

Finding out the true history of Australia and about her own family has answered many questions for her but it has also created in her a great commitment. Margaret looks on this as "a legacy. I was meant to find this but what do I do with this (knowledge). I have changed … and he (grandfather) has given me this gift. I have a responsibility to better myself, and my children. She interpreted this as a responsibility to be educated.

> It has contributed in a big way. When I started doing this history on my family and found out what I did, I thought to myself … I have to know my heritage. I had read books but I needed to be educated so that's when I came out here to do the Diploma. I wanted to get out of nursing and do something else. So I basically went to university for the education and Indigenous stuff.

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Consequently, her university journey, was also part of a journey of self-discovery for her as an Aboriginal woman. It has become a passion and has resulted in Margaret and her children becoming much more involved in the Aboriginal community. It has also created a desire in her to help other Indigenous people. During her study, she tutored and mentored other Indigenous students in the Diploma in Business Administration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies), and the Bachelor of Business. One student, an Indigenous male, did the Diploma and Business degree like Margaret, and is now undertaking an honours program. Although she has played a significant role in his achievement, Margaret accredits his success to his own tenacity.

Through the Brisbane City Council run "Black Business" forums, Margaret has also become involved in Indigenous business networks.   At one of those gatherings, Margaret was motivated by an Indigenous woman who spoke about herself being "white-fulla friendly". Furthermore, the speaker stated that "we need to be educated, move up, be on the same level to be able to make it better for our people in the country". These words had a significant impact on Margaret, making her realise that rather than being ashamed of not being black enough, she could use her fairness of skin in a positive way.

> It made me think … well I am whiter than her. I thought about that and thought … what she is saying is right. I have seen people and have been with them and there have been insinuations about people's skin colour, for example that they are lazy. I have got the advantage because of the colour that I am. I could get in there and make changes - not about what the government thinks we need, but what we need … and that's important and that's what I want to do.

The experience developed in Margaret, a growing awareness that being Aboriginal and having fair skin could be used to "assist the cause by being 'white-fulla friendly'" and has helped Margaret to determine her purposes and goals.

Supports and obstacles in employment

In her nursing, Margaret found that although she enjoyed the work, she believed that the working environment was not very supportive as "... back in old days, it was very hierarchical with senior nurses, matrons … there was not much support". However, in her current work, she has had positive experiences in that she has been "coached, mentored and encouraged from first day. Anything I have wanted I've been given and everything they have asked of me, I have done … it's been a very good partnership". She acknowledges that her employer provides good support for Indigenous workers, but adds that it is a reciprocal obligation, and that Indigenous workers must also be responsible to make the relationship successful. This partnership has worked well for Margaret, as she has been able to gain qualifications, and the organisation has retained a responsible, competent staff member.

For Margaret, being a working mother did not pose a problem in terms of childcare. When she had her first two children, her mother helped her out by caring for the children, and then she slowly introduced her children to child-care. She has very positive opinions about the use of childcare for working parents and she believes that placing children in child-care is very good in terms of their development and socialisation. However, Margaret says that it is important to choose childcare well, and that her decisions were based on "a lot of research to find the right place and checking them out". Although she was fortunate in locating suitable childcare, she acknowledges that finding good childcare for Indigenous women can be a problem that impacts on their ability to work.

As a working mother, she has felt the pressure of domestic responsibilities which she believes is not shared equally by men. She says she appreciates that her husband works long hours, but emphasises that his work finishes when he arrives home, whereas women's work continues much longer: "when he gets home, that is it … but my job isn't finished yet, with children to organise, etc … and then maybe by 9 or 10 o'clock at night I get to sit down at

the computer again". She believes that men are used to women being in the domestic role, and ponders on whether men might feel threatened by their women becoming educated.

> I don't know whether it is because they are self-centred, or is it they feel threatened because we are becoming educated … I think so, with women getting an education … they must start thinking … mmm … what's going on here. And as long as we keep doing things, we are not a threat.

By recognising their strength, she expresses admiration for women who generally carry a bigger family load: "women are stronger … we can carry and do so much, we are bloody marvellous really".   Here, she includes herself as part of the group, but later in the interview, she doubts herself as being in the same league as other Indigenous women. This suggests that whilst the self-talk is evident, underlying there is still perhaps a lack of confidence which many Indigenous women still feel despite their achievements.

With respect to community expectations, Margaret says that she has not experienced this directly in respect to her job. She believes this may be due to the fact that she has only recently identified as Aboriginal, and therefore Indigenous people do not necessarily know of her Aboriginal ancestry, particularly because of her fair skin colour. If Indigenous people come into her workplace looking for "the Indigenous officer", and there is not one available, Margaret will offer assistance. She says that at first her help is not often accepted because "they don't often realise that I am Indigenous and I have to go through the whole big story … 'well yes I am like you and how can I help', and once they realise, they are fine". Having this experience is disappointing for Margaret, as she says, "I get hurt not being acknowledged because it is important to me now. It's who I am and just because I have got fair skin, it does hurt that people don't see me as Indigenous", a feeling that she believes is shared by other fair-skinned Aboriginal people.

Margaret also says that she has not experienced direct racism in her employment. She finds rather that it is more of a "culture shock" and that when she lets people know her cultural background, "they get taken back". She says they treat her differently, but she is not sure whether it is because she is Indigenous, or because she is educated. This paradox which she describes as "a mismatch" demonstrates her awareness that non-Indigenous people generally do not associate Indigenous people with being educated. Margaret considers that her being treated differently may also be because she herself has changed - she is different due to her own education and growth and that this could make people feel threatened. "When I go back to work in my breaks I am a different person, I am totally different to those people…even my attitudes are different … they may feel threatened".

The meaning of career to Indigenous women

Having a career is very important to Margaret, not only in terms of having employment, but for her to develop to her full potential: "To be the best I can be. A job is just a job, but a career is something you indulge you build something upon". For Indigenous women, Margaret believes this is a completely new experience.

> It's a new thing for Indigenous women. Indigenous women are changing, modernizing … the western world is changing us … we have to change … subdue ourselves to western ways. We don't want just jobs. Indigenous women want to be happy with themselves, we want contentment, happiness for ourselves and our families.

This fulfilment, Margaret believes can be achieved through having a career - "having a career is about choices. And you can have it all".

In comparing the experiences of Indigenous women with non-Indigenous women, Margaret felt that the majority of non-Indigenous women do not have the same "fire" in them. She emphasises Indigenous women's strength and commitment when she says, "the women in our community will do what ever it

takes", and "our women will live and die for our children". Margaret is convinced that it is easier for non-Indigenous women to develop their careers. In contrast to Indigenous women, she believes that non-Indigenous women are not pre-judged according to their race, and "they have western culture down-pat. They can walk in there and no assumptions or insinuations are made about them, no stigma sticking on them". Because of the prevailing attitudes to Indigenous people, particularly Aboriginal people, it is much harder for them to find work. In her opinion, Indigenous people are often disadvantaged in interviews, so that:

> It wouldn't matter if you pulled a white person out of the gutter, washed them, showered them and put them in for an interview, more would be thought of them than the other … that is exactly what I see in my work.

Moreover, Margaret has no doubt that Indigenous people are judged as a race, and not as individuals, a situation that is not experienced by non-Indigenous people. When she argues that all Indigenous people are labelled by the actions of a few, this is based on the belief that when "we have a handful of bad guys, it doesn't only mar them, it mars the whole community. If you have a handful of white guys … that's just a bunch of no-gooders". Margaret also refers to the unequal expectations placed on Indigenous people to perform: "when you are an Indigenous person trying to achieve, you have to do so much more than a white person. You have to prove yourself more than a white person".

With respect to her career choice and career development as an Indigenous woman, Margaret says that since discovering her Aboriginality, she has been motivated to work in Indigenous areas. She reflects on "what do I do with the gift he (her grandfather) has given me" and suggests that this could be her way of helping other Indigenous people. But with this choice, she recognizes that the chosen path is a difficult one, firstly because she is a woman, and secondly because she is Indigenous. But she concludes that these double oppositions are not insurmountable, and says "I believe that if you are a strong person and 100% believe in what you believe in … and have the

passion, you will smash through that ceiling". Consequently to achieve her goals, Margaret says it takes a great belief in self, and with that comes the ability to smash down the barriers.

Barriers and supports while studying

Margaret explains that as a student having a family was both a barrier, and a support to her. She found that looking after a family whilst studying was very hard - "I had to sit up from 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening until 1 o'clock in the morning and get up at six". Although keeping the family life going whilst completing her assessment took a "lot out" of her, Margaret felt that she got a "lot back" from her family through their love and pride in her achievements, so it balanced out. She also found "great support from Weemala the Indigenous Unit, other students helping one another, and lecturing staff at the university". She feels very strongly about her experience at Australian Catholic University which she believes is unique - "everything about this university … I went to another Brisbane university and the support was totally different. I didn't like it at all … I was like a fish out of water, uncomfortable … there was no support network there, you are just a number". From Margaret's perspective, the support from the learning environment must be a whole package with academic staff and Indigenous unit staff working together so that "it's the whole approach. It's like a family at ACU. The lecturers want you to pass, they guide you - they don't want you to fail".

During her study at ACU, Margaret stated that she neither experienced nor saw any evidence of racism and sexism. She chose not to elaborate on that point, but preferred to speak about the positive aspects of her study experience. She believes that her university study helped prepare her for going into the workplace. "The units in the Diploma and Bachelor helped prepare me big time, in confidence and skills and knowledge, developing assertiveness skills". Although, her remarks about the university were mostly positive, she felt there was still room for improvement. When she first came to university, she found the most difficult part of adjusting to academic life was the "big killer … the essays. It was a whole new world. I needed more time to

settle in. It's a shock for people when they come to uni. It is very overpowering in the first week … the expectations". Margaret felt that this transition period should receive greater consideration so that students are not stressed by the information overload in the early weeks of study. For similar reasons, Margaret suggested that the Residential program for the Diploma in Business Administration, which currently is held over a four day period, be extended as there is "too much to cram in a few days".

Indigenous women and leadership

In discussing Indigenous women's leadership, Margaret pointed out that Indigenous women's leadership is not strongly visible as "we are not making ourselves known". She suggests that this is because Indigenous women are reluctant to stand up and be counted because of the "many obstacles. One being Indigenous men … women's place is a women's place and they put you down". In addition to the attack from Indigenous males, Margaret believes that the potential for Indigenous women's leadership is stalled by other barriers from within the Indigenous communities, such as "other Indigenous people saying to you (about education) - you just want to be a white man". These negative comments discourage Indigenous women from seeking education and leadership opportunities.

Through her studies, Margaret has gained a sound knowledge of traditional Aboriginal society and Aboriginal women's traditional roles. She believes that the latter could be used to contribute to contemporary leadership, especially the nurturing aspects. She sees Indigenous women as an untapped source of "strength, power and passion which should be shared with the outside world". Margaret would like to encourage more opportunities for Indigenous women to develop, but recognizes that this is not an easy task. She believes that there is a "need to go into communities and fire up the women". To encourage Indigenous women's leadership, Margaret advocates opportunities for Indigenous women to get together and talk – "it could just be mechanism to trigger or inspire", such as happened to her when she heard the inspirational speaker at the business meeting. She also advocates the sharing of

experiences – "knowing you are not the only one" - which breaks down the isolation for Indigenous women by providing support from other women.

With respect to her being a leader, Margaret sees herself in a leadership role, but worries that she might not have "what Indigenous women have inside them". Her admiration for other Indigenous women is obvious when she says that she "sees what these women are like, something about them" and wants what they have, but feels uncertain "about whether I've got that". Margaret believes there should be a greater promotion of Indigenous women's leadership in the wider community and that this could achieved through education – not just by educating Indigenous people at university, but also through public education and through building networks. She argues for Indigenous people to be at the centre of the push for leadership, taking responsibility with "communities getting together, organising and forming and planning so that we are surging".

Whilst Margaret sees that communities themselves should be leading the change, she recognises the obstacles faced by many communities which are troubled by social issues such as domestic violence. Although she admits that these are "hard questions", she feels strongly that these issues must be addressed and that women should be given more assertiveness training and education. Her message to Indigenous women in domestically violent situations is that, "you do not have to live like this, we understand about your husband and family, but you don't have to put up with this. God doesn't expect you to put up with this".

Final reflections

Margaret's last thoughts on her journey, and those of Indigenous women in their work, careers, education and leadership were that "Indigenous women are such powerful strong women and would be able to do so much more if they were supported".

For herself she says,

> I want to make a difference. I want to do something to make a change.
> I want to get the kids out of the circle. I want my children to grow up
> happy in what they do and very proud of their Aboriginal heritage.

5.3   CAREEER STORY 2:   KRISHNA

Krishna is in her late 40s, and is married with one daughter still living at home.
She also has 3 boys from a previous marriage, and three grandchildren. As a
qualified teacher she has taught in high school, TAFE and university. In recent
years, to enhance her teaching qualifications, she has undertaken study in the
areas of business and leadership, gaining a Masters degree. This has led to
her current position as the state manager of a charity organisation. Although
she has spent the greater part of her life and work in the southern states, she
is now living and working in Brisbane. Many of the choices of where she has
lived over the years are linked to her family relationships, particularly with her
parents. As a young mother and later a single parent, she often chose to live
near her parents for their support.

Krishna is the oldest of four siblings, a sister and two younger brothers. Her
father is a descendant of the Wiradjuri people of central NSW. Much of her
childhood was spent moving throughout New South Wales and Victoria due to
her father's work as a minister, which meant that after a placement for a
period of 3-5 years, the family would move on to a new town. Because these
constant moves were a normal part of their family life, Krishna has found it
easy to adapt to relocations, as her story later shows. In fact, she considered
it "a great experience" which gave her the change to "know a lot of people in
different communities … a lot of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
across the country". In some communities, her father ran the Aboriginal
church, so there was a lot of involvement with the local Indigenous
community. Krishna has always been aware of her Aboriginality and she has
tried to be part of the Aboriginal community wherever she has lived, as her
story later reveals.

Her primary schooling was undertaken in the various towns she lived, and she completed her high school in Melbourne to the equivalent of what was year 9. She says she never really enjoyed school and was glad to leave. Later in life, she used her negative schooling experiences to help her become a better teacher to unmotivated students. After school, her mother helped her to secure a jewellery apprenticeship for 12 months, but she "didn't really like that that much". She attributes some of the restlessness she was feeling to the fact that she was, "16 and wanting to leave home to get out and see the world. So I went back to Sydney for a year, knocked around with friends up there". She did not find a job in Sydney, and admits at this stage that she really did not know what she wanted to do with her life. She also did not have any help or advice to assist her in those decisions.

Krishna's journey into higher education began with a 12 month bridging program for Aboriginal people at Swinbourne College in Melbourne. The course objective was to "basically get people up to speed if they wanted to get into the college in a mainstream program". Krishna admits that the course "wasn't overly rigorous", but she appreciated the qualification which enabled her to get into teachers college. It was not Krishna's original intention to become a teacher because her memories of schooling were not good, but when she was unable to get a placement in a visual arts course in Perth where her parents had moved, she had to make another career choice. At that time, Krishna's father decided after many years of ministering that he want to go to university to gain some formal teaching qualifications. He encouraged Krishna to apply for the same course insisting that it would give her "something constructive to do with her life", and also "good standing to go into the other course". Heeding his advice, she enrolled in a primary teaching program at Mt.Lawley College in Perth.

Around this time, she married her first husband, an Aboriginal man from Sydney, who had moved to Perth to be with her. Krishna started the course in February of that year, got married in May, and had her first child, a son, in February, during the second year of her study. Looking back, she says "it was a bit silly, getting married a few months into the course, just settling into

relationship and then being pregnant a few months later. I was pretty excited about it - my mother was horrified … said I should have waited". Like many Aboriginal women, Krishna was a very young mother, getting married at 19 and having the baby at 20, celebrating her birthday in hospital. During the interview, she laughed about how she always seemed to be pregnant "waddling around campus" referring to her subsequent pregnancies.

Krishna found that being a wife and mother, she had to make sacrifices with respect to her study and career. Because her husband wanted to go to a bible college in Gnowangerup, 200 kms south of Perth, Krishna was unable to complete her teaching degree. She was very disappointed about that, but her love of learning encouraged her to also undertake the bible studies. However, at the end of the second year of study, she gave birth to her second son, and with two small boys, a new baby and two year old, as well as her husband studying fulltime, she found it too difficult to complete a third year of study. Once more, she put aside her own ambitions to allow her husband to achieve his goals thus giving him "he needed the space to get through the third year".

After her husband graduated from the course, they moved back briefly to Perth, and then to Canberra where her parents had recently moved. Although he was qualified, her husband was reluctant to take on a ministry position due to his lack of confidence. In the interview, she said she realised later that he was dealing with a lot of emotional problems, and on the verge of a nervous breakdown which she didn't understand at the time. Her husband got a job cleaning at the art gallery, and Krishna started her first official full-time job with Aboriginal Hostels as a clerk. To enable her to work, the children were cared for by a family day care lady, and her mother also helped occasionally. Throughout the interview, she often referred to the continued support she received from her parents, and remarked that she would not have been able to cope without their help over the years. This became critical, when she and her husband separated when she was 8 months pregnant with their third child. With her change in circumstance, Krishna was forced to go back to work six weeks after the baby was born. She became the primary carer and wage-earner for the family at a very difficult time, and had to negotiate many

aspects of her life to keep working. Her determination and resilience demonstrate the strength of women who juggle enormous family responsibilities whilst maintaining employment and careers. For Krishna, there was no other option as she "had to keep a roof over our heads and had to keep working to do that … had to find another day care mum who would take on a new baby". She spoke of how hard that situation was for her as a young mother working to support her family, "Truthfully it was difficult – but you grit your teeth and do it because there aren't any other alternatives. That's what a lot of women have to do – they have to live with what the circumstances are and get on with it".

Because of her financial position, Krishna remained in her job even though it was not satisfying work, since "at that time, a job was about paying money, paying the bills". Her job choice was primarily determined by family needs. Part of the dissatisfaction was that the job "wasn't in an area that I was skilled in – maths was my worst subject - auditing accounts for hostels … making sure they met the budget … it was just tedious, the same thing every few days and then reconciling at the end of the month, checking the balance". Despite the work being uninteresting, Krishna found the workplace to her liking - "the people I worked with were quite nice so that balanced out the tedious part of the work itself".

Recognising that she could not cope without their support, when her parents moved to Junee, NSW Krishna followed and took up a job with Department of Housing as an Aboriginal liaison officer. Her duties required her to talk to Aboriginal families that "they were having hassles with and I was meant sort it out", thus taking on the role of the "Aboriginal problem-solver". Her reaction to this was one of distaste: "Once I got into the job and realised what they wanted me to do, I loathed it. It was just awful". This placed her in a difficult situation with the Aboriginal community, being the "meat in the sandwich". Because of the experiences she had in this position, she came to realise that there was a great need for cultural awareness in the workplace. She found she had to work with people who were racist towards the Aboriginal clients, in particular "a boss who was such an arrogant man … he didn't realise he was

racist … he had no time for anybody and believed that every incident that people complained about was their fault. He would never go out, but sent you out to sort it out … thought as an Indigenous person you wouldn't get as much stick". After 12 months working under these circumstances, she decided to leave and do something more personally rewarding.

Managing studies, work and family

Reigniting her interest in being an artist, Krishna enrolled as a fulltime student in a Visual Arts degree, majoring in ceramics, pottery and glass. She describes it as "probably the best 3 years I have ever spent – I got to draw, make pots, to make lots of lovely glass things. I got to look at a lot of art pictures, got to do art theory and did quite a few assignments around styles of art, Indigenous art, Maori art – I thoroughly enjoyed it". She welcomed the opportunity to explore her Aboriginality and "used a lot of Indigenous design work, tried a lot of styles and decorative art in Indigenous artwork, and looked at artwork, decoration and symbols from around Australia, from Wiradjuri as well". Through these activities, Krishna believes her identity was strengthened as well as her practical knowledge of Aboriginal culture which she later used in her teaching. It allowed her to develop her creative talents and was a period of self discovery. It was the "first time to explore Indigenous expression and my own creative ideas. It brought out a lot of stuff that was in me that I knew I had but hadn't had the opportunity to develop".

Financially, life as a student was difficult, but Krishna was accustomed to living frugally. She received Abstudy payments, and sub-let one side of her house to make ends meet. She criticises the changes to Abstudy which have made it much more difficult for Indigenous students in recent years to receive financial aid, as when she was studying "Abstudy allowed you to claim additional expenses for art materials. This has now changed".

It was at an International Ceramics symposium in Sydney that she met her second husband. They married and moved to the north coast to a farm outside Bulahdelah, north of Newcastle where they stayed there for around 11

years. In the first year, they built a house of mud bricks, made pottery and set up a small shop to sell their products back into the Sydney markets. They were doing "quite well until the end of 1990 when the recession hit" and overnight pottery outlets dried up with "people not buying property, not buying anything - interest rates had gone up to 17½%". This crisis triggered a decision for Krishna to undertake a postgraduate teaching qualification in order to teach art. She accepts that this decision was once again based on family needs. But it also led to what she wanted to do, "I had to compromise, I could have dug my heels in and been a potter for ever and ever, but I knew that the choice had to be a bit more than just money … had to be something you enjoy", a balance she believes is important in career-decision making. Back at university, she found she was pregnant with her fourth child and taking things in her stride, a philosophy she appears to adopt in life, she finished her classes in December, had the baby, and did a deferred practicum in February. She found that during the course, this time around she had a partner who was very supportive and helped her to achieve her goal. "I had to travel 2 hours to Newcastle. So I took the baby with me and boarded down during the week. The boys stayed at home with J. – it wasn't ideal but I had to do that to get that piece of paper".

When she moved up the coast, Krishna joined the local Aboriginal land council "wanting to keep connections with local community and also to have an understanding of local happenings". She discussed how difficult this can be if you are a Aboriginal person from another group going into someone-else's traditional area, but Krishna has found that through observing protocol and making connections, she has been accepted wherever she has gone, and through this process has been able to make positive contributions. At that time, the land council was organising cross-cultural awareness training for local businesses hoping that this would improve race relations within the town. After some training, Krishna became one of the workshop presenters and for the next year, she juggled three different jobs - teaching part-time in the schools and in TAFE, and working for the land council. She admits that it was a "bit stressful – you would get up and think where have I got to be today?"

In addition to her paid work, Krishna became involved with the Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group (AECG) at local and state level, and in her own words was "pretty active" with the school's Aboriginal Student Support Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committee. She wonders how she managed to fit it all in, often going to meetings after work, and on weekends.

At this stage, Krishna would have preferred having only one job, but "couldn't land a full-time art teaching job on the coast" due to the lack of job opportunities in some geographical locations. This placed her in a dilemma with respect to her family. "If I wanted to move to whoop whoop, I could have had a job tomorrow. They wanted teachers at Bourke but we didn't want to move … the kids were settled and we were living in a nice location". So in order to stay on the farm and maintain stability for their family, she and her husband took casual jobs - "bits and pieces of whatever we could get. J. would get work occasionally – the lollypop man doing the roads, or go and do a building or fencing jobs". Krishna identified remoteness as a key problem in employment and careers for Indigenous people living in rural areas.

> One of the disadvantages of living in the country, you just have to take whatever you can get. Many of Indigenous people have to face this – the remoter areas limit your choices – you are actually thinking not career, career, but what can I get to pay the bills. If you are thinking career, you have to move away.

To improve her employability, Krishna retrained through a TAFE Indigenous teacher program gaining a Graduate Diploma in Adult Education at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). She travelled to the city for her block releases leaving behind her young family. After this period of training, she went on to a full teaching wage, the "first good money in her life". The next 8 years Krishna spent teaching basic education (literacy and numeracy), Aboriginal studies (art, history and culture). She also had opportunities during that time to undertake managerial "stints" in Sydney, acting as Manager of the North Sydney TAFE Indigenous unit. She was offered that position full-time but rejected it, again for family reasons, as her husband and family did not

want to go back to Sydney. Instead, she moved to Armidale, 3 hours west of home to take up the position of Aboriginal Co-ordinator of Aboriginal programs at New England TAFE. She took her youngest son with her, but left behind her second son, her daughter and husband. Krishna's eldest son had gone to live with his father in Sydney. "The idea was eventually we would all move to Armidale if the job worked out and we all liked the place".

Krishna had to manage family separation, a new job and travelling home as often as she could. She was still the main breadwinner with her husband working part-time and caring for the children. "We were still basically living on my wage and J. was getting bits and pieces. At that stage I was earning about $47 to 48,000 but was spending a lot on fuel, up to $150 per week". She acknowledges that this was an unusual situation, with the man usually being the partner working away. But, she says that their arrangement was possible was because "J. is unusual man", and fitted in with her career. Krishna feels she has been "blessed that J. has given me enough space to pursue the things I wanted to pursue … very supportive". However, she also acknowledges that their relationship is based on mutual support in that she supported him in his desire to stay on the farm, and so chose jobs that allowed the family to do so.

Krishna's concern about being away from her family, and the family not really wanting to live in Armidale, led to a decision for her and her husband to participate in a Diploma course in community and youth work in Tasmania. It was run by a Christian Group who worked with youth at risk.

> They had bought this ex-hydro town in Tasmania where they had the town set up so that young people could come and live and do the course, they had businesses running and kids could come and work in the businesses and learn skills. They were also given counselling.

For Krishna, this was "a defining point in moving out of teaching". One of the frustrations she had felt about teaching in TAFE had been that she had seen a lot of young people who hadn't been successful at school, "coming into

these basic education classes, almost illiterate, with no self esteem and what was happening in their homes and personal lives was distracting them from achieving in academia". She was starting to develop an awareness that "there was a step needed before this". She really enjoyed working and studying with her husband, describing it as "a really great experience – we learnt a lot about each other. We learnt to communicate with young people. We were working along kids at risk and going to classes to learn about the theory". This combined the practical and theoretical elements of the course and work.

Although they were offered the opportunity to stay on after the course and work in the community, Krishna and her husband returned for a short period to the farm in NSW and tried to make it work again. But in the end, they both realised the farm was unviable so they moved to Brisbane where her parents had retired. There Krishna worked for her brother's company which specialised in business training for Indigenous organisations. Her job involved helping Indigenous organisations put their policies and procedures together, and training board members in their responsibilities. These were mostly short-term contracts usually over six weeks to develop a project, requiring her to travel throughout Queensland, with a lot of follow-up work over the phone. Krishna found that she enjoyed working with Indigenous community organisations and felt her work was making a positive contribution to their independence, self-management and accountability, an aspect of Indigenous community functioning that has received much criticism.   But she also became frustrated with the "quick-fix" approach.

> The part I disliked was that I would go in for a short project (six weeks) and then you would be out of there, then when they found a little bit more money, you would be back in there again. I felt you only just started to make some in-roads and then you were out of it again.

She was also concerned about the lack of appropriate training in the organisations.

Most of the CEOs were female, a mixed bag – some had good qualifications. One had no quals but stepped into the role when they needed it and stepped up to the mark. Before we came into the picture, only half of the positions would have been matched to their qualification … some of them would have got the positions because of their personality, purely on that basis, others had some good academic qualifications.

Another issue she found uncomfortable was the dominance of certain families in Indigenous community organisations, a situation she believes is a real barrier to Indigenous people's advancement.

Whether we like it or not, many community organisations do not run them as a business, they run them like a pseudo-family-welfare network. And so they miss a lot of stuff that stops the organisation from going forward.

It was at this time, Krishna was "thinking a lot more about a career and about what I can do to make significant change in a positive way for other people, Indigenous people". She knew she had "a lot of experience in the teaching field and project management, but wanted to get my head around the leadership management executive stuff".

If you are going to lead a community you have to know what you are doing. I felt I had ¾ of the picture, but not all of it. I hadn't actually had time to work out what my strengths were.

Krishna began to wonder about her own leadership and management abilities but was plagued by feelings of self doubt, "I kept thinking I could do a better job than that but never stepping up to the mark. I was held back by own self-confidence about what I could, and couldn't do". This seemed to explain her reasons for taking a lower position in Taree as the Aboriginal Co-Ordinator, rather than the manager's position, although she was told by many people "you could have done the other job standing on your head". Krishna believes

that her lack of self belief and confidence was rooted in her experiences at school.

> I think in my head I've had sentences that said … you can't do that, you are really not that smart. This comes from school. I did remedial maths all the way through. I did remedial maths when I was doing my primary school training. It was like this thing … you were dumb.

Although she does not blame her teachers for making her feel that way, she believes that she did not receive support or guidance to do better and "I think some of the teachers sort of let you cruise … you were never encouraged to be anything more than mediocre". Despite her achievements, she comments on how difficult it is to overcome these negative feelings which are so deeply embedded in your psyche:

> I taught maths in TAFE and I still had a headset which said you can't teach maths, you're dumb and yet I would go and read up the night before the unit I was going to teach and would virtually teach myself the night before. I didn't understand it until I got it stuck in my head and then went in to teach it the next day. That was putting a lot of stress on yourself, when in your head you think you're dumb.

Krishna's life journey has been about balancing her successes against these perceptions of herself as a low achiever. She comments that the whole journey is not just about gaining the relevant skills, but believing that you actually have those skills.

> I think a lot of it is overcoming those early negative stuff that I experienced at school where I never felt for whatever reason I didn't achieve that well at school, or whatever that happened didn't click with me that well. I don't think I was a total drop-out but I was never up there as an A grade student, I wasn't right down at the bottom, I was somewhere floating in the middle and I never enjoyed the experience.

Krishna believes that she is not alone in her lack of confidence and self belief, suggesting that it is a common feeling for Indigenous women.

> The mental step you have to take and the level of confidence you have to have to make the jump, is quite a lot. Some people have great confidence, but a lot of Indigenous women, for whatever reason, don't have that strong self confidence to go past the next level.

But her lack of confidence has never stifled her love of learning and "having a go".

> I'd been thinking about it, and about this whole thing about self-doubt and if I really wanted to do something about it, to go back to uni and take some time to think about it. So by this time I am thinking career … I really want to understand leadership and community development and how this fits together … together, not factionally to move a community forward.

Fortunately, she came across some information on the Certificate in Indigenous Leadership, a program for Indigenous community leaders, run by the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre (AILC). Krishna attended the Adelaide program and found that it contained all the elements she had been wanting.

> They look at Indigenous leadership, different models of leadership. That was a defining moment in my understanding of leadership and the difference with management – what's the difference between a manager and a leader.

After the leadership program, she joined the Master of Arts Leadership program at Australian Catholic University that had been recommended by another Indigenous person who was a graduate of the course.

The course (MA Leadership) gave me a lot of scope to explore the issues I had been thinking about – just even the dynamics of how women and men lead differently, the processes of how we think about things and why do women have this great deal of nurturing in the way they deal with situations - a lot of different models, Indigenous leadership, servant leadership, what's different about this to mainstream leadership.

Krishna completed her Masters in Arts Leadership, and while studying, won her current position. During her postgraduate studies, she also taught Aboriginal cultural studies in the Diploma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education program. She is now enrolled in a Graduate Diploma in Business Management which she believes will enhance her role in management.

University experiences

Krishna believes that her experience as a student and a teacher in a number of higher education institutions across a range of states (Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia), as well as her participation in community learning programs in Tasmania, have given her sufficient understanding of the supports and barriers to learning for Indigenous higher education students. These include the feeling of belonging, having a "good Indigenous Support Unit" and course content that is enjoyable and delivered by supportive teachers in a positive learning environment.

For herself as an Indigenous student, the Indigenous Support Unit is important and she has found that:

Whenever I have studied I have always gone and introduced myself to the Indigenous unit. When I was at (name deleted), it wasn't that I was not supported, it was more like when you walked into the place there wasn't anybody there … yet when I walked into ACU there was always

someone there. Some units you got support and some you had to go and hunt for people if you needed any help.

She comments that her experiences with the Weemala Indigenous Unit and the Australian Catholic University have been extremely positive. One aspect of her participation in higher learning that is important to Krishna is her spirituality. She enjoys the spiritual environment at the Australian Catholic University because it makes her feel comfortable as a student and a Christian.

> I don't know whether it is the connection with it being a Christian university and because of my upbringing as a Christian, but there are a lot of common connections in that area. In some places you almost have to apologise for being a Christian – if you express a Christian view on anything … I think that is really sad – if you go to ACU, you don't have to be a Christian but you are free to have a spiritual view on things, without it being seen as bizarre or out of line. So I have had some really good conversations on both an education level, on spiritual levels and on personal topics, and I felt all the time people respected you … there was a real openness to what you had to say and you could listen to other people and not feel as though it was being rammed down through throat or threatened.

Some of the difficulties Krishna faced with study were with juggling family commitments and finances, but having experienced similar issues in the past, she was able to manage the multiple roles with the assistance of her partner. One issue of her university experience of which she was very critical, was the complex administrative procedures of the university which led to her missing the graduation ceremony for her master's degree.

> Only the administrative procedures … having to check you are enrolled in the right thing. Graduation was biggest disappointment … I really wanted to attend the ceremony, I didn't attend graduations for other courses I had done, there was always something happening that

stopped me from going and I was a bit peeved. It was like deja vu, I've missed it again".

Krishna has found that there is a significant difference between the post graduate experience and that of the undergraduate student. These include the lack of support for postgraduate students and the fact that being a postgraduate student can be an isolating experience due to the nature of study.

> It's a little bit different. When you do undergraduate work at uni, you attach yourself to the Aboriginal unit or some other support mechanism, you make a circle of friends that operate around that course that you are doing. Post graduate work is really different – it's quite lonely, you are basically on your own. It's a different interaction when you're a post grad student and there's a group of undergraduate students there talking … you have to push yourself into the group, so I did get to know the other students on a superficial level. I got to know you (Researcher) and probably some of the other staff by having one-on-one conversations.

Krishna makes a number of suggestions on how to support postgraduate students including "building collegial support particularly for introverted people". This is important as much postgraduate work is on line "which is even more lonely".

> This was my first experience of on-line; I have done every mode of learning now - face to face; travelling down in blocks; distance and on-line. What you do by yourself might get you through quicker but having the face to face … suits a lot of Indigenous people better.

Krishna was able to cope with this isolation because she worked regularly with a tutor so she could "talk to that tutor, have a face-to-face conversation … say I don't understand this bit … what do you think they mean, and I'd get the information I needed". Her comments suggest that postgraduate support

needs greater attention to improve the quality of Indigenous postgraduate students' experiences in universities.

Identity – the pressure of being the Aboriginal expert

As a worker and student, Krishna has often found it difficult to cope with the expectations of her being the Aboriginal expert and advocate.

> Being Indigenous in my work has placed a lot of emphasis on me being the Indigenous expert, especially in my teaching … at that time I was the only qualified Aboriginal teacher at Taree TAFE, and a lot of people would come and talk to me about perspectives and expect that I would have an answer. Often with protocols they would ask me about who they should be approaching in the community and other information, which I didn't mind doing because it showed respect … but it was extra work.

Krishna found these expectations were often quite unrealistic, "because you were Indigenous they thought … oh you can teach Aboriginal art … you can teach Aboriginal history … that's what I mean about being an Aboriginal expert". Despite the additional pressures, Krishna has often deliberately sought jobs that would enable her to indulge her "passion" and allow her to promote Aboriginal education in the community. She felt that this gave her some input into educational change. Furthermore, in the various jobs she has held, even though they may not have directly involved working with Aboriginal people, Krishna has used those positions to address issues for Indigenous people, and to promote cultural awareness.

> Yes, that is a fair statement, that's been underlying everything that I have done. As an Indigenous person even if you are not working in an identified position in an organisation - not even an Aboriginal organisation.

Support and encouragement in leadership roles

Krishna firmly believes that for Indigenous women to develop in their leadership roles, it is important for them to have support and encouragement. Reflecting on her journey, she emphasised the role of mentors:

> I've had different people at different times in my life that have encouraged me to have a go, but I still think it's about confidence to go forward to do it … that helped me stick at it when I felt wretched … very important to have someone there.

Having experienced the benefit of having mentors, Krishna sees herself now moving into that role with other Indigenous women.

> I think I would love to be doing that. Opportunities for coaching and mentoring are important, particularly women who are at middle-management level and wanting to make that next step up to senior management.

But she emphasises that Indigenous women need to be encouraged to accept the help offered, and to appreciate that having assistance is not a reflection of them not being smart enough. She believes that Indigenous women often do not take advantage of such offers because it may cause others to question their abilities:

> Yes those same things are really important … getting past this concept that you have gotta do it yourself. It is ok to ask – it doesn't show you are a dummy – or that you are not on the right track … and it's ok to say I don't know, but I really want to know what the answer is. I'll ask whoever I need to ask. The people I've seen who haven't made it, are the ones who say, "oh I don't know if I can ask that".

Krishna recognises that the promotion of Indigenous women's leadership and careers is not easy when communities are struggling with social issues such

as domestic violence, drugs and alcohol, and incarceration. In her current work overseeing drug and rehabilitation programs, she is aware of the complexity of substance abuse and violence, and their effects on daily life and desires for the future.

> For a lot of Indigenous women, I think it is hard if you have a lot of violence happening in your home, you don't have a supportive partner, and you are living in a small closed community … the expectations on you are enormous. On top of that, if you have a desire, or you have a vision where you want to go forward in your career, they very rarely match … and there are a lot of choices that have to be made, a lot of negotiation.

Krishna comments that there must be more support and understanding from the wider community about these issues:

> You can't expect people to turn up for jobs if they haven't got clothes suitable for employment, they are not getting enough sleep, and getting bashed every night. It's like … how can you expect kids in school to learn ... they were having horrendous experiences in the evenings and when they went home in the communities … and what is happening in their headspace is not conducive to learning. You are expecting people to do on this career journey and they have a desire to do this, but all this other stuff is happening in their lives.

Final reflections

> I have tried to go with the opportunities that have been put in front of me and its things I have been passionate about. But they have also been good opportunities for me and for my family. A lot of Indigenous women think like that … will it be good for my family, will it be beneficial for the community, in respect to training. Maybe this is something I can bring back into my community.

5.4   CAREER STORY 3:   MAXINE

Maxine is in her early 50s, married with four children and seven grandchildren. At the beginning of the interview, she pointed out her heritage with the Gooreng Gooreng people, the traditional landowners of the Bundaberg area of Queensland. She was keen to talk about her Aboriginal background providing information on her grandmother, a Gooreng Gooreng woman who had been brought up on the mission at Cherbourg, and her great-grandparents. Maxine was born in Alpha, a small town in central Queensland, when her father was working in the railway.   However, she grew up in Bundaberg with her parents, four sisters and three brothers. At the time of the interview, she was preparing to return to live in her community after spending 10 years living and working in Brisbane.

Maxine described her life growing up as an Aboriginal person in a small country town where Aboriginal people lived as fringe dwellers. There, she experienced direct racism in the allocation of housing and segregation from the wider community.

> We lived on the outskirts of Bundaberg. Some of us lived in housing commission homes, the rest lived down in what we called the bush area.   There were a lot of housing commission homes throughout Bundaberg – that particular area was the only place that the Indigenous people were allowed to live. There were about 5 houses together. But the majority of Indigenous community had to live down the bush in humpies and tin shacks.

Maxine became aware very early in her life that Aboriginal people were subjected to racism in other areas such as employment. Maxine recalls her mother saying that "white people who got lower marks" than she did at school landed jobs in banks and other places, but "if you were black you had to go out into the fields or do domestic duties" so that:

Mum and Dad mostly did field work – that was the only work available to Indigenous people. At one time Dad was a train driver for Queensland Railways but he left because some white workers wouldn't work with him because of his colour, calling him a "black b." That really hurt him as he was doing so well in his exams. Before they got married, Mum was a domestic working for a white family.

Maxine feels disappointed that although her parents were very intelligent and did well at school, they were denied the opportunities that other Australians took for granted. She says it was not until many years later when she undertook cultural studies at university, that she came to understand how racism affects all aspects of Aboriginal people's lives including their ability to get quality employment. But she acknowledges that today her children have been able to secure better jobs than her parents.

Most of my family are working in influential positions, for example, health, education and law. From the early days when our parents had to work in the fields, we have moved on now, and my siblings and my children have been able to secure really good jobs in mainstream and Indigenous areas.

Maxine spent most of her life working in the fields, picking fruit and vegetables, planting and stripping cane, and picking tobacco. The work was physically hard, over long hours. Being of small stature, Maxine found the work took an extreme toll on her body and she believes that today her health has been impacted by the experiences she had working in the field:

Sometimes the farmers would spray the crops with chemicals just before we picked them and I would often end up with rashes and feeling quite ill. Also when it rained we used plastic fertilizer bags as raincoats … I often wonder what that did to us.

Impact of negative experiences in early schooling

Maxine believes that being stuck in unskilled labouring work for many years was the result of her limited education. She did not complete high school due to ill health. She had chronic childhood asthma which meant she was often absent, and on her return to school was given little assistance.

> I was very sickly and if you were away sick, you were just allowed to fall behind. There were no specialised programs to help you catch up what you missed. I lost a lot of time due to asthma, and when I would come back to school other students were advanced and nothing put in place to help you make up what you missed.

Her perceived "failure" at school had a significant impact on Maxine's self-confidence, a belief that she was to carry into adulthood.

> As a learner, this made me feel very inferior. It made me feel that I wasn't brainy enough. I felt I was behind the 8 ball all the time. When kids were passing exams and I would go to sit the same exams and not being aware of what was covered … I just didn't make it. Always felt that I was in the lower level of the school.

Maxine links her negative experiences at school with the lack of a positive school environment. She went to a local Catholic school and does not have "fond memories" of her time there.

> The school atmosphere was not really good. I always thought it was because we were Aboriginal, that we were treated differently. We were the only Aboriginal family and then another Aboriginal student came. We thought it was because we were Aboriginal that we weren't treated as well as the others, but years later I did my pract with a non-Indigenous teacher who went to the same school and her experience was the same as us. It wasn't because we were Aboriginal at all, it

was just the whole atmosphere of the school … not racism, but the negative culture of school.

Maxine found that her schooling did not prepare her for the workforce. Rather the limited skills she gained, together with the lack of opportunities, only allowed her to engage in labouring work. She received little career guidance. Indeed, the teachers had such low expectations of her, they recommended that she did not continue on to high school, but take up a "domestic" position.

After school, when I was in Grade 7, Mum came up for an interview and one of the nuns at the school said "Maxine is not really good at education, she would probably be good at cleaning jobs and that sort of thing, or something to do with her hands because she is good with art".

That comment has remained with Maxine for many years and influenced her choice of career and how she felt about herself:

It set me into a place where I believed I was not good enough to do anything else, so thought I'll just go out and do cleaning jobs - what's suggested or field work.

After school, Maxine did mostly domestic work such as cleaning or being a live-in nanny. She also undertook "a stint" working as a railway waitress on trains and in the "tea room" at the local railway station. But the majority of her work was out in the field. She left school at aged 14, and did this type of work until she was married. Then, after she had her family, she returned to working "in the paddock" until she was 40. Maxine was an extremely hard worker and was well known in the district, as a fast and efficient worker, "a gun picker". She says that she pushed herself to extremes to make up for her lack of achievements in school, and so that she could be seen to be "the best at something". That drive was to later push her to getting a degree, becoming a manager and receiving an award from the Australian Government for her outstanding contribution to community.

Maxine describes the turning point in her life that brought her out of the "paddock".

> I was working in management in a hydroponics factory. I was employed to set up the full operation. It was this huge concern and I had about 40 staff under me, then the owner decided that they were going to bring in another person to take my place, and that person had a university degree. Although I had all the knowledge and the skills, and did all the hard work, someone was coming in with a university degree and taking over. I felt that I was used to set up this factory and that this person with their degree was going to get the cream of it. So I thought, ok, I don't want to be that person anymore, I don't want to be the paddock worker anymore. I just don't want to take the crumbs - always doing the hard yards just to make someone else look good.

She knew that to change her life she needed to be educated - to have that degree too to make her more employable. To help her make some decisions about appropriate study, she sought the advice of a sister who had been to university.

> One of my sisters who was in university contacted me and said 'there is a course going that you can do' … and 'I said I can't do it', but she insisted 'Sis, now's your chance'. So I was encouraged by a sibling to go to uni. At that particular time, I was so hurt and disappointed at what the hydroponics company had done – used me to set things up and then pushed me out – I realised that I would never get anywhere unless I was educated. I decided I didn't want the crumbs anymore. I wanted to have a good job.

Managing studies, work and family

Initially, Maxine chose to do an Associate Diploma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education course at Australian Catholic University, at the McAuley campus in Brisbane. It was a mixed-mode program consisting of

residential blocks combined with external study. This suited her because "it allowed me to stay in my community and still get a qualification". Maxine also felt she was not ready to go straight into a university degree because she believed she "did not have study skills". Being with Indigenous people, Maxine "felt very comfortable", and she "didn't feel inferior because the other students were coming from the same background". Whilst completing the Associate Diploma, she was studying by distance from Bundaberg and attending the face-to-face residential blocks in Brisbane, twice a semester. To enable her to be closer to the university, half-way into the course, Maxine moved to Brisbane with her husband and two youngest children. Later, she attended residentials at the university's Sydney campus to complete a Bachelor of Teaching and Bachelor of Education.

Taking up study immediately improved Maxine's job prospects. Shortly after commencing the Associate Diploma, she was able to apply for a teacher aide's position in a local Catholic primary school that had links with the Weemala Indigenous Unit. After working at the school for a number of years, she moved on to a position as Indigenous Education Officer for Anglican Schools providing support to Indigenous students and their teachers throughout Queensland. She then became manager of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre.

> I would never have been able to get where I am today, if I had not done this course. Studying has given me the confidence to pursue, and effectively maintain a management position. Now, as an Indigenous teacher, I have received the skills to develop and implement such programs as the curriculum for Indigenous studies.

Whilst Maxine acknowledges the benefits of her university education, she also talks about the difficulties faced in making the journey. Her being away attending residentials, and also travelling for work, had an impact on her family life. When she moved from a small town to a large city, it was a tough process for the whole family. The children had to start at new schools and the family had to rely on relatives for accommodation until they could afford the

rent and bond to move into a place of their own. In contrast to her home community, employment was very hard to find in the city:

> At home, I was living in a community where I could just go out and do field work, so there was always an income. When we moved to the city, my husband and I had to find work, so it was a real gamble. I was lucky enough to get a job in education straight away.

But, she found the greatest cost of relocation was in terms of being away from her own community, a loss that is often reported by Indigenous people who have moved away for work, study or other reasons. She is conscious that on her return to the community at the end of the year, she will have to "re-establish" herself. That move has been prompted by a desire to care for her elderly mother. For Maxine, family obligations are very important and despite the fact she is giving up a successful career in a managerial position, she has no hesitation in making that decision when she says, "Mother is living on her own. She needs her family around her. Mum has dedicated her life to family and now she should have something back". Maxine is also keen to step back from the pace of her recent life and adds that she will be happy "to do things that I enjoy whether it is painting, consultancy or just whatever. I want to make a choice for myself".

Conflicting pressures in the workplace

Maxine found that there were many pressures in being an Indigenous worker particularly in an Indigenous job. She found that there were expectations of her being able to fix up the existing problems that had previously developed in the working environment. She was seen as the "Aboriginal problem-solver" and therefore needing little support.

> When I went into this particular job, I found that there were a lot of jobs that had to be developed. I found that the organisation had employed an Indigenous person for the role so then I had to fix it all up just

because I was Indigenous. So it was, here's a problem here, you fix it up and make it better than it is.

Maxine associates the great pressure to fix up problems created by other Indigenous people, with the unwillingness of organisations to address issues and problems themselves. Furthermore, she points out that some organisations when faced with incompetent Indigenous workers merely move them to another position rather than discipline or sack them.

There is a distinct reluctance of systems to address poor performance and accountability of Indigenous workers – they just move them somewhere else. Therefore the problems never get addressed. It is like they are afraid to address "black business" because it is perceived to be racist, or else they see it as normal for black people to be bickering or fighting.

The continuing presence of the relocated worker in the organisation often creates further stress for the incoming worker/manager who has to not only cope with the legacy of poor past management, but may have to work alongside or under the incompetent worker.

The opposition that I got was that the person employed previously in that position was an Indigenous person, and there was a lot of opposition because what I was developing was not in line with what they done.

Maxine is very critical of the practice of employing Indigenous people because of their Aboriginality rather than their qualifications, training and experience. She believes that this is partially because in the early days when Aboriginal people were starting to be employed in Indigenous roles, few were formally qualified. Now days, with the increase of Indigenous people going to university, she sees many educated Indigenous people coming through. However, they are being expected to pick up the pieces and solve the problems of their predecessors who often feel threatened by the new

graduates. This sometimes leads, as Maxine points out, to their work being sabotaged so that the previous worker/manager's poor work performance is not being highlighted against the new worker/manager's better one.

> I found that the Indigenous person involved wasn't educated. I realised that that person was threatened by what I had put into the place … I came in with experience in education and was told by other people up the line to develop the curriculum, but faced conflict trying to get my ideas accepted. It took many years of convincing them that this was the way it was supposed to go.

Those pressures impacted on Maxine's health and well–being. From a relatively healthy person who maintained reasonably good physical health, she believes that in the last five years, her health has suffered greatly. Furthermore, that this is directly linked to the stress of conflict in the workplace and the lack of support from management in resolving work-related issues.

> I found that while I was going through the years of battling the system and battling these people, it did impact on my health. I found that I was suffering with health – stress, physical sicknesses such as pre-cancer, diabetes.

Other pressures that Maxine felt in her work and study was in the area of family and community obligations and expectations. She still had children at home, and "had to work in this role and was still studying. I was working long hours, studying full-time and working full-time. There was a huge distance travelling to and from work each day".

Being the "Aboriginal expert" also took its toll. Maxine explains that

> working in roles such as cultural awareness, there is an expectation that you have to know everything, for example, what language it is, and where it comes from where … and you automatically are expected to

know the group whereas there could be 700 groups around Australia. If you don't know, you have to find that information or be able to refer them to another agency. Because you are Indigenous, you are supposed to know all the answers.

Careers and Indigenous women

Talking about having a career is something Maxine expressed as being new to her, because for many years her primary focus was "just having a job". This began to change once she started study, and she became quite excited about the prospect.

> I started thinking more about a career than just a job. Probably when I first started studying, it was "ok I'm gonna to do this course now and I'm gonna get a job" … and I was happy about that. But the reality about a career path didn't come into it until a little bit later down the track. I thought "ok I am doing this, I am doing education and hang on, this is going to give me a career here and it's gonna be a career in teaching". When I realised the reality of the whole thing, I was quite excited about it. This is an area I have always dreamed about being in but never dreamed about having the opportunity … and the more I started studying, the more anxious I became about having a career path. The doors just started opening up along with the realisation of how important those studies were to me.

Despite her enthusiasm, Maxine believes that it is not easy for Indigenous women to have careers due to their multiple responsibilities, and the stress of having to achieve the balance in their lives.

> In some cases, people move into careers quite easily, but it also depends on what their family is like. They might have a grown family when they are studying or they might have studied before they had children. In my case, I had to do that along the way, and I've found that a lot of our Indigenous women are rearing families, studying and

trying to do some part-time work, or working full-time. That is a really big commitment for that person because you have to really negotiate your time and sometimes some areas really suffer and it is hard to jiggle around what is the best place you should be at a certain time.

Maxine has found that the lack of support for Indigenous workers and managers in the workplace leads to isolation. The lack of support for Indigenous women in management roles is a great concern to her since she has begun working at that level:

> There are a lot of our Indigenous women out there working in isolation and it can be said that they are used to that "wraparound cultural support". If you are working independently, you can become quite isolated. That's when the stress levels can become quite severe.

In contrast to non-Indigenous women for whom it may be "more of an individual journey", Maxine believes Indigenous women's support needs have a strong cultural basis.

> Cultural people need that support. They need that connectedness to their people at all times, whether it is in a workplace, family, wherever it is. It all comes back to culture … we need the support of our people to walk through all parts of our lives.

With her move into a management position, Maxine has given a lot more thought to what a career is, and what that means for her. She says when she thinks of the word "career", she thinks of "future", and that "it means opportunities … it means security". Maxine identifies strong links between identity, self-esteem and careers when she says:

> Before I was educated and could get into careers, I always felt that I was always below everyone. These were the same feelings when I was going to school, when that teacher said I'd only be good for cleaning and craft things … I always had this low opinion of myself. However,

with being educated and being able to work in this role, it gives me an identity of who I really am … so I am not that person I perceived myself to be … I'm not that person that teacher said I was.

University experiences

Reflecting on her university experiences, there is an acknowledgement from Maxine that she has undergone dramatic changes, both personally and professionally. She firmly believes that her transformation has taken place through gaining a university education, explaining that the university "prepared me for work", and that "doing the university course is the key to the career I have today". The quote below provides an insight into her thoughts about this process.

> Through the educational processes and being able to work and get these jobs, has given me a place of who I really am … I am not some dumb person. I would never have been able to get where I am today if I had not studied. Studying gave me the confidence to pursue and effectively maintain a management position … it has made the most amazing change in my life. I would be still out working in the paddock today, going from week to week on just those few dollars to survive, if I hadn't gone to uni. It's a whole different world now where I can own a home, support my children financially, and build dreams for the future.

She credits her study with her growing confidence and how good it feels,

> To be able to have the confidence to go into interviews and feel that "ok I am going to get this job" where I never ever dreamed I could do that. I can now go into an interview and feel confident that I have got a chance to get the position. These are the big points in my life. I never had these opportunities before and here I am now convincing the panel that I am the best person for the job.

University was a very emotional experience in a number of ways. Maxine freely admits that she had reservations about coming to university. She experienced great anxiety about being able to cope academically, particularly because of her own school experiences, the perceived gaps in her education, and the length of time she had been away from any form of schooling. Maxine was proud when she found she could do the work, but this knowledge and self realisation also made her angry that she had been made to believe she was "dumb". She expressed great sadness about the loss of opportunity.

> One of the things I found coming to university – I had mixed feelings. I started doing assignments and before that I never even knew how to write a letter properly let alone an assignment. I was happy and proud that I was able to go to university. I never thought I would be able to be in a position like that, but I was also sad that it had taken me all this time to find out that I wasn't as dumb as what I thought I was. I was saddened … and even a little angry that I hadn't had the opportunities before that.

Her other reflections of her university experience were very positive. Although her first impression of university "was pretty scary", she settled in quickly. She attributes this to the support she received from the faculty staff, her ATAS tutor, but particularly the Indigenous unit, when she says:

> At Weemala I felt it was more of a family thing. Everybody … the other students had the same opinion. The staff was great, they treated us like students but had great compassion and understanding for us as people. I felt very comfortable. The lecturing staff had a good understanding of Indigenous people. One specific teacher was just as nervous as we were, and she ended up being one of the best teachers.

In her view, there is support for Indigenous women while they are studying "if they are associated with an Indigenous unit, they do get a lot of support with the study part of it". However, the difficulty is that they do not always enjoy

the same level of support at home, and have to rely on their own strengths to achieve the balance:

> Whenever it comes to home, they have to work out themselves how they are going to do their study time, how they are going to have time with their families and all the duties that come along with home life.
> It is very difficult when you have to juggle those two areas, and if you are working, that's another ball to juggle.

Maxine also points out that there are huge differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people with respect to their late entry into study, and the consequent demands as a mature age worker and student.

> Most Indigenous people are coming through as mature-age students, so they are balancing the three elements: family, study and work … whereas, a lot of non-Indigenous people don't necessarily come into education as mature-age students. They come directly from school. They are also from more financially secure situations going into study, whereas our people come from low incomes, that's why they have to work while they are studying so they can still put food on the table.

Like many other Indigenous people, Maxine herself was not only a mature-aged student, but she was also the first in her immediate family to undertake university studies. In contradiction, while she was a leader and teacher of her children in one respect, in another she had to get assistance from her children:

> I am the first to go through university. My children were still at high school when I was studying and a lot of the things I was doing, I had to learn from them, how to do studies … how to do assignments, so some of the parts of my early uni years I had to rely on my children to guide me.

Maxine suggests that this is "often the opposite way around" for non-

Indigenous people who "are teaching their children because they have been to university". Through Maxine's example and being a role model, she has encouraged other family members to go to university. Although her parents were not educated beyond middle primary school, Maxine, two of her sisters, two brothers, her daughter and niece have all completed university qualifications.

Cultural awareness and racism

In 2004, Maxine was awarded a Centenary medal by the Australian Government for her outstanding contribution to the reconciliation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. She talks about her passion for her work in the area of cultural awareness and reconciliation and how she uses these processes to affirm her own identity and to bring about understanding. The desire to use cultural awareness to change attitudes is "motivated by experiences going through the schooling system and what I saw my forefathers had to experience". She is aware that she needs to be an active participant of the change, recognising her own role as an agent of change.

> … to change the face of what is happening throughout the nation, we have to be part of that process ourselves. It's about changing the attitudes, but it is also more. A lot of non-Indigenous people aren't really aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture … so it's sharing and showing them what we are really about.

Maxine is convinced that cultural awareness is the key to combating racism and sharing the history and cultures of Indigenous people would foster better relationships between groups.

> With cultural awareness, racism stems from the fact that non-Indigenous Australians don't know the true history. So if we are taking the history to them, showing them what happens in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture they become more aware of what we do –

why we need to work in a large group! Why we have obligations in extended families! Once they learn how important our culture is to us, it breaks down the stereotypical things that non-Indigenous people believe about Indigenous people.

However, she firmly believes that racism is still prevalent and strongly embedded in Australian society. But she suggests it is more subtle, and that racists are "becoming more clever" about being racist in public to avoid the anti-discrimination penalties.

> Every Indigenous person experiences racism in some form or another. But it is different today than what we experienced when we were younger … it is more hidden, more guarded. Racism was so out there when we were growing up, but they have learnt how to throw a blanket over it, or disguise it. We will always have racism, but with the new policies and practices out there, they have learned how to manoeuvre around it.

Despite the reconciliation process and anti-racism laws and strategies, Maxine says that Indigenous people face racism as a normal part of their daily lives regardless of who they are and how successfully integrated they are into Australian society. As an example, she spoke of a recent incident while shopping with her non-Indigenous husband. They had to wait in line to be served and were totally ignored. She said "this does not happen to him when he is on his own … as Indigenous people we have to face it everyday", the practice of being ignored by counter assistants being one she says she has consistently experienced in her life.

Although racism continues to be an issue in her life and work, Maxine expressed that she did not any problems with sexism personally, probably "because she is a strong person". However, she has to deal with sexism in the workplace being directed towards Indigenous female staff by Indigenous male staff. Mainly, she has handled this by making all workers more aware of

sexual harassment policies and procedures so that it is clear to them that sexism is unacceptable and not tolerated in the workplace.

Indigenous women and leadership

Through the various roles that Maxine has under taken in recent years, both personally and professionally, she believes her experiences have made her a leader in reconciliation. Maxine sees herself as a role model and mentor, and is keen to support other women in leadership. Although she was never given career guidance and mentoring, she believes that they are important aspects of Indigenous women's leadership and career development. She always did everything on her own initiative, but is certain that with "guidance and mentoring to walk beside me, I wouldn't be leaving this position". Without that support she has suffered greatly, so that now she says, "I worked so hard over the years that I am on burnout. You've got to be everything until there is nothing left to give. I have seen so many of our Indigenous women in leadership roles walking away tired, with the same feelings as I have".

Another area of concern for Maxine is the impact of social problems such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol problems and incarceration levels. She emphasises that these issues have very real implications for women in their work, careers, and leadership. She has supported staff members in difficult social situations, and says it is hard on both the staff member, and the manager.

> It is very difficult to come to work with injuries - it is embarrassing - but it is also difficult for manager handling pastoral care to workers in a d.v. situation. With drugs and alcohol problems, we are expected to teach and train workers about what is appropriate in the workplace. Also, because Indigenous people sometimes end up in jail for minor reasons such as non-payment of fines, you need to be flexible and understanding.

Maxine was very keen to see something positive come out of the research project. She commented on how she enjoyed being part of the focus group "catching up" with women she had not seen since graduation, and meeting graduates she had not met before. From the focus group gathering, she organised to keep in touch with some participants for further activities. She also said she benefited from the individual interview as an opportunity to tell her story so that it might help others. She came up with some suggestions for further gatherings which she thought should be entitled "around the table". She also recommended a retreat with motivational speakers, a women's prayer time and relaxation. Other strategies she felt which would be useful to promote Indigenous women's leadership included leadership training, a coaching and mentoring program, counselling and developing a pool of people who could "help, talk, support … new ones, not just the same people".

Following the interviews, Maxine applied to the National Indigenous Women's Leadership program, and she was successful in becoming one of 17 coaches from around Australia to participate in this inaugural program, coaching a number of Indigenous women to develop their leadership in their communities.

Final reflections

> Growing up in an Indigenous family, I saw the need to build relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Through my studies I have been given the opportunity to work in the area of Reconciliation, promoting its purpose. When I first began my studies, I never imagined that my work would be acknowledged in such a tremendous way, and I am thankful to be able to make a difference in the lives of my people.

5.5   CAREER STORY 4:   DANIELLE

Danielle is a registered nurse in her 30s. She is married with two children, and is currently working in the surgical ward of a large private hospital in Brisbane. Her father is a Torres Strait Islander from Murray Island in the Torres Straits. He grew up on Thursday Island and in Cairns on the mainland, until he moved to Brisbane and married Danielle's mother. Danielle was born in Brisbane and lived at Wynnum, mainly with her mother and an older sister, after her parents divorced.

Danielle talked about her father's early life and the struggles and responsibilities he coped with at a young age, including the tragedy of how when he was "a young fulla his dad died". Danielle's grandfather was a pearler in the Torres Straits. He was of Spanish descent, and married to Danielle's grandmother who was a Torres Strait Islander woman. One day while was working on the docks, her grandfather was electrocuted by a fan, and to cover up the accident, co-workers and management "threw the fan overboard so all the evidence was gone".   Her father was 16 at that time and still at school, but his life took a different turn because of his father's death. At that stage, Torres Strait Islander women weren't allowed to own property. Because her dad was the eldest, "his father's namesake", he assumed all of his father's legal responsibilities including his care of the family property and provision for the family.

> So he had to say that the house and all the property was his so they didn't have to lose the house. Then he had to take on the responsibility of looking after the family. He still had younger brothers going to school … there were six of them. He was very bright but lost that opportunity and had to go and cut cane to survive.

Danielle regrets that he had to take on such a heavy burden at such a young age and had to sacrifice his own desires, ambitions and choices. Like other Indigenous people, her father did not have the opportunity to secure skilled jobs, but had to settle for unskilled work to support his family.

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Sometimes I feel sad for opportunities he had to miss out on – education. Like for me, it would be great for Dad to have a public servant job or something like that but he has always had to do the physical labour.

He moved to Brisbane to work in retail and also as a painter and docker. To meet his family responsibilities, he would always send money back home "without fail" to his mother. Danielle says her father "has always had a strong work ethic" and strong obligations to family. These are characteristics that she admires in her father and ones that she has tried to incorporate into her own life, as her story reveals.

Her parents met whilst working for the same department store. Her father was in "the shoe-selling section and mother was in the retail haberdashery". But because her father was a Torres Strait Islander and her mother a white Australian, their relationship was not well accepted. Her parents found that they experienced racism from an unexpected quarter. Because her mother was "a white woman", she was rejected by Danielle's Torres Strait Islander grandmother, who felt she was "not good enough for her son". Danielle says this was a "real cultural eye-opener" for her mother when she went up to Cairns to work on the family farm. The tension that "white" partners feel when they are not accepted into Indigenous families is something that Danielle feels is not often discussed. As an Indigenous person with a non-Indigenous parent, she believes that Indigenous people can also be racist towards non-Indigenous people.

Another cultural aspect that Danielle's mother found hard to deal with was the cultural obligations to other members of her father's family. Sometimes relatives on her father's side came to stay and expected to be accommodated, fed and provided with money. This cultural sharing was an unfamiliar practice to her mother and sometimes caused problems for the family's limited budget. However, Danielle believes that despite the cultural demands occurring more often in Indigenous families, Indigenous people are very loyal and on difficult occasions such as death and illness, her father's

family like other Indigenous families support one another without reservation. "When Dad had his stroke, his brothers were fantastic, all fights were put aside ... blood is thicker than water".

Culture and family

Reflecting on her childhood, she remembers her father spent a lot of time working away as he had his own business. She says this was difficult for the family being "isolated from Dad culturally". The separation impacted on family dynamics in a negative way, particularly with respect to her "mum's issues relating to being alone, and the isolation". To cope with their situation, she says she and her sister "bounced off one another" providing mutual support that remains today as an important aspect of their relationship.

Family connections are important to Danielle. Her relationship with her sister is strong and has influenced some of her life and career choices. After completing a social work degree, Danielle's sister was placed in a remote Aboriginal community "smack bang in the middle of the desert" and Danielle visited her there. That experience had a huge impact on Danielle. She says "it was such a strong immersion into almost an alien culture … things that I had ideas about … but I hadn't seen it in such a traditional sense". She became aware for the first time of the differing cultural practices and behaviours, particularly the differences between Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people.

> From that visit many things impacted on me – I saw a lot of Indigenous mannerisms like eye contact, which I wasn't aware about before because I was more or less immersed in the white world with a bit of Torres Strait Islander culture.

She also became aware of the separation of 'men's business' and 'women's business'. When she was out with the women, she had a unique experience that had a major influence in her life. She described the skills and knowledge she saw from her companions, how they communicated, and she related the:

beautiful memory I had of the women. I went out hunting, and visited sacred wells. The women would say "stop the truck … there's a kangaroo there", and I couldn't see a bloody thing … and a million miles away you'd see these two little ears. And I couldn't speak the language … and they couldn't speak much English. At one point, the sun was setting and I could hear this voice start singing Amazing grace … it nearly brought tears to my eyes. It was the standout memory for me … eating goanna was ok … but this was standout, amazing. Then I came back with a totally different appreciation and I started doing a lot of my work with Indigenous students.

After this encounter, when she returned to Brisbane, Danielle began tutoring Indigenous high school students to help them get through their studies. She went to university and completed a Bachelor of Business in Communication with a double major in Film and Television and Public Relations, the latter to develop her creative side. This first degree she found was "totally different" to study she undertook years later after she had her family. "When I did the first degree, I was a young girl, with different interests, weekends I was free to go out and party, and play up, and go down the coast". She was also in the Army Reserve so had a full weekend with her study and weekend activities, but in those, her decisions mainly concerned herself.

Whilst she was studying in the first degree, she went through a personal crisis and her illness impacted on her study. She was unable to cope and failed a subject, "the only subject I ever failed" but which she was to repeat and pass at a later date. She felt in her personal struggle, she received little support from the university, including the Indigenous unit. In addition to the lack of personal support, Danielle found that there was little support in the curriculum and learning environment which she considered to be "not very friendly and with little Indigenous content". She found that there was only one Indigenous subject in the course and although she felt she had done well, she felt she had been discriminated against by the teacher. She was "disappointed about getting a poor mark … it was just a pass because the woman didn't like me".

As a project in a Film and Television subject, Danielle was the producer of "Clapsticks" a short video program on Indigenous culture. That project mainly came about because of Danielle's initiative and the interest of American lecturer who was keen on Indigenous culture. However, she found great resistance from the rest of the class "… one bloke said ' I am not interested in Indigenous people … I don't want to participate in this' … that was disappointing". Despite the lack of interest from the other students, Danielle persuaded them to undertake the project and engaged local Indigenous people to share their cultural knowledge of such things as bush food. The result was so good that the visiting American lecturer wrote to Imparja the Indigenous television network at Alice Springs in Central Australia, to encourage them to use the film. Unfortunately, Danielle's course lecturer did not follow it up so there was no opportunity to take this project any further. It was through this experience that Danielle began to understand that there were definitely elements of racism in interactions with students and lecturers.

Becoming a healer

After she finished her BA, Danielle was still doing ATAS tutoring with high school students and running a homework centre. At this time, she met her husband who was in the process of joining the police force. She also thought about becoming a police officer, but found she was pregnant with her first child. During this pregnancy, and a later one, Danielle began to explore "natural therapies to help with pregnancy pain". She trained in massage and started to realise she had healing abilities. This self realisation, she says put her back in touch with her Indigenous spirituality and with the earth.

Her new interest in alternate therapies and traditional healings would eventually lead to Danielle's belief in herself as a healer. She had not seen any traditional healing when she was out at Alice but she had a dream which started her on her healing journey. In this dream, she related that "a bunch of Torres Strait Island women came up to me' and performed a "sort of ceremony on me … that's when I realised that I have the healing and that is

my path". She did not recognise any of the women but as she recalled the experience in the interview, she said "I am getting tingles now … they showed me what my animal totem was and that I was a healer … and from that I rapidly acquired some of the healing things like seeing auras".

Working with natural therapies led her to a move to nursing. She was still finding it difficult to accept her gifts. At first it was "hard to put it into a business or monetary sense. I was not confident with my gifts … now I can say 'I am a healer and this is what I do'" so that later she was able to accept that this was her calling. Because she has "worked on too many people and seen too many things to belittle the gift", Danielle has learned to appreciate what she has been given. She had already completed an infant massage course, and at a baby show was given some information on midwifery. She describes how she made the decision to go back to formal study.

> So I thought maybe I could be a mid-wife because that would give me
> the piece of paper that's often required to do this healing work. That's
> how I saw the degree, so I went in wanting to do midwifery in nursing.

Whilst doing the nursing course, Danielle "found the stuff on the human body real interesting, but not nursing per se".   She began to develop a vision for alternate and traditional medicine working together: "I could take it up to the next level and become a doctor, so then I could do my holistic healing … because you need that piece of paper to qualify what you do". The concept of bringing together the two traditions of healing was to motivate her in her nursing studies.

University experiences

Within the nursing course, Danielle found some support for her ideas and that "some lecturers are open to the healing stuff". She says that one of the reasons she chose ACU was "because I heard they were open" but she found that "there were certain lecturers who were very open to it and others who would just look down their nose at it". Her greatest disappointment with the

course was the lack of Indigenous content. Consequently, as an Indigenous student, she became an advocate for Indigenous issues, offering her knowledge and perspectives, and quite often the implications.

> I found if there was any stuff about Indigenous issues, I was the one bringing it up in the class … I was the one always trying to put that Indigenous perspective on things. People can sit there and regurgitate the statistics, but when it actually comes down to the nuts and bolts, and you say this is what it actually means … let's have a look at how it impacts on people.

Danielle found her own inner strength, both a hindrance and a help as a student. She believes that some students and lecturers could not cope with her assertiveness and her previous knowledge and experience. For Danielle, who had already completed a degree and worked in the field of natural medicine, this was a challenge to her growing confidence. But she also acknowledges that there were students and lecturers who appreciated her knowledge and experience.

> I was a bit of a strong person and I did have a clash with one lecturer. The majority of lecturers absolutely loved me. The interaction I had in the class was appreciated. If I hadn't been such a strong person … I probably wouldn't have clashed with that lecturer.

From Danielle's perspective, there are Indigenous students who do not have the necessary assertiveness skills to deal with difficult lecturers and fellow students. When faced with negative comments by lecturers and other students, particularly when Indigenous matters are being discussed, she says that rather than challenge, some Indigenous students will simply stop going to classes. The lecturers may never find out why the students did not return and in their ignorance, may make assumptions about the suitability of Indigenous students for academic study and/or their commitment to the course. Danielle believes in respect to the nursing course, that there might have been other Indigenous students who "have left the course because they were not as

strong and been hurt by that person". This raises concerns about need for support for Indigenous students in helping them to address sensitive issues in class but it also highlights the responsibilities of the teaching staff in facilitating appropriate class discussion where all students' rights are protected. Additionally, it emphasises the need for Indigenous people's prior learning and cultural knowledge to be acknowledged by the academy.

Despite some negative experiences, Danielle found that generally speaking, university staff was supportive. She found that because of her previous study and work, she did not need academic assistance, but expressed a hope that it would be there for other Indigenous students if needed. The support that Danielle appreciated was more of a personal and cultural nature, and she felt that she received this from the Weemala Indigenous Unit. When she had problems, Weemala was a place for her to "feel safe and for somebody to be able to listen, without being objective … that was a good sounding board or healing tool".

In considering what more could be done for nursing students, Danielle responded that "it would be fantastic if they employed an Indigenous Associate Lecturer in the faculty that the students could identify with or someone at Weemala who just does nursing". She believed that this would be most beneficial when students are on clinical placements, saying that "I can communicate with people but if you don't have confidence … you are thrown into an unfamiliar place … you have a bunch of nurses who don't want you … you are trying to hand-over and listen to what they are doing. It can be very hard for Indigenous nurses". Furthermore, Danielle suggested that it would be a worthwhile strategy to employ an Indigenous graduate nurse in the faculty who had been through the experiences, reflecting "that could be a good job for me".

On the topic of racism, Danielle said, "I have never seen any direct racism on my pract", but she mentioned another Indigenous nursing student who although "confident, really struggled" with racism. She suspects that the reason she has not experienced blatant racism, is because she is fair and not

easily identified as being of Torres Strait Islander origin. She attributes the lack of cultural understanding as being a bigger problem for Indigenous patients, rather than direct racism from medical staff. Danielle spoke about her father's experience when he was in hospital having his leg amputated due to diabetes complications. He was unused to hospital food and did not have contact with an Indigenous hospital liaison person to make his needs known. Danielle said she "had to take in bit of their own food" to encourage him to eat and get well. She also had to "chase down" the Indigenous support person and say "hey my father's up there, go and have a chat to him" as he was often alone when she was at university. Danielle believes that a hospital stay can be a stressful, alienating experience for Indigenous people who are often far from home and immediate family. She advocates that all hospitals have "a person who can give that cultural support". She expressed disappointment that the hospital where she presently works does not have a cultural liaison officer. She thinks it may because there are few Indigenous patients with the main clientele being war veterans and private patients.

Throughout her study and work, Danielle has had tremendous support from her partner. Together, they have planned life decisions such as work, study, having children, and their futures. Her career negotiation and development has been constructed within a family context. She believes it is not just about her as an individual - "I can't see myself operating as an individual because I am part of a family structure". She wants to encourage her own daughters to achieve the most from their lives, but knows the reality for Indigenous women is not simple, but very complex.

 Danielle believes that Indigenous women can achieve careers with support, particularly from their partners. But she also acknowledges that Indigenous women are often without partners, or have partners who are unsupportive or worse, violent towards them. She agrees that on top of the struggles in their workplace, they have to cope with domestic violence at home. She comments on "how much harder is it for them". But she also has enormous admiration for those who have and continue to overcome such obstacles when she says, "haven't they got such fire in their belly and what inner

strength … I find it inspiring".   In the interview, she talked about Indigenous women she has personally drawn strength from "just amazing brilliant women".

Indigenous women and leadership

To assist Indigenous women developing in leadership roles, Danielle says they need emotional and financial encouragement and changes to infrastructure to support that growth.   She also believes that there is insufficient acknowledgement to Indigenous women "for a job well done". Without the proper supports and recognition, Danielle feels that Indigenous women are reluctant to take up leadership roles since there are more barriers than supports.

In particular, she is very concerned about sexism, the "gendered violence – horizontal violence (which) happens everywhere" and prevents women from being promoted and improving their career and leadership status. Furthermore, Danielle highlights the problem of the "tall poppy syndrome" where Indigenous women are often cut down by their own people. In this way, Danielle has found that not all Indigenous people are appreciative of other Indigenous people's success in the modern world.   Nor do they understand, that to get to where they are today, these "fighters" have had to overcome many difficulties including family abuse, poverty, alcoholism, racism and isolation.

> They don't see the fight you had to get there. Sally (name changed) and I came from a dysfunctional family … and how do you pull yourself from that. Mum suffered because she was not of the Torres Strait culture and was not welcomed into the culture by grandma … she calls it the blackest years of her life. Her mother got the priest to come around and talk to her about not marrying a black man … she was told your children will be black … that was that whole thing … a bloody struggle from day one.

For Danielle, it is often difficult for Indigenous people to take on contemporary leadership because of their childhood experiences which have damaged their confidence. This occurs not only in the family situation, but also in the education system. She says that she is seeing much the same with her own children, "too much discouragement … being locked into a box, independent thought is stifled … narrow mindedness and intolerance". She echoes the comments of many Indigenous parents who say "Indigenous kids are not always seen as bright", when it is often quite the opposite. Like many other Indigenous people, Danielle knows that once labelled, it is hard to "rise above your station", or rather the station that society has delegated to you.

Furthermore, Danielle concludes that even if you do succeed in "rising above the past", and make good lives for yourselves, you still carry pain from the past. In order to survive, "a lot of the stuff you black out". Being educated has helped Danielle with the healing process. It has also given her the motivation and vision to help other Indigenous people heal. She shares that vision below.

> Yeah … I sit back and trust that everything is perfect and life is where you want to go and I question 'where do I want to go?' … I want to get the medical degree and have a holistic healing centre where I am the doctor with a bunch of nurses I am now encouraging to study naturopathy, homeopathy, herbal medicine, and nutrition. I see multidisciplinary health team, and if we get a patient, then I say, 'right I am referring you to the dietician in this building' and so on, it will be holistic care. It's a vision I have had for a while … that holistic healing centre is visionary … it's not around … yet.

The latter part of the quote demonstrates not only Danielle's passion and her determination to achieve her vision.

Final reflections

Danielle's her commitment to her vision is encompassed in her final thoughts*.*

I actually had this happen when I was on pract up at Caboolture. I had this guy who was coding, the doctor's on his chest … resuscitating … I was standing on the side and I felt like one of those lizards floating on the water with their eyes above and their eyes below the surface of the water. I could see what was happening clinically, and but as well as spiritually, and it was really bizarre. I was standing there going thinking "Holy Crap". That's what it felt like. I had a dream and a symbol came to me … it said I am like a bridge between earth and heaven … and it was like I had a symbol and when I told my reiki teacher, she said that is what I am: a bridge between white and Indigenous culture - between healing and medicine. I am like the lizard with the eyes up and I can see two worlds.

5.6   CAREER STORY 5:   DANA

Dana is a preschool teacher in her mid 20s. She is currently working part-time. She is job sharing so that she can spend more time with her son, who is 3 years old. Dana is a single parent and has been the sole carer for her son since his birth.

Although she describes herself as a single mother, Dana sees her son and herself as being part of a much larger extended Indigenous family. Dana was born in Canberra. At the time, her mother, a young Aboriginal woman was working in the Public Service, and her father had recently emigrated from England. After their marriage, her parents remained in Canberra for a few years before moving to Nambour, Queensland to be closer to her mother's family. Her younger brother was born a year or so after the move.

Although she has had intermittent contact with her father's family, including a couple of visits to England, Dana mostly remembers a childhood surrounded by her mother's Aboriginal family. Although she says she "had a lot more to do with mother's family", because of her father's influence, she found she had a "mixed upbringing – bit of both cultures, which sometimes took on a different focus". For Dana, her identity is very important. She is perceptive enough to

recognise that identity is not static, but like culture is changing, and that identity is also a process.

> Identity depends where you are living, the city or country and the interaction with the Indigenous part of my family - now as society is changing and being a teacher – I am more comfortable with my identity – I am able to explore being Aboriginal even more.

Dana is proud of her Aboriginal heritage, but she confesses she knows "only bits and pieces about my heritage". She acknowledges that her mother is more knowledgeable about the ancestry and particularly about life on the Cherbourg mission where her grandmother's family lived. She attributes this to the fact that young Aboriginal people today, do not always live where their parents grew up, and therefore may not have the same sense of connection with a particular area of country. For Dana, her Aboriginality is more about her relationship with other Aboriginal people.

> It has been more about the upbringing … more about the lifestyle especially the kinship system, the art has been the biggest thing … because of the loss of identity for many Aboriginal families that is the main issue - trying to preserve that.

This may be because Dana has spent nearly twenty years of her life living in a major city, with occasional visits to her mother's country. She agrees that her life may have evolved differently if her parents had not made a life-changing decision to move to the city from the country, in pursuit of work and education. This is a dilemma for urban Aboriginal people.

Dana started school in a small country town, where her parents had settled. Employment was extremely limited, and despite their previous employment in the government, they found it very difficult to obtain local work other than manual labouring jobs. She describes this period as her father doing "anything" to bring in some income, "working in the (sugar) mill … he was doing landscaping, and bricklaying, anything to get money … picking

strawberries". According to Dana, her mother stayed at home and cared for the children "from what I could remember, mum took care of us … that was her job". Then an opportunity came about for her parents to have a change of career.

Believing that there would be better opportunities in the city, the family moved to Brisbane where both parents enrolled in teacher training courses. Life for the next few years was difficult due to limited funds, and having to live in a small unit when her parents were studying fulltime and her father was also working. Dana says "this was really hard – there was little space and everyone was really busy. After my parents finished their courses, they both had jobs so we moved and got a house". Dana found the change in circumstances with both parents working, made a big difference to her life. In addition to living in a house, her parents could afford to give her a private education, and move her from a public school where she was very unhappy. "I felt a lot better, because I had own room and by that time had changed schools. Being in a Catholic school was much better for me, probably because of the difference with the Catholic education, the quality of schooling and because of the gospel values". She enjoyed the later part of her primary education and made a number of significant friends with whom she still retains links.

After primary school, she attended a local Catholic high school. At high school, she admits that she "got a bit side-tracked". Although, she was a very bright student, Dana found it very hard to settle into a structured school environment and identifies the mismatch of the school environment and herself as a learner. "Socially I didn't fit in that environment … it was too structured. I couldn't relate to anything too structured – it's the same today". She also found that there was "no flexibility or support".   Although there was a guidance counsellor that they could go and see, she believes that the system itself was unable to cope with difference and diversity. Dana says it is same today "for a lot of kids who get trapped in the system. But now there are a lot more hands-on approaches". In that sort of structured environment,

Dana found it difficult to learn in a meaningful and relevant way, and became what she terms, "labelled" as a difficult student.

She completed Year 10 in Bundaberg, where she went to live with her aunt, and at aged 15 was not keen to go on to Years 11 and 12. Her high school experiences had discouraged her, "I didn't like the way school was run … I mentally cannot cope in situations that are too structured … or maybe it's social. Can't control myself … when it's not meaningful for me … but when I am engaged in something…it becomes more meaningful". Later as a teacher, she recognised that she had learning difficulties which with appropriate teaching could have been assisted. Interestingly, her poor experiences at school were later to be a motivation for becoming a teacher to help other children with similar learning backgrounds.

Finding her way

After finishing school, Dana was unsure of what she wanted to do with her future and had little guidance from the school guidance counsellor. At first she tried to figure it out for herself, "I was thinking about being a nanny because I loved children. I knew I had to get some qualifications but did not get any advice … so I looked up some information … found out I was too young to be a nanny". The turning point in Dana's life came through her mother's intervention, and she relates that **"then something extraordinary happened"**.

Dana's mother discovered an educational program called the "School at Sea" in the Bahamas that she thought might help Dana make some decisions about her future. Her thoughts about this program including the quote below are included in a publication called "Weemala the Spirit Within" (Nolan, Evans & White, 2004), where Dana also shared her story. She requested that the same quotes be used in this study.

> At 15, I flew half way across the world, not knowing what to expect. It turned out to be an amazing experience and one that changed my life

forever. Island Expedition was a hump-back whale research project and it's a hand on school … it involves some structure but there's a lot of flexibility and more about independence … getting children to problem-solve and become life-long learners … making you become responsible … making you become the teacher (Nolan, Evans & White, 2004, p. 22).

This educational and life journey was to have a huge impact on Dana's life. It was interesting and meaningful. It was very practical with lots of hands-on-experience. There was a strong emphasis on working as a team and as participants were from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it was a real challenge to build relationships. Dana's passion about her time there at the school is evident in her reflections.

Island Exhibition started off in the Bahamas and then sailed down the Turks and Caicos Islands and into the Dominican Republic. And when I say sailed, the children sailed the boat. The youngest was 12 and the eldest, Maree, was 18. They showed us how to sail the boat. We had to do shifts and stay up in the night. We had to read compasses and maps and when the compass broke, we had to read the stars. I found it absolutely fascinating and because of the hands-on stuff, the independence and choices we were given, we were motivated to do the school part of it. We were doing all of this navigation and sailing and hands on stuff but we were also doing six days a week, from 7 to 12 that was school time, and you had a given amount of time to complete your study. You could fish, you could swim, you could take as many breaks as you wanted to as long as you got your work done … and I didn't have any problem getting it done.

Learning and identity

Living with people from all around the world, made Dana want to learn even more about other cultures. She "developed an appreciation and fascination with other people's cultures … shared Aboriginal culture with them and they

loved it. It was fantastic for building my self esteem". Through these exchanges, she developed pride in her own culture and identity. Coming back from the trip, Dana still wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her future. But she realised that whatever she chose, she needed to get a better education.

> I knew I wanted to go and do some more study. I only had Grade 10 when I came back from the Bahamas, and thought I wouldn't get very far with that, except for casual positions or supermarket work.

Through her mother's Indigenous networks, she was offered a place in the tertiary access course at the Indigenous People's Unit at TAFE – this was to enable her to complete her year 11 and 12. She was adamant that she did not want to return to a structured school environment.

> My parents helped me get involved in a TAFE program that wasn't as structured as school. You got the choice to go or not, you handed the work in at your own pace. There was lot of support there and the tertiary access course was to help you get into uni or work ... it was a pathway course and equivalent to Grade 12.

Dana found the program invaluable because it helped her gain the knowledge and skills that would enable her to get into university. But it also was important for her growth in cultural knowledge and confidence in her Aboriginal identity.

> They had subjects like Aboriginal culture and history which I really enjoyed. I found out more about myself whereas at school, all I learnt about was "the natives". That was good for me in terms of identity and confidence.

She also enjoyed being with other Indigenous people. The learning environment was not restricted to a classroom and the style of teaching was supportive in contrast to previous experiences at school which had eroded her confidence.

I was with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and there was a more relaxed feel about the classroom. The classroom wasn't only inside, it was outside … they would take us different places. They taught us how to research and we never got yelled out, never made to feel dumb or stupid. This is important because when you are from different cultures and the way you've been brought up … it is not that you are stupid just that you take things in different to other people.

Towards the end of the course, the group was given information on careers and further education and training. Dana began to consider a teaching career.

I always loved children, coming from large extended family … I had lots of practice … it's natural … so when they brought up QTAC and going to uni, I decided to apply for a teaching degree to work with children, in early childhood or primary.

This decision was also influenced by her contact with a local Catholic primary school. Whilst at TAFE she had been volunteering at the school where her aunt was employed as an Aboriginal teacher-aide. The school has a high population of Indigenous children, mainly Aboriginal, and Dana was encouraged by her aunt to go along and work with some Indigenous children. Through her experience at the school, she was encouraged by teaching staff who recognised her potential, to study early childhood teaching.

Reflecting on this decision in the interview, she said that her own schooling experiences influenced her choice of teaching as a career - the positive and negative things that she felt. She found that structured school didn't work for her but living in the Bahamas did " … just living off the land and incorporating so many environmental aspects … the independence I was given at a young age … I thought maybe I could bring the two together one day if given an opportunity". Her Bahamas lesson initiated her ideas for creative and natural teaching.

We were a group of students and teachers from 16 different countries, we rose with the sun to catch our breakfast – cracked conch (shell). We studied in the sand with driftwood as our desks. The outdoors was our classroom, with marine biologists teaching us as we sailed through the Caribbean. We learnt science but we also learnt a lot of other things like languages, navigation, sailing and teamwork. (Nolan, Evans and White, 2004)

Through her own experiences, Dana starting thinking about what a good teacher should be, that is, "making sure that children feel loved, and proud of themselves, and that they belong and are valued". These she says, are key principles in her current teaching.

University experiences

Dana chose ACU to do her training because of her Catholic background, and the reputation of the Indigenous Support Unit. From her personal knowledge, she said, "I knew that there was a really good support network there for Indigenous students". This was an important factor as she was unsure about possible gaps in her education and how this might impact on her academic success.

Because I hadn't been to university before, and because of my lack of education in the last few years, I wasn't sure academically if I would be able to cope. But I went really well. When I graduated, out of over 100 students I placed second with my results. I basically topped some of my courses at the university. I just enjoyed myself.

Dana has given credit to her university education for enhancing her life. She strongly believes that education and knowledge has given her professional qualifications, which in turn have led to her teaching job. She has established networks that she still draws on. She has kept in contact with a lot people that she met at university and goes back regularly to visit lecturing staff, and the Indigenous staff at Weemala. Dana found her satisfaction in the course was

achieved through her success with her study, and the support she received from both the Indigenous Unit, and the faculty staff:

> There was a place to go in between lectures – Weemala. And because of the pressures and stress that I was under, I felt like those people were like a family to me. Support from the faculty was excellent because it is such a small university - they know your name, your face, everything that you were going through.

Some of negative experiences she encountered were due to a sense of isolation as the only Indigenous student in her year. Furthermore, as the sole Indigenous student, she felt the added pressure of being seen as the Aboriginal expert.

> Yeah, I felt that because I was a minority - there were only a few Aboriginal people studying education - I was the only Aboriginal person that graduated. I found that a lot of questions were thrown on me. People were angry because of things they heard, myths about Aboriginal people … they took it out on me and also thought I was an Aboriginal expert.

She was also subjected to the negative attitudes of non-Indigenous students who believed that she used her Aboriginality to gain benefits:

> And then there were people who thought that I just used my Aboriginality to take me further…and some people thought that I just brought it up as needed. Even from one of my friends, who is still a friend today … I just don't know how they think in the back of their heads. She said that the only reason I got a first round offer for my teaching placement was because I was Aboriginal. That has been confirmed that that wasn't the reason I got the job. I was chosen because I had an early childhood specialisation and was recommended as the best person for that job by my early childhood

lecturer. It was both my academic record and the voluntary work I had done at university, not because I was Aboriginal.

Dana has mixed feelings about those attitudes. On one hand she says, "these negative comments don't affect me now because I have more confidence". But, on the other, she comments that "it still hurts that there is still that stigma out there". For her, the issue is not only about non-Indigenous attitudes to Aboriginal "handouts", but also the lack of recognition that Indigenous people are competent to achieve success in their own right:

> It's not their jealousy … they truly think it to some degree that Aboriginal people cannot be in high positions or in mainstream, unless they have been handed jobs … another handout. It couldn't possibly be because I worked hard or maybe have the ability.

Dana is aware that this places greater pressure and expectations on the individual to perform, because of their Aboriginality.

> Yeah, because of this, I didn't want to fail, I didn't want to drop out of uni because of what people would say … just the guilt and trying so hard. Yes because then I would have been just what everyone would have thought ... stupid. There were such high expectations … but it was hidden expectations … sometimes it wasn't what they said … you could just feel it. I felt I had to prove myself constantly.

This greater pressure forced Dana to become an advocate of Aboriginal issues, and this sometimes was met with resistance and anger from other students.

> All the way through uni, whenever there were opportunities, I would include Aboriginal perspectives into whatever I was researching or in writing assignments. I felt that I had to do it and I felt other people were angry at me because it was all I seemed to talk about.

The compulsion to include Indigenous perspectives to create cultural awareness was also motivated because there was little included by the lecturers themselves. "Some lecturers included it because it had become a core component" in the teaching course, but on the whole, "perspectives were just thrown in … it was not a co-ordinated approach … a lot more could have been done". But Dana found that her efforts were often supported by many staff and students: "There were also a lot of people who were very interested". However, because she expended so much energy on Indigenous issues, Dana feels that she did not have the opportunities to develop in other areas.

Family and careers

The other event that created a lot of stress was that she became pregnant in her final year of study. This was an emotional time because although she was in a relationship at the time, she was not married and was worried about how that might affect her getting a job in a Catholic school.

> I wasn't married, and to contemplate working in the Catholic system, it wasn't the ideal situation. I was concerned about the expectations … the moral expectations … the lifestyle clause. We are supposed to be role models and with the principles we are supposed to follow, I wouldn't have been the ideal. I didn't tell anyone at the uni at first … and then some people found out … and you know how gossip spreads. I was angry, because I hadn't had a chance to explain it to my Principal because at that time, I didn't know what school I would be working at.

But fortunately, Dana's fears were allayed as she was able to negotiate her teaching and maternity leave with the help of a supportive Principal. This was to be a critical factor in her first year of teaching.

> I got my letter, found out where my job was, arranged a meeting with my Principal to introduce myself to him … the second thing I told him was that I was pregnant. I wanted to be completely honest. This was received well. He organised a meeting with other people from Cath Ed

to discuss how the situation would be addressed so that it still fitted within the lifestyle clause. We talked about discretion, keeping personal business to ourselves and how the situation would be handled within the school context.

Dana worked for nine weeks, had her baby in second term which she took off on maternity leave, and then returned to work in third term. Her son was 10 weeks old at that time. This was a difficult time for Dana as a single parent. She was no longer in a relationship with her son's father - but she was assisted by living with her parents, "that was the only way I could do it … my mother was basically the other parent … also my grandmother came down and my cousins were a great help". She added that her "grandmother comes whenever someone has a baby", as is the cultural practice in her family.

Becoming a young mother at the age of 22, was something that Dana as an Indigenous woman found easier to accept. Most of her non-Indigenous friends including her university companions currently do not have or intend to have children in the near future. They are more focussed on developing their careers, wanting to establish themselves as home owners, or travelling overseas. Dana does not see their choices as a negative thing, just different to hers. Dana agrees that this is generally different for Indigenous people because of their attitudes to life, having children and possessions, for cultural reasons. She has found that Indigenous women tend to have their babies younger, "even younger than me".

Dana talked about the fact that women today are more likely to seek an abortion, rather than to allow being pregnant and having a child to interfere with study, work and career plans. She acknowledged that there certainly would have been other women who had been faced with that decision whilst at university.

> Quite possibly … but there is no other option for myself because of the upbringing I have had … if I get pregnant I have to have the baby … that's how I feel, that's how I've been brought up … that's where my

values have come from. I know other people and some of them are my friends and they could have had children but they didn't.

The decision to have the child rather than a termination, she believes is to do with her cultural values in terms of attitudes to children and "knowing that I would get lots of support". When she let her extended family know about her pregnancy, "everyone in my mother's family rang to reassure me and to tell me that I was making the right decision". For me, family is most important.

> In Indigenous families, girls have children as single parents, and it is regarded as normal … and there is lots of acceptance. In Indigenous families, family is at the top of the list. The whole kinship system keeps us altogether … whereas I don't see that with my friends. I personally know of people, in order to further their careers, have actually not gone ahead with pregnancies. If you look at Indigenous families and you see young Indigenous women, and quite possibly they could have done something else in their lives or gone on with education, but they chose to have these children.

The lack of moral judgement from her Aboriginal family and community and their acceptance of her as a single mother were important to her decision.

> That played a part in my decision, definitely. I just knew it was the right thing to do, just talking to my own grandmother and that reassured me that all that I was doing was right. I don't think my other friends would be doing that … having that conversation. The expectations are different in Indigenous families … it is not about getting to the top or who makes the most money or who drives the nicest car. It's about who keeps in touch, and family connections.

Indeed, Dana believes that for Indigenous women this might mean that "motherhood" is a career. She feels very strongly about being a woman and having a career:

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If I hadn't had my son, I don't think any part of me could have had any type of career at all … and because of the career I chose, I ended up being around children, it would have destroyed me if I hadn't had him. Ultimately that is why women are women.

Although Dana sees her career in its very early stages, she is happy with what she has accomplished. Significant events in her career she includes as the birth of her child; securing her job; being nominated for a teacher award by parents after her first year of teaching; and being invited to be a judge for the leukaemia quest this year.

Her understanding of the concept of career compared to having a job is that:

Career means mainstream. It's more of a journey. A job is about paying bills. A career just does not encompass a job, it is who I am and what I am doing. I am doing this job because I love it and I can share who I am, and I can help build other little people and other little careers. But it, the teaching job, is only one aspect of my career. Other aspects are helping myself to become more independent everyday, and a life-long learner … and that is what I am trying to instil in myself at a higher level.

In order for her to remain independent, and become this life long learner in addition to her mothering and working role, Dana recognises that "I need balance as well". Not having a partner, she felt an emotional weight on her shoulders making it difficult for her to find time for herself. Sometimes she thinks she manages well but at others, finds it is a real struggle to keep things in perspective. The balance sometimes gets out of kilter so that, "I keep going and going … and then I feel like I am just going to break". Thus, Dana recognises that lack of support leads to stress, physical problems, tiredness, and impacts on mothering "being cranky, tired, impatient, not having energy to put into quality time". She relies on support from family and friends and encourages other women, particularly single mothers, to establish support networks:

Women will always need support. We are designed to be mothers and have to learn to cope with support.

Childcare

One issue that has posed problems for Dana as a single working parent is the difficulty of securing suitable childcare. When she was pregnant, she was appalled by the "huge unbelievable waiting list – not enough places; too expensive and limited choices – you just have to take what you get". At one time, she was unsure whether she would be able to return to work after the birth of the baby because she could not find suitable childcare and this almost "finished" her career "before it got started". She says "I only got this place because I persevered. I had to go to extremes - the media, local paper - in order to find care". In fact, it was the article about Dana in a local paper that generated a huge debate about the lack of childcare places on the Brisbane's north-side, and eventually led to more places being released by the government.

Dana believes that childcare is an even more difficult issue for Indigenous mothers because of differing cultural values about childrearing. Her understandings are that Indigenous families try to look after children within the family, and that childcare places such as family day-care or day-care centres need to respect cultural values to encourage Indigenous parents to use their services. At first, she organised care for her child in a child-care centre, but now has him with a family day care mother as it is "more of a family environment". Dana would like to see some Indigenous mothers become day-care providers. Currently, she does not know of any, but believes that this would encourage Indigenous mothers who might be reluctant to leaving their babies in the care of non-Indigenous carers. She is aware that there are some Indigenous kindergartens, but believes that most day-care centres do not employ Indigenous people, nor are they "Indigenous friendly or culturally aware".

In her opinion, single parenting limits career development and career choices. She thinks that "being the only parent takes up so much of your time" making it difficult to do further study, and having "to choose jobs that fit in with family arrangements". But she also agrees that being a single parent can also have its benefits. Because she works in preschool and there is more flexibility in the program, her son can attend pre-school events. As the pre-school teacher, she is often invited to her pre-school children's birthday parties, and because her son is a similar age he also gets an invitation which he enjoys. She believes having a young child improves her relationship with preschool parents, and being a single parent also helps her connect with single parent families in her class.

Because she has had her child in care since birth, she has chosen recently to change from full-time work to part-time so that she can spend more time with him. Previously, she was unaware of the options of job sharing, and believes that more flexible work options would enable women to make better choices in managing their work, family and career responsibilities. She suggests that this would be good for all women, but especially for Indigenous women.

> Some Indigenous women work so hard and then it becomes too hard and they burn out … it discourages them from going into a career or leaving a career. It is a choice "have your career, or have your family". You would see a lot more positive things going on for Indigenous women if they had that support and flexibility.

Being an Aboriginal teacher

Although she finds it very hard combining working and mothering, Dana is committed to using the professional qualifications she worked so hard to achieve. She loves her job not only for the teaching opportunities, but because she wants to be able to make a difference to the understanding of Aboriginal culture, and Aboriginal people. She is pleased that she is able to incorporate her culture in the classroom and is supported by the school

curriculum and leadership that value Indigenous cultures and the reconciliation process.

> In my teaching, I try to apply all the skills that I have learnt from my family, and my life experiences. I have a strong multicultural focus in my program, and even though I don't have any Indigenous children in my class at present, I always incorporate Indigenous perspectives – not only during NAIDOC week – but throughout the year (Nolan, Evans & White, 2004, p. 23).

As an Indigenous teacher, Dana's advice is sought by other teaching staff for planning and resources, but they also respect her workload and do not expect her to take on the extra work. Therefore, they often bring in Indigenous resource people that she recommends. In comparison to her university experience, she is not assumed to be the expert. She finds that the other teachers take on more personal responsibility for cultural awareness, as she believes they should. At the pre-school level, she works with another teacher who is keen to learn about Aboriginal culture, and this has created a good teaching partnership.

Dana has found that because of the respect for cultural diversity within her school, racism has not been an issue in her work. She says this may because she "doesn't look stereotypically Aboriginal or act it - if there is such a stereotype … when I speak about my culture it's a great positive". The school has a no-bullying rule that ensures that there is no discrimination of any kind, "and that goes for students and staff". This is maintained at all times.

> It is because of the system (Catholic) which does not support any type of racism, and they expect their staff to uphold that policy. There are big 'B' signs around the place which represents - no bullying. Everyone in the school has heard many times from Principal's mouth that "racism damages children forever".

Mainly it is about the colour of her skin and being made to feel different. In her work, she tries to bring as much attention to her skin colour as possible and teaches a unit on "being special" and points out the differences and sameness in all people. Some people are surprised when they find out she is Aboriginal. Outside of the school, she has experienced racism. She has been hurt by racist comments that have been directed at Aboriginal people in her presence, or general comments made about Aborigines by friends or others. She also knows many stories from her mother, and other family members about the racism they have been faced. Dana is certain that racism still exists today but in a different form:

> People are a lot more cunning because of all the laws and it's a bit scary actually, for example, the bashings. We need to fix this. We need education, but it is never going to be totally fixed because people are set in their ways, but education can help … starting at the earliest age possible.

Indigenous women and Leadership

Although Dana strongly supports the growth of Indigenous women's leadership, she is aware of the many complex issues that prevent them from developing in this area. These include the many roles they undertake, and the obstructions they face. She believes that leadership is still very much male-dominated, and this is evident in the Indigenous community as well:

> Indigenous women need opportunities, but it is difficult for them to take these opportunities because of their roles. Indigenous men have more opportunities. Indigenous women aren't seen as the leaders, they are seen as mothers, so it's the men who end up in charge. Typically, it's white men who are in charge, even white women don't get the opportunities. Indigenous women are obstructed in their attempts to become leaders. Because of their extra roles, it makes them look incapable, but actually they are very capable, and multi-tasking.

Dana talks candidly about the impact of domestic violence on Indigenous women and how that issue strips Indigenous women of their confidence.

> It's hard for Indigenous women experiencing domestic violence. They need support, but just have to deal with stuff on their own – they are so desperate to make something of themselves. It is hard when they have to turn up for work when things are going on at home, they can do it for a while but then it gets too much.

On the other hand, she believes that Indigenous women sometimes become educated and get into jobs as a way to cope with the lack of success in their personal lives. With support to overcome the many obstacles, Dana believes that Indigenous women have the potential to become confident leaders:

> I suppose that's why when Indigenous women get into these roles, they do it so well, because it is another life for them and they put so much into it. This can help them sometimes move out of those problem areas by giving them the confidence to stand up for themselves, to be more confident to stand up to what is being done to them. So they are growing in confidence in leadership, but also in coping and being assertive … and finally becoming independent instead of being confident in the male.

Dana suggests that support for Indigenous women in leadership could be in the form of support from employers with respect to domestic violence; counselling; women's networks and groups; and leadership training. She sees herself as a leader and role model - identity is very much part of her work, career and leadership. She expresses a desire to promote positive images of Aboriginal people through her work. She would also like to go back to university, and talk to Indigenous students to encourage them to achieve their goals, and also to non-Indigenous students to encourage them to be more supportive of Indigenous people in their professions.

Final reflections

Dana's own personal life and career journey has been inspired by the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters to what lies within us". Her own philosophy about one's inner strength comes from that quote.

> It doesn't matter what we become. It's just who we become. We try. That is the most important action in our lives. Through trying, we can reach self actualisation. We can reach for the stars. We can reach for whatever we have dreamed about. Whether we touch it, is not important. But it's the people we leave, and it's the history we contribute to this mankind that makes its mark. It is what lies within us! (Nolan, Evans & White, 2004, p.23)

5.7   SUMMARY

This chapter presented the stories of five university educated Indigenous women. It highlighted the views of the women in respect to their career stories which also included their understandings of their work, studies and leadership. Margaret's story emphasised her search for her Aboriginal identity, while Krishna's reflected her accommodation of her career to suit her family. Maxine's narrative reflected her triumph in overcoming past negative attitudes and low self concept, while Danielle showed the development of a healer who combined traditional methods with alternative methods. Lastly, Dana's story reflected the journey of a young woman who struggled with structured schooling to become a gifted teacher. In the next chapter, the data from their stories are discussed in respect to the literature and research questions.

CHAPTER 6:   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1   INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the results of the current research are discussed within the context of the literature which was identified in Chapter 3. The research questions generated from the literature review are used to organise the findings and discussion. Each research question is addressed with respect to the analysis of individual stories and the focus groups, the relevant body of literature, and the implications for policy, practice and further research.

6.2   RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What experiences do Indigenous women have in entering and maintaining their position in the workforce?

This research question was developed to gain an understanding of Indigenous women's employment backgrounds. The women were asked to describe their employment experiences prior to gaining a university education and to consider the barriers and supports to them gaining and maintaining quality employment in the workforce. In responding to this question, they were also asked to consider how they entered the workforce, their motivation for wanting to work, and having obtained a position, what it was like for them as a worker, and an Indigenous woman. Their responses were grouped around four main areas. These were:

6.2.1   **Becoming part of the workforce**
6.2.2   **The Indigenous woman's reflections of self as worker**
6.2.3   **The complexities of working**
6.2.4   **The cultural demands of working**

6.2.1 Becoming part of the workforce

Work experiences prior to university education

Prior to gaining a university education, most of the women were not in the paid workforce or else had unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. These included working in the fields or in lay professional roles, such as one woman describes, a "teacher's aide, sheep hand, working in the pub, club serving alcohol, the bakery … started as a nanny, started a jockey apprenticeship" (Focus Group C). Similarly, most of the women's parents appeared to have undertaken jobs that were also unskilled or semiskilled. For example, Maxine's parents mainly working in the fields and Danielle's father was a labourer. An exception was Margaret whose father was in the army.

This is in keeping with the current literature and contextual information which records that until quite recently, Indigenous people mainly occupied labouring and unskilled positions (ATSIC, 2000; Runciman, 1994). This data fosters an appreciation of how far some of the women have progressed, for example, Maxine from being a fieldworker at 14 to gaining a university education and working in management. It also confirms the value of education and how gaining an education means that Indigenous people now have better choices in occupations (Nelson, 2002; White, 1998), and are able to secure better jobs (Maxine). It may also explain the lack of role models for first generation Indigenous university students, and therefore why some Indigenous students may fail to receive support from their families for their studies and careers.

Job opportunities

The lack of employment opportunities expressed by the participants was related to the inflexibility of job options. Many positions did not suit their family commitments, in particular caring for their children. Most jobs were inflexible in terms of working at home, job-sharing, and being able to work around childcare. The inflexible structure meant that women were forced to accept less preferred jobs. Other "black" women have also experienced this

narrowing of employment opportunities which means that "access discrimination is the absence of opportunity" (Hite, 2004, p. 140).

On the other hand, some Indigenous people have learned to create job opportunities by becoming quite savvy in utilising personal networks which in the past had privileged mainly the job seeking of "white" workers. One focus group participant alludes to this when she says.

> I used to say people get jobs because of who they know and then I had to shut up because it happened to me - getting that job is more about who you know, what your name is, your contacts (Focus Group A).

Thus the study reveals that Indigenous people are learning how to "play the system", and recently acquired savoir-faire has enabled them to adopt job opportunity strategies that have previously excluded them from attaining employment. Other evidence from the participants is that they mentioned receiving information about job vacancies and assistance in gaining employment through the university where they were studying. Maxine said that she found out about her first teacher aide position from the Indigenous Support Unit. Dana reported that her university lecturer answered an enquiry from a school principal looking for a new graduate and recommended Dana for her first teaching job. It appears that universities, in particular Indigenous Support Units, may have an important role to play in linking students to job opportunities, through the informal networks students make, but also in terms of direct dissemination of information regarding job vacancies. They also provide a source of recommendation and often references, since students may not have established a reference base. This finding which has not been previously been highlighted has important implications for Indigenous support units, and their potential for education and work linkages, and is a unique contribution to the area of student support.

6.2.2 The Indigenous woman's reflection of self as worker

One of the key issues that emerged from the study was the women's reflections of themselves as worker. This was mainly tied up with their self-concept/self belief, their self esteem and their motivations for working. The core of all these was their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity.

Identity

Cultural identity continues to be an important aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives. Family and community relationships, the meaning of sharing and sense of belonging, the significant spiritual links with land and sea, cultural practices such as language, storytelling, song and dance, and observances such as funeral ceremonies, all contribute to a continuing pride in being Indigenous (Bruno, 2003; Gool, 1997). Embracing their cultural identity, their culture and traditions, their spiritual beliefs, are important elements in the journeys of Indigenous women (Bruno, 2003). However in maintaining a healthy concept of identity, the women in the current study reported that they faced discrimination according to their identity from both their own people, and the wider community. Comments were made when seeking jobs that they didn't "look Aboriginal". Margaret said "if you are light skinned – it impacts on you going for the job. They don't believe you are Indigenous". Similarly, Gool's 1997 study on the career aspirations of young Indigenous women found that the concept of identity for Aboriginal people is often used as source of discrimination, particularly in terms of negative images or stereotypes. Margaret also mentioned that "if you don't look the part, you also get a lot of flak from the Indigenous community". The racism that Indigenous people inflict on their own people receives little mention in the literature, and yet this study found it to be a problem in terms of both rejection, and also barriers to an individual's success.

In applying for jobs and the possibility of rejection because of colour (Gool, 1997), a few of the women said Indigenous people had to make choices about

identifying to the point that on one hand "some people might deny they're Indigenous because they might not get the job" (Focus Group A). On the other, one focus group discussed how being clearly identified as Indigenous could be an advantage going for a job, particularly if there are other Indigenous people on the panel who might "know your family". One participant said that she was "often asked who you are related to … so I kept my surname because it identified to the culture" (Focus Group B). This cultural practice of identifying your family or "mob" is an important form of Indigenous communication (personal knowledge). What was not discussed is how this could be a problem if the panel member has a conflict with the applicant's family since many of communities are plagued by inter-family conflicts (Pearson, 2000a). These conflicts are often linked to long standing inter-tribal group conflicts left unresolved by the colonial practice of relocating "unfriendly" groups to the same missions and reserves, and expecting them to live harmoniously (White, 1998). The problem of conflict of interest is discussed later in Research Question 4 and community leadership.

Thus, there is a real tension for Indigenous people in contemporary society in respect to their cultural identity and how they are perceived or labelled by others, including their own community. The women talked about their struggles in defending their identity and being part of a group that is heavily criticised, pointing out that non-Indigenous people don't have to face that. Sometimes to cope, Indigenous people felt they had to reject their identity to survive.

> In that sort of climate if you want a career, you have to reject your cultural identity and you are expected to join in the racism and the abuse … This is the table where the black women sit, this is the table where we sit. To survive you have to join in … it is enormous pressure on an individual (Focus Group A).

Such encounters are painful reminders of the "exemption certificates", known to Aboriginal people as "dog licences". These certificates forced Aboriginal people to reject their cultural identity and to disassociate with other Aboriginal

people. Although, officially, exemption certificates are no longer issued, deep-rooted attitudes born out of long-term prejudice are slow to change (Richardson, 1993).

Despite these pressures, the participants in my study reported a pride in their Aboriginal identity so much they wanted to share their culture with others, a similar finding to Gool (1997). Margaret talks about the joy of finding out that she was Aboriginal after many years of her family hiding the "shame" of having Aboriginal ancestry. At the same time, she mentions the sadness of how unearthing this secret has torn her family apart. Whether the women had grown up Aboriginal or had recently discovered their Aboriginal identity, the study found that they all believed in their culture, and that it was important for strengthening their own identity to share that cultural knowledge. For Dana, this was a deeply spiritual process.

> I grow so much and learn so much everyday … by teaching others about my culture I am finding out so much myself like identity wise. It is a spiritual thing for me (Dana).

These insights are echoed in Bruno's (2003) study, where Lionel Kinunwa, an Elder describes this feeling as "buried deep within me" (p. 40) and one of the participants in that study found that reconnecting with and embracing her culture was a turning point for her own personal growth and development.

Motivation and confidence

The study also found that the women's motivation to work and their self-confidence was significant to their entering and maintaining a position in the workforce. The women reported that the desire to work was prompted by a desire to improve themselves and their life and to contribute to a better life for their families and communities.

> I want to be both. I feel like I've got potential and I want to get in there and I want to lead people, being a teacher. I want to help other people.

At the same time, I want to be a mother and be part of the community (Focus Group A).

Krishna and Maxine both confirmed this in their interviews when they talked about needing to work to support their families but also wanting "to do something for me". The obligation to community remains an important motivator and most of the women discussed their community obligations which often determined their choice of job and their functioning within a job, whether the job had an Indigenous focus or not.

It's having a deep down feeling that part of my obligation is to give back to the community. Nobody has come up to me and said you must do this but something deep down you know what you as a person need to be (Focus Group A).

Cultural obligations to family and a sense of belonging to community are embedded within the Aboriginal family and kinship system (Edwards, 1988). That strong obligation to make a positive contribution to their communities was also expressed by the women in Bruno's (2003) study, one of whom said "within that community, it has always been part of our culture to take responsibility collectively for the well-being of the community" (p. 45). By virtue of who they are, the women in the current study felt that in their work they often played the part of Indigenous advocate and cultural awareness trainer. This was mostly by their choice rather than being appointed or expected by the organization. Krishna's story reveals how in any job she has gone into, "somewhere in the back of my mind is how can I promote Indigenous issues, Indigenous affairs, positive role models, getting opportunities for Indigenous people" and that through advocacy, making "them open and change their culture to be more accepting of Indigenous people".

This sharing of cultural knowledge and desire to bring about attitudinal change towards Indigenous people appears to be strongly connected to that sense of collective responsibility talked about in Bruno's (2003) study. The current

study also highlighted that most of the women admitted that they had suffered from a lack of confidence which often prevented them from applying for jobs or for promotion. For example, Krishna applied for the lesser position of co-ordinator, even though she had already acted and proved herself in the higher position of manager, because of an inner voice questioning, "can you do it?" This has links with the past where Indigenous people had always been relegated to the lesser role, and also because of the current negative attitudes towards Aboriginal workers (Gool, 1997) which discourage them from applying for promotion.

> As Murri women, we were always the teacher aide not the teacher …
> always in the lesser role, for example, teacher aide and not the teacher
> - the nurse and not the doctor. (Focus Group B).

Consequently, Indigenous people find it challenging to move away from the mindset of servitude (White, 1998) and continue "being channelled into particular jobs – especially as carers or servers" (Walker, 1993, p. 17). In addition, as Indigenous people, the participants felt that there was much more pressure on them to succeed and to prove themselves, and to combat the negative opinions about Indigenous people "so much more than a white person" (Margaret). This is supported by Tripcony (1995) who wrote that women managers have to be "twice as good" but for Indigenous women, "we must be four times as good" (p. 124). Then even when they are achieving, this pressure does not go away, as the quote below shows:

> Even though we are educated, own homes, are comfortable in our
> careers … you are always proving yourself! Even in your school … you
> have got the qualifications but you are constantly trying because of
> your Indigenous background, and being a woman on top of that.
> (Focus Group C).

With that sort of pressure, it is not surprising that the women in this study reported that their journey was fraught with self-doubt and questions about "am I good enough?"; "am I intelligent enough?" It is generally accepted that

the power of negative comments on the individual's self concept has far reaching effects, often into adulthood (Crump, 2001). Often despite their achievements, as this study demonstrates, Indigenous people are still traumatized by their earlier negative treatment and plagued by self doubt. Some of the participants made comments in their interviews about being made to feel "dumb"[13] when they were at school, and how that thought stayed with them and challenged them in their employment and education pursuits.

The historical impact of poor attitudes towards Aborigines, particularly those early negative experiences at school has led to low self-esteem and low self worth in present day Aboriginal people (Gool, 1997), and impacts on their ability to engage in employment. However, with their successes, some of the women like Maxine came to "a place of who I really am" and to a realization that they were intelligent, capable women, in spite of the negative terms with which they had earlier been labelled. Moreover, that education was found to be a major contributing factor to the women's increase in self respect and self belief. The study therefore concludes that there is a great need to support Indigenous workers in their growth in knowledge and skills, but also in their confidence. This also suggests that mentoring would be a useful strategy.

6.2.3 The complexities of working

Amongst the many challenges Indigenous women face in their employment are structural barriers such as racism and sexism, the issues of childcare, and the difficulties of managing multiple roles - balancing their work and family and community commitments. The women were undivided in the belief that Indigenous women face a greater struggle than other women in entering and maintaining their positions in the workforce due to the double oppression of racism and sexism, and not being "given a fair go"[14] (Pettman, 1992; Runciman, 1994).

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[14] Colloquialism meaning not being given proper or fair opportunities.

Racism and sexism

Racism was identified as a continuing barrier to Indigenous women's employment, both in Australian society and in the workplace. Behaviours and attitudes of co-workers placed Indigenous workers in a precarious position as they struggled with whether to ignore or challenge racist comments or actions, " or stand up for your for your culture" (Focus Group A).

> In particular situations you make a choice - either shut my mouth because it might damage further dialogue … other times I have challenged people. Sometimes they don't even know they are being offensive. As you get older you get more wiser – not always being confrontationalist (Focus Group A).

Racism also occurs in the recruitment and selection process for employment positions. In the interview situation, Indigenous people are often "knocked back" (White, 2000) in favour of "white" people who are less qualified. Margaret talks about "a white person out of the gutter", "washed" and "showered", being better thought of in the interview, than Indigenous people. This finding is consistent with the literature (Gool, 1997; Hunter, 2000; Runciman, 1994) in that racism continues to be powerful impediment in the lives of Indigenous women so that any consideration of Indigenous women's employment must include this element.

Sexism is another structural barrier that impedes Indigenous women's employment. Several of the women mentioned the "glass ceiling" that women experience and the fact that this barrier is even more difficult for Indigenous women, being a "double glass ceiling" (Focus Group B).

> Because we are female and because we are Indigenous and you join those two together, there will probably be a brick wall that Indigenous females have to get across in the workplace, in their studies and where-ever else they're going. (Focus Group B).

Indigenous people have never been given a fair go and when you are an Indigenous female, the brick walls are there and you gotta try and step over those. (Danielle)

Therefore, a revelation from the study is that although the women believed that they had some common barriers with non-Indigenous women, they felt their situation was unique due to the societal barriers that keep Indigenous women down at the bottom.

For Indigenous women it is where are placed in society … and how we are placed. How are we perceived? As Indigenous first or women second? (Focus Group A).

What's been put on us … the white community has always been allowed to get up and rise … where black women have not been encouraged. White women have been encouraged, Indigenous women have not (Focus Group B).

The women articulated that they were very much aware of the combination of these two dominating forces in their lives, but were unsure how to overcome them. A comment in a previously mentioned quote, "you gotta try and step over those" by Danielle suggests that there is still a belief that Indigenous people have to find the solution themselves, a perspective discussed in depth in Chapter 2, whereas the responsibility is much more a societal one.

Childcare

Childcare was found to be a major issue because of the lack of available childcare places and the high cost of child care. Most childcare places were not seen to be culturally supportive and the women expressed that there are few Indigenous day care mothers and childcare workers in the system. This was in agreement with Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy report (2001) on the childcare needs of Indigenous families in Brisbane.

For some it meant that they accepted less favoured jobs or were unable to enter the workforce until their children were independent - thus delaying their entry into or return to the workforce. Dana talks about how she nearly was unable to return to her teaching position because she could not find place for her child. This suggests that there is a need for Indigenous women to be more informed generally about childcare options to allow them to plan their childcare needs, a recommendation made by Kurragong Aboriginal Consultancy (2001). The women also felt that they faced pressure from families because of family and cultural beliefs about the provision of childcare, as the Kurrajong report found, and this therefore, created a disincentive to work (Hunter & Gray, 1999).

Some of the women were able to find both a compromise to the above cultural barrier and the costs of child-care by having family care for the children whilst they went to work. Krishna's parents, Margaret and Dana's mothers assisted in this way and all three women acknowledge that without this support they would have been unable to work. As a single parent with a young baby and new job, Dana had to live with her mother as "that was the only way I could do it". This finding confirms the shared nature of childrearing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures that is still strong in Indigenous families today, an aspect that has been established in the literature (Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy, 2001).

Balancing work, family and community commitments

In addition to childcare, the women found another significant barrier to their successfully gaining and maintaining a position in the workforce was having multiple roles and huge family and community responsibilities, the impact of which was enormous. Krishna related having three jobs was a "bit stressful – you would get up and think where have I got to be today?" Maxine remembers "that a lot of our Indigenous women are rearing families, studying and trying to do some part-time work or working full-time. That is a really big commitment for that person because you have to really negotiate your time and sometimes some areas really suffer".

This agrees with what has already been written generally about women suffering from the additional stress of managing multiple roles (Alderton & Muller, 2000; Limerick, 1995). However, there is little written about Indigenous women's experiences of this phenomenon. What is unique about this study is that is addresses this gap in the literature and gives Indigenous women an opportunity to speak about their concerns surrounding this issue. The study allowed the women to discuss how their health suffered from the role strain, and how they could only find time to complete their own work and/or study after their domestic responsibilities were completed, for example, after their children did their homework and went to bed. They worked long hours, often travelling distances to work and to drop children to care or school, and then had to come home and prepare tea and do other duties before going to bed. They, not their partners were "usually the one who has to take up time from work when the kids are sick" (Focus Group B). Although these factors may be similar for other women, this study does not subsume Indigenous women's experiences in the wider group.

The study revealed that although the women were very much aware of the stress of their family responsibilities on themselves as women, they were unsure of how they to make changes. In Focus group B, there was a sharing of strategies that might take pressure off them, for example employing a cleaner to keep household chores manageable. This is not generally a practice of Indigenous people and the women felt they might be uncomfortable if the cleaner is a "white" person. This is because of the historical role reversal and/or the anxiety of having a "white" person coming into their home and making judgements about their cleanliness. For that reason, the women said that they would probably clean up before the cleaner came, and "that would defeat the purpose" (Focus Group B).

Consequently, for Indigenous women to effectively participate in the workforce, the study concludes that they need to have much greater support and understanding in managing their responsibilities and commitments, from both family and employers. A primary requirement is the access to

professional and personal development about time management, lifestyle balance, stress management and opportunities for stress relief.

Working environments

In general, the women reported that their working environments and organizational culture did not provide the support that they needed to successfully participate in the workforce. Issues identified included both high and low expectations by supervisors and co-workers, and lack of awareness of cultural issues and socio-economic disadvantage. Attitudes held about "gone walk about",[15] and "working murri time"[16] (Focus Group B), by both supervisors and co-workers permeated the myth relating to Indigenous people's lack of responsibility and commitment to work. Negative employer attitudes about Indigenous workers being "lazy and unreliable workers" were similarly reported in Gray and Hunter's (1999) study. To try to discourage this negativity towards Indigenous workers, some of the women used their positions as a way of making non-Indigenous co-workers and community more culturally aware, a role which they often enjoyed.

> I feel it an absolute privilege to be able to do that through education. It is a key tool in how we can promote awareness. At the same time you need to have support within the school … a friend who has just graduated is having an awful time with stuff like "stolen generation" and non-Indigenous parents coming up refusing to allow children to attend parts of her classes because of that content (Focus Group A).

There was general consensus that there appeared to be a lack of understanding about both cultural issues and contemporary social issues for Indigenous people. For example, the women agreed that non-Indigenous people did not understand about Indigenous people's attendance at funerals

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[15] "Gone walkabout" is a term used negatively to describe Indigenous workers leaving work without permission. This term is based on an historical practice of Indigenous homestead workers returning to their country for cultural reasons, however they did not wander aimlessly as believed.

[16] "murri time" or "koori time" is used to describe a different view of time by Indigenous people, but often is used negatively to denote Indigenous people's tardiness or lack of responsibility in meeting timeframes.

or tombstone openings[17]. First Indigenous people have larger families and extensive family networks and cultural obligations. For example, the kinship system dictates that a person has more than one mother or father. This means more deaths that individuals are affected by, and more funerals to attend. Indigenous people also have longer mourning processes due to cultural requirements and the subsequent longer absences from work are not easily understood.

> When I lost my dad I was only given 3 days … in our culture you go all week and I had to go two days without pay, and if you are just starting off in the workforce it comes back to finances. This can be very stressful and demanding. They don't realise that (Focus Group B).

The statistics show Indigenous people's health problems contribute to a lower life expectancy. Therefore, Indigenous workers face the deaths of similar-aged relatives and community members more often than non-Indigenous workers. These facts are constantly being highlighted to the Australian public, but it seems to have little impact, and does not generate any understanding of what the statistics mean in reality. One focus group participant commented that:

> Health issues are never seen when it comes into enterprise bargaining … if we are not living longer … that is not even an issue. And if you come from a family that susceptible to respiratory disease that is not even considered … you are just part and parcel of the award wage (Focus Group B).

Perhaps, the stark realities of Indigenous health need to be conveyed to the Australian population in a more innovative way so they can identify better with how poor social disadvantage impacts on the every day struggles of Australian Indigenous people, as Calma (2005, p. 3) puts it :

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[17] Torres Strait Islander practice of celebrating the setting of the tombstone or headstone one year after the funeral.

Social justice is grounded in the practical, day-to-day realities of life. It's about waking up in a house with running water and proper sanitation; offering our children an education that helps them develop their potential and respect their culture. It is the prospect of satisfying employment and good health.

Another important issue in the workplace raised by the women is about language and the fact that Indigenous people speak languages other than standard Australian English (SAE), such as "pidgin and creole", and may have different communication styles (Eades, 1985). This often isolates them from fellow workers. Similar findings have been expressed in educational settings (Purdle, et al., 2003). The quotes below demonstrate these differences.

When I am sitting in the staffroom and talking with other people and I am the only 'darky', I have to watch what I am saying … my language changes (Focus Group B).

I asked if the hospital had Indigenous patients and was told 'no'. When and old Murri woman came in, I was able to talk to her, calm her down and make her laugh while taking her blood sample, telling her she was 'gammin'[18] … then when I was talking to another staff member I did the "lip thing[19]"… and said I was going for a "Doris" [20] (Focus Group B).

Yet an understanding of Indigenous people's linguistic backgrounds would greatly enhance the ability of Indigenous people to do their jobs in a supportive environment, especially if they are able to relate to clients with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Danielle reported that when she adopted Indigenous frames of working with clients, this was not considered appropriate. She gave example of how she talks to Indigenous patients and lets them know by her communication that she is Indigenous, setting them at ease in the hospital environment. This is standard communication protocol

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[18] "Gammin" is an Aboriginal term to mean "just joking" or "not serious", also spelt "gammon".

[19] "lip thing", Aboriginal non-verbal expression.

[20] "Doris" is an Aboriginal communication expression used as a verb to mean "going for a gossip" or a "chat", or as noun describing someone to be a "busybody" or "gossip".

between Indigenous people (Eades, 1985).   Yet providing personal information is frowned on in the western concept of the client-practitioner relationship and is often viewed as being unprofessional (Danielle).   This valuable resource - the use of Indigenous worker's cultural knowledge, remains largely untapped yet it could mean a significant difference to effective service delivery to Indigenous people.

A huge part of the problem identified by the women is that many non-Indigenous people simply do not know Indigenous people. The participants reported that "lot of people have not worked with Indigenous people (Focus Group B) and "many of the students who come to the centre have not met any Aboriginal people" (Maxine). It is a sad reflection on our society, when the most criticized and often condemned group in Australian society is so isolated that few other Australians know them on a personal and intimate basis. What this finding tells us is that there is a great need for Australians to step outside their comfort zone and get to know and understand Indigenous people. Obviously, reconciliation at the community level still needs to be a priority as well as cultural awareness in organizations.

The women agreed that support within workplaces is important from a cultural and personal perspective. But Maxine believed that this support is not across the board "but depends on the role you are in", that "there are a lot of our Indigenous women out there working in isolation", and they need "wraparound cultural support" so that they do not become further isolated. This finding agrees with Walker (1993) who emphasises the stress experienced by "black" women who are isolated by their race and gender.

It is quite clear, that this study adds to the body of literature about Indigenous people's experiences in the workplace and like Hite's (2004) study, it has identified the need for greater support for Indigenous workers through cultural diversity and awareness training, and mentoring programs.

6.2.4. The cultural demands of working

Culture plays a significant role in the working lives of Indigenous people. With respect to the type of work roles, a number of the women chose to work in Indigenous areas. However, these positions had their own stressors. Particularly if they were employed in identified positions or liaison roles, the women stated that they faced enormous pressure from both Indigenous community and the employing authority. Equally frustrating for the women is being stuck in those roles, being pigeon-holed and not being able to extend their skills.

> In lots of Aboriginal liaison type positions attached to departments, you become the in-between person between the community and the government or organisation. If you are not careful you can get into that niche and never get the opportunity to move up into management in mainstream. And some of that can be a fear thing, you know it being a mainstream job, and that can be too hard or too different. Stick with what I know because I know I am good at working with my community rather than taking the leap into a completely different framework which could actually give you a whole new range of opportunities and skills (Focus Group A).

In more recent years, there have been a growing number of "identified" positions which are advertised to be filled specifically by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. Whilst this has increased employment it creates a perception that Indigenous people's skills are not transferable and they are only suitable for working with Indigenous people. Bourke et al. (1991) raised issues about marginalisation and lack of career paths for Indigenous workers in universities, yet there has been no evaluation on or research into how these roles impact on workers in other areas. This suggests greater attention needs to be given to career paths for Indigenous workers, and opportunities for professional development such as "secondments" to assist them move out of those roles into either different roles and advanced positions within Indigenous areas or general positions in mainstream areas.

Another tension that emerged from the study was the burden carried by the Indigenous worker to be the Indigenous problem solver. This expectation was placed on them by their employer, for example, Maxine and Krishna felt they were both being used "to sort out the problems" (Krishna). This occurred whether or not they were in an identified position, or not, and they were expected to "fix it up and make it better than it is" (Maxine). As Indigenous "experts", they were also expected to have a broad, almost encyclopaedic, knowledge about all things Indigenous, "because you are Indigenous you are supposed to know all the answers" (Maxine). So there is an unrealistic burden of advocacy put on Indigenous workers to solve "the Aboriginal problem" and also to provide expert information on Indigenous issues when they were often not qualified to do so. A similar expectation is faced by Indigenous university students and lecturers (Herbert, 2003; White, 1998). This impractical condition requires a greater sharing of responsibilities to address Indigenous issues, and for all workers to have cultural awareness training to take the pressure off Indigenous workers.

Another concern revealed by the women's focus groups, was that those Indigenous people who left their communities of origin to find work, or to seek an education, often found themselves culturally isolated. Community connection is so strong (Bruno, 2003) that some Indigenous people will forgo the opportunities outside their communities, rather than risk being rejected as "flash blacks" and "uptown niggers" (Herbert, 2003).

> I have seen that with people who have lived in a close community wanting to get an education and career and they might go away for a couple of years and have great opportunities to develop that side of their careers but then turn it down to go back to their communities and take a job (Focus Group B).

To prevent the loss of links with their communities, there should be more help given to communities develop them quality employment opportunities and community-based education programs so that more Indigenous people can

stay in their communities. This does not just mean expanding the CDEP. However, it should be recognized that it is often necessary to move away from communities to achieve specific education and work opportunities. Therefore, Indigenous communities should be encouraged to support those going away to work or study by being made aware of and promoting the benefits of education and work opportunities in the outside world.

6.3   RESEARCH QUESTION 2: How do Indigenous women move from being a member of the workforce to pursuing a career?

This question was used to explore Indigenous women's understanding of the concept of "career", how this might be different to having a job and then what having and developing a career meant to them.   Their responses were grouped around five main areas. These were:

- **6.3.1 Indigenous woman's reflections on what a career means for them**
- **6.3.2 Career Choices**
- **6.3.3 Cultural framework for Indigenous women's careers**
- **6.3.4 Complexities of an Indigenous woman's career**
- **6.3.5 Sabotaging careers – the oppressed oppressing**

6.3.1 Indigenous woman's reflections on what a career means for them

In sharing their understanding about what having a career meant for them as Indigenous women, the women outlined a number of factors.   Firstly, their understanding was that having a career clearly was very different from having a job. The concept of having a career was described by Margaret as being able "to be the best I can be" not just a job but something to "indulge" and "build something upon" (Margaret's story). Dana believed it to be "a journey" which is encompassed in all aspects of her life and identity.

The women spoke about careers "being choices", planned but also "evolving", as "stepping stones to a destination to an area that inspires you", "a journey",

and a pathway to fulfilment of goals and dreams. The women then were able to apply these terms specifically to them, attaching meaning to what "career' as compared to a job, was for them as an individual. For the individual, it was about personal fulfilment, "having choices to how you live your life", "taking opportunities … evolving into a career" and proving to themselves and others that they could do it. In the focus groups and interviews, the women were passionate and expressive when they talked about this issue.

- I want a career that is fulfilling and that will allow me to challenge myself and go beyond situations that I might not find in everyday situations … but will also make me happy.

- Career to me is opportunities to meet goals and visions you have for yourself, careers give you opportunities to reach far a field to what you anticipated for yourself … an opportunity for growth – growth in all areas.

- Career to me means to aspire to becoming what I am today – to fulfil my dreams
  (Focus Group B).

The great determination of the women and their aspirations to succeed are echoed by other studies on Indigenous women (Bruno, 2003; Gool, 1997; Richardson, 1993). Clearly, the study found that the women understood and articulated that they needed to have a career to achieve their individual and group goals. It allowed the women to have a voice about the meaning they constructed about what a career is to them. Consequently, the importance of their voices and their words makes this study a unique and valuable contribution to the body of knowledge about Indigenous women's lives in particular their career aspirations and development.

The participants agreed that the concept of having a career was a fairly new one to Indigenous women since many come late to work and careers due to poor education, early motherhood and lack of opportunities. Margaret

described it as "a new thing for Indigenous women", that they "are changing, modernizing … the western world is changing us … we have to change". Since there is an absence of writings on the subject of Indigenous women's careers, this finding is a distinctive one for the study. However, studies on the careers of other black women (Hite, 2004) have revealed similar findings.

For both the individual and the group, the women expressed that there were enormous barriers to Indigenous women's career development. Nearly all of the women expressed their journey as a "struggle".

> Indigenous women having to work hard about what they want to achieve because it's not just self, they have got a lot to worry about in their background. It is a big step for Indigenous women to go forward and to dream … to get to their dream and what they want (Focus Group A).

The study found, as had Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998), that "women of colour" faced structural inequalities that give advantages to "those considered the norm" (p. 88). All the women felt that, compared to non-Indigenous women, it was much more difficult for Indigenous women to achieve careers. This is because they believed that non-Indigenous women understand and can better negotiate the system, and did not face racism and sexism in the way that Indigenous women do. Margaret stated that non-Indigenous women find it easier to develop their careers because they "have western culture down-pat. They can walk in there and no assumptions or insinuations are made about them, no stigma sticking on them" as the system is supported by their own culture.

Furthermore, it was suggested non-Indigenous people also had better opportunities for work and career because they often came from families with a history of employment and careers - a history and infrastructure to support their education and careers, whereas, Indigenous female graduates are often the first in their families with degrees.

Some non-Indigenous families have generations of careers. Aboriginal people have generations of career unemployment (Focus Group A).

This perception that this particular group of Indigenous women have of all women does not necessarily reflect accurately the stories of other Australian women who as a group are now more culturally diverse. Certainly the above would apply to some non-Indigenous women, but not all as Australian population characteristics reveal. This indicates a greater need for all women to share stories so that myths and misconceptions are not perpetuated to create further divisions between women.

The study was used by the women as an opportunity to reflect on how they constructed their own careers within the context of their lives, an important practice to support professional and personal growth. More recently, narrative approaches to career counseling have encouraged the use of life stories to assist clients construct personal meanings about their careers (Brott, 2005). One of the focus groups generated some deep insights on this experience which was described as a stepping stone and an evolving process.

The way that I have looked at career is thinking about the stepping stones that you need to take to go forward to some destination whether it is a long-term destination or short-term destination as far as work or an area that inspires you … I don't think that is a one-off process (Focus Group A).

Most of women agreed that this process for them fell out naturally rather than being planned, so that they took opportunities as they came along.

When you think back to when you were a teenager … I don't think you were thinking about career … you were thinking about just getting a job because you needed a job. For me somewhere along the line, the whole idea of moving down the track became clearer and you had to make decisions about how to get to the next stage, and to move forward to the area you wanted to work in (Focus Group A).

Most people don't start off saying they are going to be President of the United States. You take opportunities as they come along and your career tends to evolve. You don't necessarily know what you are going to do when you are seventeen, but it evolves. (Focus Group A).

Thus the study concluded that Indigenous people do not have access and support in early career planning, but that constructivist approaches to career counselling and the construction of life roles may be beneficial to Indigenous people in their career development. This finding has significance for further policy and practice.

6.3.2 Career choices

From the interviews, it was established that the women were given little if any, or poor career advice, which then impacted on them achieving jobs and careers.

I was phoned and asked when I was doing nursing about doing medicine – it was a career option I never considered … I'd love to do it … I was never encouraged to do it … because I was a caring nurturing person then nursing was a good career for me … there was not enough career guidance – I was being encouraged to go into softer or easier options, nursing instead of medicine (Focus Group B).

Thus the study identified that Indigenous women receive little encouragement in developing careers of substance. This problem dates back to school where teachers and guidance counsellors are often at fault (Crump, 2001). Krishna was allowed to "cruise" and was "never encouraged to be anything more than mediocre". Maxine's mother was told that Maxine "would probably be good at cleaning jobs and that sort of thing, or something to do with her hands because she is good with art". These findings agree with literature on career diversity that "women of color" have to choose from a "menu of limited options dictated by our gender, class, race and cultural backgrounds" (Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998, p. 87). The current study established a great need for

teachers and guidance counsellors to be appropriately trained, to have a better knowledge of cultural and historical issues, and the opportunities now available for Indigenous people, points congruent with Crump (2001). Furthermore, they also need to examine their own attitudes towards Indigenous peoples and beliefs about their potential and ability to succeed. This concurs with Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998) and Gool (1997) who noted the links between structural inequalities and negative stereotypes about minorities, which then disadvantage them in career development.

Maxine raised the importance of career guidance and mentoring. Having never had it and doing everything on her own initiative, she believes that guidance and mentoring "to walk beside me" would have made a difference to her remaining in her position but also other Indigenous women in leadership roles who often walk away "tired with the same feelings" as she had. Mentoring has been found to be a valuable aid to assisting women enhance their career development where the experience mentor acts as a "wise guide" to the mentee (McMahon, Limerick, & Gillies, 2004), a partnership that Maxine would have welcomed.

Consequently, the study also found that for Indigenous women, their career choices were influenced by community expectations and cultural obligations, very much like their choice of jobs. In some communities where there are low levels of literacy, the educated person is often called on to write letters for others, statements for courts, chase up banks and write submissions for organizations. As often as one of few educated Indigenous people in a family or community, these women found their careers were sometimes dictated by Indigenous issues rather than what they trained for or desired as an occupation:

"We were told my cousin and I, to go and fix it. As the educated ones in our family we were told … you guys go and deal with it otherwise there will be consequences. That's how I am in my job. Basically, moving between careers from nursing into community was about working for family (Focus Group A).

There was sometimes direct pressure on the individual to work or remain in a specific area and one participant reported the "pressure on you not to apply for those white positions" because "you should be serving your people" (Focus Group C). Given the growing number of qualified Indigenous people, this problem may be naturally resolved as a greater number of Indigenous people are able to assist their communities. However, until that time, there needs to be a greater promotion of career information in Indigenous communities so that career choices can be better supported. This is more of a concern in remote communities where job and career opportunities are limited.

The geographical constraints of career development were raised by participants in Focus Group A and Krishna who express that living in rural and remote makes it difficult to build careers. This is because of the lack of job opportunities which then means lack of career opportunities since "the width and breadth of career opportunities" are "not there in rural and remote communities even some of the urban communities (Focus Group A). Also, Krishna talks about the disadvantages of living in the country where "you just have to take whatever you can get. Many Indigenous people have to face this – the remoter areas limit your choices and if you are thinking career, you have to move away" (Krishna). The high rates of Indigenous unemployment due to distance from labour market has been reported extensively in the literature and government reports. This study adds another dimension by concluding that careers are also impacted by geographic location and mobility.

Career choices were also found to be influenced by women's parenting responsibilities which in turn impacted on their career advancement as Limerick (1995) has written. Dana raised the issue of single-parenting which means "limited career development and career choices" as "being only parent takes up so much of your time", making it difficult to do further study and having to take "jobs that fit in with family arrangements". Since a significant number of Indigenous families are known to be single-parent, mother-headed (Huggins, 1994; White, 1998) this problem is important to the career choices

of Indigenous women. Therefore, this issue raised by the current study requires consideration and further research.

6.3.3. Cultural framework for Indigenous women's careers

The importance of culture and family for Indigenous women explains why Indigenous women feel such an obligation to consider these aspects in relation to their career development, as "we need the support of our people to walk through all parts of our lives" (Maxine). For the women, they believed that their careers and work must be framed within a cultural context, and a worldview that is encapsulated in the concept of *The Dreaming,* a spiritual framework (previously described in Chapter 4) that connects people and permeates all aspects of Aboriginal life (Edwards, 1988, p. 13). Similarly, in her study of Canadian Aboriginal women's journeys towards a doctorate, Bruno (2003) describes the interconnectedness of "The Medicine Wheel". Both Bruno (2003) and my own master's study (White,1998) describe how the circle is a significant symbol to both Australian and Canadian Aboriginal women's spirituality. This is also discussed in the research chapter. In one of the focus groups, one of the women used the circular symbol to describe how Indigenous women careers are conceptually different to non-Indigenous women. This is depicted below in Figure 6.1.
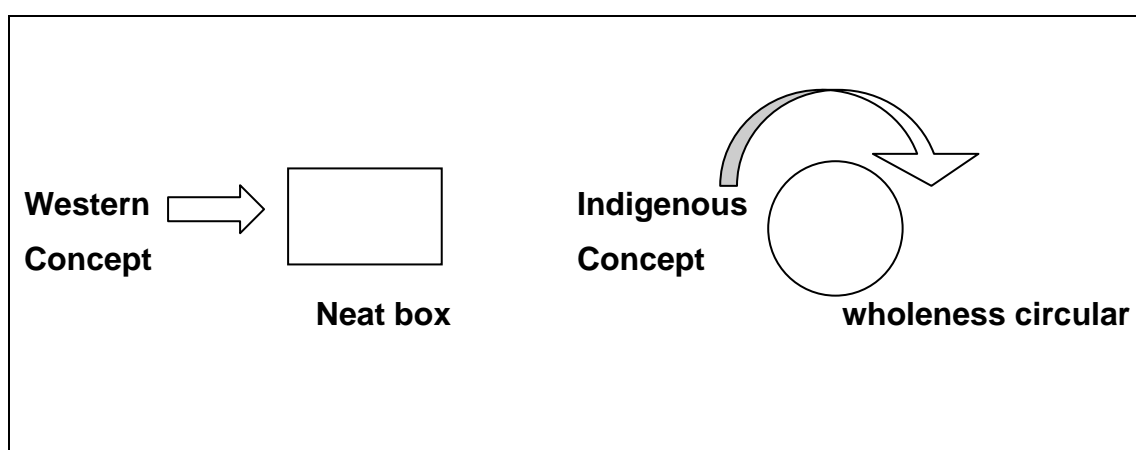

Figure 6.1: Indigenous women's careers. (Conceptualised by Focus Group A)

Significantly, the study emphasises the importance that the women place on their family and culture, by voicing that career negotiation and development has been constructed within a family context, and is not just about them as an individual. It is about their perception of self being central to their being part of family. Bruno (2003) echoes this when saying, "emphasis is placed on the self in relation to other beings, this is not an isolated individualistic self" (p. 80). This sense of belonging is embedded in Indigenous kinship systems which are still strongly evident in Indigenous people today, including those living in urban areas. The significance of an Indigenous women's cultural framework for careers is a distinctive contribution from the study to the knowledge about Indigenous women and women's careers.

All participants confirmed that they placed their families first and careers second, thus confirming Alderton and Muller's (2000) belief that women have a strong tendency to put their needs below those of others. This is especially apparent in Krishna's story where her working and travelling "was a significant choice to fit in with my family". In addition, the study found that the women wanted more information about how they could construct careers through flexible working arrangements so that they would not be forced to choose between having a family, and having a career. Flexible work options and initiatives such as "crèches at schools" (Focus Group A) were suggested as ways to support Indigenous women in work and career decisions. Thus the study argues that more flexible options would make a difference to Indigenous women's participation in employment and careers in agreement with the abundance of literature on balancing women's careers that reiterates the importance of providing women with flexible career options to support their family arrangements.

Dana raised a significant issue, not often discussed, about the links between women's careers and abortion. This was a decision Dana faced herself, and it was only with good support from her family and from within the system that she was able to make an informed decision to have her child. The issue of abortion is a contentious one, with growing numbers of women regarding termination as a lifestyle choice. Professional women are increasingly

reluctant to take breaks that might interrupt their careers (Fraen, 2005), and are also choosing to have children later. This study makes no conclusion about this issue, but mentions that Indigenous women may have difficulty making this choice for cultural and spiritual reasons.

Lack of career development

The women consistently reported that although they wanted to do further training, they did not receive the encouragement or opportunity to do so.

> I was looking for opportunities to do management training while I was at TAFE and the only training I could find was the New South Wales Equal Opportunity Department where every second year you could apply to do a 6 month internship for mainstream. I didn't get in even though I applied many times over the 8 years. I don't think there are opportunities for women to get on-the-job training (Focus Group A).

The current study reinforces Hite's (2004) study that "women of color" have less access to career development opportunities. However what this study finds, unlike other research, is that Indigenous people are often pushed too quickly and are expected to make rapid promotion without the accompanying knowledge, experience, training and support. Furthermore, upon graduation, some Indigenous people may be lured into higher paying positions than they are qualified or able to do.

> I think that in Indigenous positions, women didn't get time to have proper career development because they are accelerated too quickly … because there is such a desperate need. I know young women who have just got a degree and they end up policy advisors because they are Indigenous, and have got a degree and they haven't had time to consolidate their skills at any level … they don't get an opportunity to work through the system and they need to (Focus Group A).

This finding which reports on the acceleration of Indigenous people may provide shed light on why Indigenous people being involved in the management of their own affairs have not made significant impact on the situation of Indigenous people generally.

6.3.4. Complexities of an Indigenous woman's career

The Indigenous women interviewed said they faced many of the complexities experienced by other women in constructing careers. These included coping with multiple roles, trying to balance work, family and study commitments, difficulties of child-care arrangements and lack of support to do all of these. These issues were discussed in addressing Research Question 1.

However, it was felt that these issues were more compounded for Indigenous women because of the socio-economic disadvantage that Indigenous people faced generally such as poverty, poor health, and insufficient housing. These impacted on Indigenous women in terms of their ability not only to gain and keep a job but also to develop their careers further. For example, concerns included the finances required to provide interview dress, clothing for work, professional resumes and the ability to maintain regular attendance and performance with health conditions, personal and family sicknesses, and deaths. Of particular concern, were the huge demands placed on women that caused enormous stress and great tension in trying to balance the demands of careers and families. In most cases, it was found that the women believed they had to choose between family and career. This same phenomenon has been written about in respect to women generally, but few studies, if any, have included the views of Indigenous women. This study is important in that it allows the women a voice to explain how such issue are unique to them as Indigenous people and women.

> In today's society, the term career puts a lot of pressure in a different way on Indigenous women. A lot more is expected of us … we want to be involved more in society in leadership but a lot of us are still

struggling with the mothering and the family ties and that's challenging in itself (Focus Group A).

The women used their interviews and focus groups as a way to reflect on their own personal struggles and to share and discuss these with others, and to ask questions.

How can you progress your careers when you have all these pressures and no under-pinning support (Focus Group B).

I want to be both. I feel like I've got potential and I want to get in there and I want to lead people, being a teacher. I want to help other people. At the same time, I want to be a mother and be part of the community (Focus Group A).

Participants in Focus Group B expressed that the study provided an avenue for women for personal reflection and suggested that women should be given regular opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Early motherhood/late careers

An issue not previously emphasised in the literature and research is that Indigenous women experience early motherhood and later entry into education, which often results in late careers. This was confirmed by the women in the study, several of whom had children at a young age, and a number of whom were mature-age students as the quote below demonstrate:

I see a lot of Indigenous women striking out, embarking on a career or seeing what they are capable of at an older age. Indigenous women tend to have their babies a lot earlier - which is not necessarily a bad thing - but then they are caught in that cycle of family raising and then its like when the kids are off, then they think about themselves. So it's like an age barrier (Focus Group C).

Although many women today are choosing to have families later because of careers, this is often more difficult for Indigenous women due to cultural and family pressure. Belonging to cultural groups with strong traditions about motherhood and child-rearing meant that they received negative comments and were discouraged from pursuing careers until their children were grown.

> From a Torres Strait Islander perspective, if you have traditional Islander in-laws, or are a traditional Islander person yourself, you are told off for wanting to pursue a career. Until those kids are out and independent - that's your first job (Focus Group C).

> I find the same. You have got the family to look after and you can't go chasing a career until they're out and about themselves. Priority is the family and my mother went through it, my sisters have gone through it. I am lucky because I don't have children and can focus on my career (Focus Group C).

That Indigenous women are younger mothers is confirmed by the statistics readily available and reported in Chapter 2, and the cultural attitudes on childrearing are included in the report on childcare needs by Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy report (2001). This study reminds us of the differing profiles of Indigenous women and the cultural factors that impact on their work and careers.

Racism and sexism

There is no doubt that racism continues to be a problem for Indigenous women, discriminating against them either directly or indirectly and by reinforcing negative stereotypes as described previously by Gool (1997). The women recalled many direct experiences that they have had in their working lives.   However with respect to their career advancement, the study found that all the women felt that sexism, rather than racism, was a bigger problem for them, not only from white males, but worse from black males. They also felt that black males were given preference over them, even when they had

better qualifications. This was regardless of whether the interview panel was 'black' or 'white'. They also felt that Indigenous men were more easily promoted and that there is a problem in some community organizations where the management and board membership is predominantly dominated by Indigenous males.

> I lost out on an Indigenous police job even though I had better qualifications. They wanted an older male … I heard that he is still there being slack. He probably looked the part. The police are typically a male organisation (Focus Group B).

This agrees with Huggins (1994) and what I had found in my master's study (White, 1998) about the promotion of Indigenous males at the expense of Indigenous females. However this study is significant because it raises not just the sexism between male and female, but highlights the oppression of Indigenous women by other Indigenous people, mainly Indigenous men.

6.3.5 Sabotaging careers- the oppressed oppressing

The most insidious lingering effect of colonisation highlighted by the current study, is the oppression of Indigenous people by other Indigenous people, which Bruno (2003) frames as "the oppressed oppressing" from the work of Freire (1970). It is sadly ironic that Indigenous people who have suffered the oppression of the coloniser have now turned that oppression inwards (Bruno, 2003; Pearson, 2000a; Phillips, 2003).

A serious matter raised by a number of the women in the study, is the deliberate obstruction and sabotage they have felt and experienced from other Indigenous people in their workplaces. Firstly this occurred in trying to break into jobs, and continued through their attempts to develop a career. This phenomenon has not been researched previously or discussed widely in the literature.

Some of the findings provided in this section are based on the interviews and focus group discussions, but were unable to be referenced to individuals as the women were concerned about being identified, and "copping" consequent retribution. They sometimes asked for the tape to be stopped or parts erased. Therefore quotes will only be referenced as "Discussion" or attributed to a particular Focus Group.

One woman found a direct attack against her religious background by an Indigenous panel member when she went for an interview with Indigenous organization:

> On my resume I noted that I went to bible college and attended a local church. I was asked questions about whether I would be bible bashing. So, I asked if all interviewees were being asked that questions. I didn't get the job and felt that it was because I spoke up (Focus Group A).

The same woman also reported that she had put in many applications and had received as many rejections despite her qualifications. Yet she knew of other Indigenous people with lesser qualifications than she possessed, who got jobs more easily because they had family connections.

> After completing my Masters, I wanted to work in an Indigenous organisation – I put in a number of applications to a particular government department, jobs from level 5 to management – but was not given an interview. I was told on feedback that I didn't match the skills required in selection criteria. They wanted Indigenous people but even with all my qualifications, I didn't get a look in (Focus Group A).

This finding is disturbing in that it suggests that Indigenous people are prejudiced against other Indigenous people who do not belong to the same family group or community. When Indigenous people travel outside their community of origin, whether to a city or interstate, they often face rejection from their new community. This is because prior to European settlement, Aboriginal Australia was divided into over 600 language groups, all of whom

had defined land boundaries. Movement between one group's "country" to another's required official permission. However, colonisation removed people from their traditional lands, and over the years land boundaries became lost or blurred. With the reclamation of land through native title, language groups are asserting their territorial rights without recognition that today there is much more mobility of the population due to employment, education and lifestyle choices. If "outsiders" do manage to obtain employment, they often face opposition and criticism because they are not "local" (Discussion).   This practice is well known in Indigenous circles, but not understood by the wider community who continue to see Indigenous people as a homogenous group. Pearson (2000a) and Appo (2003a) have written about this practice which is one of the prohibitive factors to Indigenous community development.

Consequently, nepotism is entrenched into Indigenous organizations and government departments where significant numbers of Indigenous people are employed. Often the work team is dominated by family members, relatives or people closely connected in the community. Sometimes family members are on the board of organizations where family are also employed. This is taking kinship structures and obligations to an unhealthy level (Pearson, 2000a), so that better qualified Indigenous people are rejected in favour of family and friends. Such a practice results in a workplace that is insular, open to malpractice, internal tensions and power struggles. Some of the women said they left jobs because they had either uncovered inappropriate practices or malpractices, and were unwilling to go along with them.

> I worked for an Indigenous childcare- the level of accountability was difficult. I had the job for 12 months and then they gave it to another woman. I pointed out "dodgy stuff" and was told that I was only on probation (Focus Group A).

Often they could not receive support or take their concerns anywhere because of the interconnectedness between other staff, and staff and board members. What's more, they also received little support from the system which often left Indigenous workers to fight it out, there being a reluctance to

intervene in 'black' matters or perhaps because it might reflect upon their poor choice of employees in the first place (Discussion).

The study also revealed that the women believed that they were deliberately being kept down by other Indigenous supervisors particularly if they came into jobs with better qualification and skills than that person.

> I feel that I have been held down because they don't expect or want you to succeed. You've got all this to give, all this to offer but you know you're being held down and after a period of time, you try to raise your head and in the end you collapse (Focus Group B).

In order to protect themselves, the women found that they often underplayed their abilities, acting "dumb as dog shit" (Danielle) to keep their job.

> In our jobs, you "play the game", you go under the radar … when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women get into positions and they are smart, they underplay their skills so that those ahead of them don't feel threatened (Focus Group B).

Some of the women moved to other jobs and said they said they would never work in Indigenous roles or for Indigenous organizations again, thus creating a great loss.

> Yeah and it's too much and you have to get out and you become exhausted and you just can't do it anymore (Focus Group B).

This phenomenon referred to by one woman as "horizontal violence" describes aggression in a workplace where oppressive structures and unequal power relations are allowed to flourish. Such work culture has roots in colonial relationships so that Indigenous people now oppress each other in virtually the same manner that they have been oppressed (Pearson 2000a; Trudgeon, 2000). One woman in the current study described this situation as

a metaphorical rape, arguing that the oppression by other Indigenous people is so hurtful:

> I don't give people permission to treat me like this … you feel so violated and gutted (Discussion).

The women's stories clearly revealed that they understood their work and career aspirations were ignored or sabotaged by other co-workers or supervisors. They spoke of being "chopped down by non-Indigenous people as well as Indigenous people" (Discussion), like tall poppies. Furthermore, the study found that there was jealousy from others, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous when the women performed to a high standard. Often others took credit for their work and did not acknowledge their achievement, with praise coming more often from outside their organizations.

> They do not acknowledge your value – they take credit for your initiatives … when I got the (name deleted) award, only an old nun congratulated me. My three immediate bosses never said a word because they didn't get any accolades … when you do something good they don't let people at higher levels know … they take credit for your achievements (Focus group B).

Internal oppression in the Indigenous women's lives was also seen by the women as being present in the form of domestic violence. Yet none of the women volunteered that they had been subject to domestic violence but referred to the experiences of other women they knew or had worked with. The probability is that at least one or some of the women had been a victim of domestic violence is quite high, since that problem is a common one in Indigenous communities. But like most victims, women minimise their situations. Domestic violence is commonly treated as a taboo subject and there is often a conspiracy of silence in Indigenous families about domestic violence and the closing of ranks to outsiders and authorities as the literature shows (Huggins, 1994; Monture-Angus, 1995; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence, 2000). However, the women all

agreed that it was almost impossible for some women to work, to develop careers and to provide leadership when they were dealing with what continues to be a serious problem in Indigenous families and communities.

> Domestic violence, drug and alcohol environments, overcrowding – impact on your ability to get a job, hold a job … after a punch-up you can't go into work busted up … even just the ability to be well dressed, to have nice clothes, a good portfolio, a computer to do your resume on … they are things that other people take for granted (Focus Group B).

Although she has not been in this situation, Krishna believes "it is hard if you have a lot of violence happening in your home, you don't have a supportive partner, and you are living in a small closed community, the expectations on you are enormous". Then, "if you have a desire or you have a vision where you want to go forward in your career, they very rarely match", thus emphasising the dichotomy facing Indigenous women.

The internal oppression and violence which has permeated Indigenous community life together with alcohol and other addictions continue to be a major impediment to community recovery (Phillips, 2003). Yet, the dialogue about domestic violence and other forms of oppression in Indigenous communities must continue to happen to bring these issues to the surface, as they have been in this study. This will keep them on the agenda to be addressed in respect to advancing individuals and building healthy communities.

6.4   RESEARCH QUESTION 3: How does achieving a university education assist Indigenous women with work and career opportunities?

The purpose of this question was to gain an understanding of how a university education impacted on Indigenous women's work and career opportunities. The women were asked to consider why they chose to come to university, what the university experience was like for them, and then whether having a

university education assisted them gain work, and in their careers. The women's responses were grouped around five main areas. These were:

6.4.1   **Coming to university**

6.4.2   **Motivation to study**

6.4.3   **The university environment**

6.4.4   **Complexities of being a student**

6.4.5   **Consequences of being educated**

6.4.1 Coming to university

Prior educational experiences

Prior to coming to university, the women reported that their educational experiences on the whole were mostly quite negative. The majority did not complete high school for various reasons such as having to leave school to support the family, being expelled, having no interest in staying at school or because of ill health. Most of the women talked about the school atmosphere as being unfriendly, often racist, and where they either did not feel as though they fitted in, or were made to feel inferior. Several of the women talked about the how those negative experiences later affected them as adults when they returned to study. Negative comments or attitudes by teachers remained with the women and impacted on their confidence and self-esteem as adult learners. Maxine remembers how "this made me feel very inferior. It made me feel that I wasn't brainy enough", and how she "always felt that I was in the lower level of the school". Similarly Krishna, talks about having to overcome "those early negative stuff that I experienced at school".

The current study confirmed the abundance of literature and previous research which has found that when Indigenous people have experienced failures in the education system as many have (Crump, 2001; Herbert, 2003; Nelson, 2002), this has impacted on their self-worth and self identity. Bruno (2003) talked about how the early years of schooling had created low self esteem in Canadian Aboriginal women as a result of the low expectations of

teachers. The Purdle et al. (2001) study also found that one of the most important influences on the development of positive self identity in Indigenous students came from teachers. Similarly in the current study, some of the women referred to how they had been made to feel "dumb" and inferior by teachers and how their aspirations were limited by the teacher's lower expectation of them. This was therefore a prominent finding in the current study, and one which must be taken into account in the learning and teaching of Indigenous students. It also has implications for the training of teachers.

Late education/first degree

With the exception of one participant, the women spoke about how they were the first ones in their family to go to university and get a degree. As first generation university students, they felt they had no previous role models and this often separated them from non-Indigenous women who might come from "generations of university educated families" (Focus Group A). However, their achievements often had a positive effect on their families and communities by encouraging others to follow suit. An interesting point was that in some families there was often a role reversal with children helping their parents with their study. Maxine found that because of her lack of study skills "some of the parts of my early years I had to rely on my children to guide me".

Although the women expressed the difficulty of being mature-age students because of their additional responsibilities, they also believed that being of mature-age had distinct advantages.

> It was the mature aged students that finished the course … the younger ones that had just finished high school and haven't got those real life experiences and were dropping out. It was the mature age ones that were able to handle the workload. They were coming in as a mature-age student with an open mind. They have skills they didn't think they had … time management and budgeting … and are often more successful (Focus Group C).

So the study confirmed what the literature said about Indigenous people being recent participants in higher education (ABS statistics), their prior experiences and current issues which challenge them as learners and as mature-age students (Bourke et al.,1996; Encel, 2000; Herbert, 2003; Nelson, 2002), the latter status also being a benefit to their study. Recognition of these factors will continue to be important issues in their support.

6.4.2 Motivation to study

The women agreed that at some point, they came to the realisation that they needed to get an education to bring about change in their own lives, their families and communities.

> For me every step in education has had some motivation into being more involved in the Indigenous community or seen as an opportunity to get some more skills to use in the arena of Aboriginal affairs (Focus Group A).

Two of the women were prompted to study by seeing others - non-Indigenous people getting ahead - while they were still stuck in the lower paying, "dirty" jobs. Although Krishna realised that she had "lot of experience in the teaching field and project management", she wanted more training in the areas of "leadership management executive stuff" because she only had part of the picture "but not all of it". For Maxine, it was being replaced in the hydroponics nursery by "someone with a university degree" and deciding I was "sick of doing all the dirty work". Not wanting to "take the crumbs", she realised, like some of the other women, she had to "do something … get an education to go ahead into the professional areas such as management". Similarly, a Focus Group participant said:

> When working in the kitchen at James Cook uni, I used to see the students and I thought I can do that … I can do that. I was sick of being on this side of the counter (Focus Group B).

For Margaret, who had only recently discovered her Aboriginality, it was about taking up study to learn more about her Aboriginal heritage. For Danielle, it was an intensely spiritual journey which started with an experience she had with traditional women in the desert. As a young mother, after completing a business degree, she became interested in alternate medicine and it was a dream that set her on the path to nursing and the quest to become a doctor of medicine. Like Danielle, Dana had a life changing experience which led her to formal study. She was given the opportunity to participate in an alternate education program which gave her a very different view of how learning could be made enjoyable, and influenced her decision to become a teacher, "through own experiences, starting thinking about what a good teacher would make".

A number of the women talked about the influence of significant people who provided good role models, or encouraged them to take up study. These included parents, work colleagues, particularly other Indigenous workers and relatives who had already done some form of study. The quote below reflects the continued need for Indigenous people to receive encouragement and support in making the decision to study.

> I was working as at teacher aide and the teacher that I was working under, she was just wonderful person and the love that she had for the children and the respect that she got … it was unreal and I thought this is what I want to do (Focus Group C).

Having made the decision to study, the women found that they were often plagued by self-doubt and feelings of low worth. These were often connected to past performances and early education experiences, as previously mentioned, as well as how they felt they were perceived as Indigenous people and women in society. However, although a number of studies have explored the university experiences of Indigenous people, few have been able to reveal the depth of feeling attached to how Indigenous women feel about themselves as students, as this study does. But what is uplifting about the stories in this study is that through education the women discovered that they were not as

people had labelled them. Several of the women used the word "dumb", a term used in the past to denote lack of intelligence, to describe how they had been called or made to feel, particularly at school. Through reading their stories of triumph, the reader can share their joy and celebrate their success. From Maxine, this inspirational quote is worth repeating in it entirety to highlight this point.

> Before I was educated and could get into careers, I always felt that I was always below everyone. These were the same feelings when I was going to school, when that teacher said I'd only be good for cleaning and craft things … I always had this low opinion of myself. However, with being educated and being able to work in this role, it gives me an identity of who I really am … so I am not that person I perceived myself to be … I'm not that person that teacher said I was.

This is another valuable contribution of the study which confirms that Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women, should be given opportunities to tell their stories about their journeys, and that research methodology should accommodate storytelling as a legitimate research method. The process of discovering that they were intelligent, capable, gifted women was greatly enhanced through supportive environments and curriculum which affirmed them as human beings and as cultural people. Dana talks about "subjects like Aboriginal culture and history which I really enjoyed" and was good for her in "terms of identity and confidence". She shared how being with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, "there was a more relaxed feel about the classroom". Importantly she said "we never got yelled out, never made to feel dumb or stupid" but also that "when you are from different cultures and the way you've been brought up … it is not that you are stupid, just that you take things in different to other people" highlighting the learning is about differences.

Thus the study highlights the important links between learning, culture and identity as well as the effects of positive teacher student relationships on the women during their university studies (Herbert, 2003) which encouraged them

to overcome the negative experiences of the past and achieve pride and success. Hence the study also emphasises the importance of the university environment in promoting the successful participation of Indigenous students.

6.4.3 The university environment

Three of the women had studied at universities other than Australian Catholic University, and felt that their ACU experience was more constructive. All the women interviewed agreed that their experiences at Australian Catholic University were extremely positive. They felt welcome as Indigenous students and that all areas of the university, not just the Indigenous unit, had treated them with respect and understanding. Some believed that this was due to the catholic ethos of the university and the Christian environment and agreed that the spiritual dimension of their study and campus life was an important part of their time as students. Krishna appreciated that she didn't "have to apologise for being a Christian" but was "free to have a spiritual view on things without being seen as bizarre or out of line".

There were several factors identified by the study which contributed to the women's positive experiences. These included the support of the Indigenous unit, their satisfaction with the course of study, and the educational outcomes from their study.

Indigenous Support Unit

The Weemala Indigenous unit was described by the women as a place where they could feel "at home", receive support whenever they needed it, and where they could form friendships. This was important for students who lived away from the university and whose only opportunity to catch up with lecturers was during residentials, and by phone in between residential blocks.

> Being so far away from the university, you had to catch lecturers and sometimes they were in lectures so your next point would be to call into Weemala … and the support that I got there. The

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door was always open … you could always feel that you had that support there and if anything was ever wrong you had that person to talk to. It didn't matter if it was over the phone or face to face (Focus Group C).

The women spoke of the Weemala unit as being like family, a relationship that is emphasised in Indigenous culture and one that has been constantly mentioned in the literature. Participants remarked on the uniqueness of ACU and the Weemala unit in view of their experiences at other support units and universities. Margaret found that the atmosphere was very positive in contrast to an experience at another university which made her feel "like a fish out of water, uncomfortable … there was no support network there, you are just a number". Being part of such a grouping was important to the women, that sense of belonging, having a network of support, often being the difference between passing and failing a course. Krishna acknowledged when she needed help "it was never a big drama … and people would make it happen for you. That was a really big thing in getting me through my masters".

The study confirmed Herbert's (2003) findings that Indigenous university students have better success when they are supported by an Indigenous unit. This should be a collaborative process with other areas of the university. Since Indigenous units are "primary deliverers of Indigenous support" (Nelson, 2002), the study highlights the need for universities to consider how best they can support the activities of the Indigenous units, and the staff working in those units.

Indigenous postgraduate experience

The different experiences and support needs of Indigenous postgraduate students was raised by Krishna. She found that as an undergraduate student it was a much more natural process of gaining peer support, but that as a postgraduate student, it was a more difficult task. That "circle of friends that operate around that course that you are doing" is not there at postgraduate level and postgraduate study can be "quite lonely". She also commented on

how the post-graduate experience has become even more isolating with the emphasis on on-line courses. However she was able to cope with this mode of study by having a tutor or someone to talk to about the work. Whilst on-line courses appear to allow students to work at their own pace, particularly with other commitments, Krishna highlights that for many Indigenous people the traditional learning style of working with a teacher is still very important even after achieving undergraduate qualifications. This was present in the "face-to-face conversation" she had with her tutor each week, where she was allowed her to talk through assessment. It was her "saving grace".

This finding highlights the need for universities and Indigenous support units to consider the support needs of Indigenous postgraduate students (Croft, Fredericks and Mundine, 2000; White, 1998). Until recently, there have been few postgraduate students, and hence the focus has been mainly on undergraduate support, but growing postgraduate numbers in recent years have signified that it is timely to examine the experiences of Indigenous postgraduate students through further research and consultation.

Support of the university staff

The participants also talked about the great support they received from other university staff which complemented the support given by the Indigenous unit. Maxine believed firstly that "the lecturing staff had a good understanding of Indigenous people", and secondly, that "they treated us like students but had great compassion and understanding". Similarly, this quote from the focus group captures the essence of those relationships which had a long-lasting impact, thus confirming the quality of teacher-student relations is important for Indigenous students at all levels.

> I felt that the lecturers I had were really supportive … they had this understanding of where we were coming from … they only saw us four times a year and that might have been enough. To get your lecturers coming up and congratulating you at graduation was just wonderful. There is a still lecturer that I have spoken to last week and he is really

rapt in what I am doing. There are some who will always be part of my life and you know if you ever run into them they will never forget you. (Focus Group C).

Despite the supportive nature of the staff, the university environment and Indigenous Unit, there were aspects of university study that were extremely difficult, and which each woman had to overcome as individuals.

Transitions and transactions

One such aspect was becoming used to academic writing. Margaret describes how overwhelming this experience is: "the big killer … the essays … whole new world", and how students "need more time to settle in". A number of the participants had been away from study for a long time and often their previous educational experiences were poor and had left gaps in their knowledge. Academic writing and completion of academic assessment is a challenge for any new tertiary student, let alone those students with poor educational backgrounds, and lack of confidence. The choice of Australian Catholic University was based on knowledge that there "was a really good support network there for Indigenous students". This was important because some of the women "hadn't been to university before" and they weren't "sure academically if (they) would be able to cope "(Dana).

The transition to university can be a difficult one for Indigenous students, particularly having to adapt to an academic way of thinking and writing. Dana mentions in her story that the TAFE tertiary access course enabled her to overcome the lack of year 11 and 12 qualifications and provided an alternative pathway to university. Bridging and enabling programs either delivered by the university or TAFE can help prepare Indigenous students for tertiary life (Herbert, 2003) and such courses should be continue to receive support and funding.

The difficulty of adapting to the university curriculum was compounded for Indigenous language speakers whose languages range from Aboriginal

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English to Torres Strait Creole and traditional languages. Indigenous students found that on assessment items they were disadvantaged by being non-standard English speakers. Some mentioned that going on teaching practice they received negative remarks and practicum reports about their "poor" English. The women felt that there needed to be more awareness in universities and schools, about the diversity of languages spoken by Indigenous people to encourage a greater acceptance of Indigenous languages, such as Aboriginal English as legitimate dialects of English. This finding is consistent with Purdle et al. (2000) who recommended that a plan be developed to create better teacher awareness, understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal English.

Some participants who had completed "mainstream" programs felt that there were not enough Indigenous perspectives in their courses. Therefore when Indigenous issues were raised in classes, the Indigenous students were often called on to provide input. This put pressure on them to be experts on Indigenous issues, something that their "white" classmates were not subjected to. Dana found that as the only Indigenous student she was not only expected to be the expert, but she also bore the brunt of other students animosity, "I found that a lot of questions were thrown on me, people that were angry because of things they heard, myths about Aboriginal people … they took it out on me". Similarly Danielle found that she "was the one bringing it up in the class … I was the one always trying to put that Indigenous perspective on things" plus she was also expected to provide the analysis and interpretation of the statistics, "say this is what it actually means … let's have a look at how it impacts on people".

It seems that this pressure on Indigenous people to be Indigenous experts is present throughout their student and working lives. Consequently, the study confirms that cultural awareness training for university staff and students, particularly lecturers working with Indigenous students, is essential for providing the optimum environment for success. This finding agrees with the Nelson (2002) report which recommends incorporating Indigenous knowledge into university mainstream education, and encouraging all staff to take cross-

cultural training to assist Indigenous students to overcome "cultural isolation and prejudice". In agreement with the literature, the study concludes that universities must continue to evaluate and improve their services to Indigenous on-campus and off-campus students, recognizing the diversity of their needs, and ensuring that the curriculum supports their identity and approaches to learning.

Indigenous specific programs

A number of the participants had been enrolled in Indigenous specific programs such as the Diploma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, the Bachelor of Education Primary (Indigenous Studies) and the Diploma in Business Administration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies). Those women agreed that the programs which are delivered in mixed mode were critical to allow Indigenous women from communities gain a qualification, particularly for women who were single parents and had children who relied on their support. Away-from-base programs were found to be more flexible in meeting the students' needs and did not deplete the communities of human resources, an outcome that often eventuates when Indigenous people have to leave their communities to get a university degree. The curriculum includes a number of Indigenous cultural subjects which encourages and strengthens students in their cultural identity. The participants also felt that the learning environment was much more positive than they had experienced at school. They were not treated as inferior or "dumb" by the lecturers and they were much happier to be with other Indigenous learners as group learning is a feature of Indigenous learning style.

> ACU Indigenous programs which allow women from community to get qualification are absolutely brilliant for women who have family obligations, whether they are young or mature, and they can't leave their communities. We need to get out there and promote it even more. They are given opportunities where they don't have to leave their families for long periods (Focus Group A).

Away-from-base programs were also preferred because they eased the students into study by using a two-phase model – a diploma articulating into the bachelor program. This pathway suited students like Maxine who "was not ready to go straight to university" and those who did not have the requisite study skills, by giving them a sense of achievement by accomplishing one qualification, the diploma, before going on to the degree program. Therefore, the study confirmed that the value of Indigenous specific programs whose delivery, structure, and content is supportive of Indigenous life circumstances and cultural needs provides validation for their on-going support and funding.

6.4.4 Complexities of study

Despite the support received from university staff and Indigenous unit staff, all the participants agreed that university study was extremely difficult, the most difficult aspect of which, was trying to balance study with work and family commitments. Maxine's story highlighted that although women may receive support at university, when they go home "they have to work out themselves how they are going to do their study time, how they are going to have time with their families and all the duties that come along with home life". For some women, it meant that they missed important family events, for example, "missing out on grandchildren because you are studying on weekend", and that culturally, this was difficult for them to accept (Focus Group B). Several of the participants were pregnant while they were attending university. This created another problem to them in terms of appropriate childcare. Sometimes they were able to enlist the help of family members or share childcare with the partner but the financial costs of study prohibited them from utilising paid child care.

The financial burden of study was felt by all the participants. Some were able to receive Abstudy and this was helpful, but after the tightening of the Abstudy guidelines and eligibility in 2000, few of the women received assistance from the scheme. This is particularly difficult since many Indigenous families already suffer from socio-economic disadvantage and have larger younger families to support, as detailed in Chapter 2.

Support from their families was mixed. In some cases, the participants found that their families were very supportive of their study needs, but in others, they had little understanding of the demands of university study. The latter often caused tension within families and subsequent stress on the women. However, it was felt that when family members gained or had an understanding of university life, then the women reported that they were better supported. Often their families were their staunchest supporters, taking pride in their achievements and sharing in their success and graduation.

> Without the support of my family, I could not have gone to university. I am the first on my dad's side and my mum's side to go through university. My mum used to drive 3 hours if I was having a bad time with the study and she would be in the car to push me … 'you can't stop you've got to keep going'. Reflecting back, I know I might not have done it without the support (Focus Group C).

The finding from the study agrees with Alderton and Muller (2000) about the complexities of balancing work, study, and family commitments, the combination of which is not been often considered. This study is one of few that examine all these elements and so is significant.

Racism, sexism, and lifestyle challenges

In contrast to their experiences in employment and careers, the women found that they faced little direct discrimination on the basis of race or gender during their studies. They attributed this to the ethos of the University and the commitment to the reconciliation process. However, they did feel that there was a perception from some of their fellow students that they received favouritism because of their Aboriginality. Consequently, the women felt their academic performances were under more scrutiny than other students, even those they perceived to be friends. Dana felt the full impact of this during study, on graduation and receipt of job offers, where others believed she used her "Aboriginality to take me further" and "just brought it up as needed". Comments that she "only got a first round teaching offer because I was

Aboriginal" were very hurtful and do not provide opportunities for Indigenous students to celebrate their achievements, even though they might be "recommended as the best person for that job". To combat the myth of favouritism, students like Dana, felt pressured to pass "because of what people would say" and having "to prove myself constantly".

The myth of "special treatment" has been one of many that have been perpetuated about Indigenous people in the Australian community (Edmunds, 1990). These range from being given "handouts" such as free bikes for children, free taxi vouchers to deposits being made on cars (Author's personal knowledge). With respect to higher education, some of the so called "special treatment" includes that Indigenous students are taking places away from other students; that they are doing "mickey mouse" or "dumbed down" courses and therefore that they were not as qualified; that ATAS tutors are writing their assignments for them and of course that all are receiving Abstudy payments with little accountability (Author's personal knowledge). The Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1990, put out a booklet called "Rebutting the Myths" to combat the effects of such inaccuracies and misconceptions, however it appears that these are attitudes are still strong and continue to create tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Therefore, these misconceptions should be further addressed through reconciliation and cultural awareness activities, but also through Indigenous perspectives in courses from pre-school through to tertiary education. A re-printing and circulation of the "Rebutting the myths" booklet would also be of benefit.

More so than racism and sexism, there were concerns from the participants about being discriminated against in terms of lifestyle and religion. Few of the Indigenous participants were Catholic, and many of the current Indigenous students are also non-Catholic. Some participants reported that they knew of Indigenous teaching graduates who failed to gain teaching positions in Catholic schools because of they were not Catholic, or because their lifestyles were not approved.

Catholic Indigenous workers were told of that they could not get jobs or would lose them because they were not married to the person they were living with. There's a lack of understanding about what marriage means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Focus Group C).

Nevertheless, one of the focus group participants said that this was not a problem for her in the diocese in which she was employed.

I was told that the possibility of teaching in a Catholic school was really slim because I wasn't a Catholic but once they realised that I went to Catholic boarding school for 5 years … then going into a Catholic school and working as a teacher aide for 7 years in a Catholic schools - sitting on the Catholic Social Commision in (name of diocese omitted) and everything else I have done … they went to the bishop and he had no problems with it. I was lucky (Focus Group C).

However she recognised that for some Indigenous people seeking jobs in Catholic schools, there may be potential problems.

It could be a problem for other Indigenous graduates – most of the Indigenous students in the Residential programs are not Catholic. We talk about racism and sexism but here it is more a problem with lifestyle (Focus Group C).

It appears that whilst the Australian Catholic University has a mission to educate Indigenous people, particularly in the teaching profession, there is insufficient consideration given to the fact that the same people on graduation may not be offered jobs in Catholic schools because they are not Catholic. It raises the question of what responsibility universities such as Australian Catholic University have in negotiating these issues with employing authorities such as Catholic Education Offices.

> They make this genuine effort to include Indigenous people but it has got to be more than offering them places. It's about putting them on a career path (Focus Group C).

> Yeah, they jump up and down because there aren't a lot of Indigenous teachers working in Catholic schools but that's because they are not Catholics and can't teach in a Catholic school (Focus Group C).

This issue of religion and lifestyle is significant in that it has not been raised in any other research with Indigenous higher education students. It was raised at the Indigenous Leadership Symposium held at Australian Catholic University in 2001, but has not been addressed by the university and employing authorities to date (author's personal knowledge).

6.4.5 Consequences of being educated

Benefit of university education

With respect to the benefits of received a university education, all the women agreed that getting a qualification had contributed to their personal and professional growth. Primarily, it was about getting that formal recognition, that all important "piece of paper" that was a personal achievement in which they took much satisfaction.

> The big thing for me was getting that piece of paper. Coming from high school which I didn't finish, it was important for me to get the degree (Focus Group A).

There were many benefits that came from commencing and completing a university education. The study found that being qualified opened more doors to employment and careers. All the women reported that they were employed either prior to completing their courses or immediately afterwards. This is in contrast with some of the literature (Gray and Hunter, 1999; Herbert, 2003) which reported that having a degree did not necessarily increase the

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probability of employment. Through their time at university, the women told how they developed networks which assisted them in the workforce. In addition, having succeeded in one course was often an encouragement to do further study, and several of the women possessed additional degrees including postgraduate degrees. They also felt that they had grown personally through their study - in confidence and in ability (Doring et al., 2002) as Maxine says "it has helped tremendously personally and professionally. I got to a place I never thought I would … Study helped me realise I was more intelligent than I thought I was – it has made the most amazing change in my life". It meant that she was no longer having to work in the paddock, "going from week to week on just those few dollars to survive" but contributing to a life where she can "own a home, support my children financially, build dreams for future". Krishna found satisfaction in education which she says were "probably the best 3 years I have ever spent" and gave her "opportunities to explore Aboriginality" through her art.

Although their achievements brought great pride, there was also sadness and anger for some when they reflected that they could have done this before if they had not been made to feel inferior. Maxine talks about those mixed feelings, on one hand, about being "happy and proud that I was able to go to university" but also sadness that so much time had passed before she knew that " I wasn't as dumb as what I thought I was" and anger because she hadn't been given "opportunities before that".

This change in perception helped remove some of the self doubt they had developed as early learners (Bruno, 2003) and gave women such as Maxine, the determination to disprove those negative labels. However, this realisation did not come without great pain, as Maxine's words reveal. The journey into higher education for women who still carry past hurts is also a journey into healing (Bruno, 2003: Croft, 2003) and one that also needs to be framed spiritually.   Bruno's discussion about women's participation in "spiritual retreats, sweats and talking circles" (p. 40) highlights this point. A paper, I had written for the Bennelong Society Conference (2002), entitled "Indigenous education at Australian Catholic University: A spiritual journey" strongly

advocated the nurturing of the spirit of our students to so that our Indigenous students have the opportunity to grow spiritually, as well as intellectually (White, 2002).

> When education is impoverished by the lack of the spiritual dimension, it does not allow us to reach our full potential as human beings and to reach higher forms of human consciousness. The challenge is for higher education institutions to engage in new conversations about spirituality and education, in particular how to support student's intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth. For Indigenous students this is merely a return to traditional ways of learning, living and being, a way that is undeniably a better way for all (White, 2002).

To support the spirituality of Indigenous students, Australian Catholic University at the request of Indigenous community, constructed an Indigenous Reflection Space, believed to be the only such space at a higher education institution in Australia. Here students can reflect and conduct ceremonies and talking circles. Other universities should be encouraged to provide similar spiritual spaces for Indigenous students.

Preparation for work

Some of the women felt that their university study prepared them well for their jobs, while others felt that there could have been more assistance from the universities in the area of career guidance and planning.

> I wished they could have explained that there were other options to working full-time i.e. job-share. I have only found at now. There was not enough information (Focus Group A).

The participants suggested that this should be a priority that the university could address for students in their final year. A conclusion from the study is that universities could play a more prominent role in helping Indigenous people make appropriate choices in courses and careers.

The downside to being educated expressed by the women is that other people could not always accept their changes in skills and knowledge (Margaret). Several mentioned that co-workers and managers who did not have the same qualifications and skills now found them a threat (Maxine), especially the men. Implications from the study, is that women require support to deal with their changing status, such as mentoring and networking, and should have regular opportunities to discuss their concerns.

Despite these shortfalls, the study found that the women for the main part believed that their university study prepared them for moving into a job and/or career. Maxine says that "university prepared me for work. Doing the university course is the key to the career I have today". The participants expressed that they would have appreciated more practical help such as assistance with writing resumes and job applications, particularly addressing selection criteria, and preparing for the interview. This is not addressed in previous research.

> We didn't have anyone to show us how to write up a resume or even to talk to you about where to go - there was nothing about career pathways and how to set yourself up for an interview. We got a little bit of career guidance but we were the first group to go through so we were all leading each other (Focus Group C).

However, when they did get that information, the women found it valuable.

> I got that help. That last week, someone from the union came and talked about why we should join the union … financial institutions came about doing financial planning. It was very good … like life planning. People from the dioceses came down earlier. They talked about super. It was great, it was like the icing on the cake – you made it and now you need this (Focus Group A).

Thus the study concluded that university education must be a well-rounded and balanced approach in preparing Indigenous graduates.

6.5 RESEARCH QUESTION 4: How do Indigenous women develop their leadership in contemporary society?

This question was formulated to gain an understanding of how Indigenous women's leadership is developed in their own community and the wider society. The women were asked to talk about Indigenous women's leadership from a traditional and contemporary perspective and to reflect on themselves as leaders. They were also asked to consider the factors that support and impede Indigenous women's leadership today and what must happen to strengthen Indigenous women's leadership. The responses were grouped around four main areas. These include:

   6.5.1 **Indigenous women's leadership, past and present**
   6.5.2 **Indigenous women's reflections of themselves as leaders**
   6.5.3 **Complexities of leadership**
   6.5.4 **Restoring Indigenous women's leadership**

6.5.1 Indigenous women's leadership, past and present

The concept of what it is to be a leader has changed over time and for Indigenous people this has been greatly influenced by historical, political and social contexts. Today many Indigenous people are more aware, and outspoken about the leadership that they hope will bring them out of "passive welfare dependency" (Pearson, 2000b, p.1) and into positions of empowerment and responsibility. The current study provided the space for women to discuss these topics.

The women in the study all had a good understanding of Indigenous women's leadership in traditional society - that Indigenous women played important roles which were complementary to the men and that the arrival of Europeans had upset this balance. Their understanding of the traditional roles of women

suggests that they have retained that knowledge through their families and probably through their studies. They particularly appreciated the nurturing aspects of Indigenous women's leadership, their identity as leaders and their respected position in traditional society.

> The whole role of nurturing and caring and role-modelling was very much part of that leadership … how it was metered out in traditional culture. Women and men had set roles … and did not value one over the other … there was a sense of equality - women's business controlled by the women, men's business controlled by the men. There was a lot more respect given to women and men's roles. Respect for women's role gave them a sense of identity and gave them to empower other girls and women … this has been now lost or watered down considerably. That's a serious issue (Focus Group A).

The knowledge and understandings generated from the study demonstrate that Indigenous women see the loss of Indigenous women's leadership status as a serious matter. The power of Indigenous women has been "watered down" by colonial processes. If Indigenous women's leadership is to be restored to its rightful place, the traditionally powerful voices of Indigenous women must again be heard.

Indigenous women in leadership today

The participants felt that the strength of Indigenous women's leadership had been eroded so that today they are not valued in the same way as they were in traditional times. The women did not elaborate on how this erosion of Indigenous women's status and leadership came about. However, there is extensive literature that details the destruction of traditional Indigenous society and social breakdown brought about by colonialism and dispossession (Pearson, 2000a; Smith, 1999; White, 1998). What the women did focus on was the potential of Indigenous women today to be leaders, but that many barriers both personal and institutional, prevent them from doing so. Their understanding of the obstacles provides important information which is of

value to policy and practice in supporting the future of Indigenous women's leadership.

The women agreed that whilst Indigenous women have the capability to be good leaders, they are not given the opportunities to move into leadership roles or the support after they are in these roles. On Indigenous representative bodies and in community organizations, Indigenous women are fewer in numbers and/or relegated to positions of less power.

> Indigenous political cultures such as ATSIC suggest that women don't get a look in at all. Just numbers alone demonstrate that. The ATSIC example is an interesting one – why did it fall apart, aside from the government, it was going to implode anyway. It was terribly dysfunctional and women didn't get a look in at all. Community perception is that the processes were corrupted by Indigenous men (Focus Group A).

This agrees with the review of ATSIC by Hannaford, Collins and Huggins (2003) which found the gender imbalance of ATSIC an issue as well as the under-representation of Indigenous women at all levels from local to national. The women in the current study also confirmed views put forward in the review that the current Indigenous leadership had reduced ATSIC to a "disreputable state of affairs" (p. 25)

The study found that the women believed that Indigenous women are unwilling to take on leadership roles because they did not see themselves as leaders.

> Indigenous women have to support their men's self esteem. They have got the potential to be leaders but there is a lot of pressure on Indigenous women. I think their self esteem is a barrier (Focus Group B).

Although there are few studies on Indigenous women's leadership, research on other areas of Indigenous people's life such as education and employment

have emphasized the lack of self esteem and self-efficacy as being an inhibitive factor in Indigenous people's growth and success.

Despite the obstacles, the women in the study agreed that there were a small number of Indigenous women leaders stepping up to the mark. However, the women believed that those who did so, were "often isolated" (Maxine), and desperately needed more support and recognition than they were currently receiving.

> There are more Indigenous women in leadership positions now and this is really good but they are very isolated from each other in the workplace (Focus Group B).

It has been found that Indigenous women are strong leaders within their families and communities but that their leadership often goes unacknowledged and unsupported (The Office for Women, 2005) whereas Indigenous male leadership is often to the forefront.

Dominance of Indigenous male leadership

Most of the women spoke about the issue of dominant Indigenous male leadership. They expressed concern that many community organizations and boards are dominated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males who are unwilling to support Indigenous women in leadership. It was suggested by the women that the authoritarian form of Indigenous male leadership which is so prevalent in Indigenous communities is not conducive to improving the situation of Indigenous people in agreement with Pearson (2000a) and Appo (2003a). Moreover, several of the women argued that it is damaging to the point of being worse than being under a "white" regime (Focus Group A).

> When you look at leadership models, Indigenous men are modelling a very authoritarian style and they have a hierarchical powerplay, even though they say they work in their communities and listen to their communities. When you see it happening on the ground, manipulating

to keep control under their own personal political powerplay. I find that very sad because my understanding of traditional culture is that that wasn't how things really operated. So it is sad to see Indigenous men are still giving lip-service to operating in traditional model but actually using western techniques to get what they want (Focus Group A).

Although the topic of Indigenous leadership, is very much a contemporary issue, an extensive search of the literature has revealed that Indigenous women's leadership is not a prominent feature. Rather that Indigenous leadership discussed today is predominantly male Indigenous leadership. This is confirmed by the current study. These opinions expressed by the women are rarely voiced outside Indigenous circles or publicly. This is possibly because the women may feel that they are being disloyal to Indigenous people by pointing out the internal leadership problems. Appo (2003a) has heavily criticized the current models of leadership in Indigenous communities, maintaining the crippling effect of poor leadership exercised by corrupt leaders who deliberately block authentic leaders in order to maintain their own power bases. Certainly this was the experience of some of the women in the study.

Some of the women found that in their attempts to develop themselves as leaders they were obstructed by people who felt threatened by them or else did not want to give up power.

I have worked in leadership however I have found lots of obstruction from Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. At first I was quite upset about it, but realised that they felt threatened by me. In communities, people look after one another but in these big organisations people look after themselves (Discussion).

Consequently, the study has raised serious concerns about gender issues in Indigenous leadership. It has also found that the development of Indigenous women's leadership has been stalled by the lack of support from Indigenous males, and sometimes the direct opposition from and obstruction by

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Indigenous male leaders. It is no surprise that many Indigenous women fail to perceive themselves as leaders, or act to put themselves forward in the leadership role.

6.5.2 Indigenous women's reflections of themselves as leaders

Strength of Indigenous women

Nearly all of the participants commented that Indigenous women had much to offer Indigenous leadership. The strength of Indigenous women in facing their struggles was seen as a great source of pride. The women in this study spoke proudly about themselves and other Indigenous women having that strength, and not feeling ashamed to speak about what they had overcome. Many referred to the strength of their mothers and grandmothers and their hope that their daughters would also learn to be strong.

> Having to work hard to get here has made us into strong women – we can organise time, care for our grandchildren … even it is scrubbing floors … it's building characters (Focus Group B).

> Look at our mothers, grandmothers and what women are doing today, despite all the things, all the yucky stuff, Aboriginal women are the backbone of our communities (Focus Group A).

The strength and resilience of Indigenous women in Australian and other colonised countries has been highlighted in the literature and research (Bruno, 2003; White, 1998).   Bruno's study particularly recognised the strength of "mothers, grandmothers, mothers-in-law, and female friends and colleagues" (p. 54). The same respect for female relatives was confirmed by the current study. This strength the women felt was strongly evident in traditional society and has clearly not been diminished by the struggles of colonial domination, or the contemporary issues that affect their current lives. Furthermore, the study found that there was an agreement that Indigenous women's strength and the achievements of individual women, should be

celebrated more often (Danielle), especially as an inspiration to younger Indigenous people.

> Young people do not know what you've been through. They just see you in the successful position/job you are in now and don't know what you have had to go through to get there. We went through all the hard stuff (Focus Group B).

The passing of knowledge and experiences on to the younger generation is a traditional way of sharing skills and life experiences (Bruno, 2003; White, 1998) thereby teaching the lessons in life. Indeed, Croft (2003, p. 59) says that "the communication of knowledges can reconcile and empower aspects of self and community identity". From the study, this celebration and sharing of stories is acknowledged as an important endowment for Indigenous youth.

Supporting others into leadership, and being leaders themselves

Another aspect of women's lives which has been identified through the literature and research is their support of other Indigenous women. Each of the participants in the study, without exception, was committed to helping other women find their way into education and careers. Interestingly, they did not recognize this as an aspect of leadership in themselves, but saw this as a natural part of being Indigenous women.

A number of the participants had been involved in mentoring other women, or were mentored by other Indigenous women themselves. All the women made very positive comments about the value of mentoring and how important it was to "have someone there' (Krishna), or "to walk beside" (Maxine) them. Krishna, for example, said "I think I would love to be doing that', and to help Indigenous women "to go past the next level". Margaret helped other Indigenous students to complete the course she had undertaken. By being involved in mentoring, the women felt they could be good role models for other women to inspire them to further achievements and to encourage them in times of difficulty. Maxine became a coach with the National Indigenous

Women's Leadership program and worked with Indigenous women in discrete communities. Dana thought she was a good role model in the school and said she would welcome the opportunity to go back to university to speak to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. All recognized that it was:

> important to inspire others through role modelling, but also to share success stories and to acknowledge the strength of Indigenous women …and to share stories about the difficulties we faced to encourage younger women who might be finding it hard (Focus Group B).

There was a strong belief in the importance of the sharing success stories, and being involved in mentoring and networking to develop Indigenous women's leadership. One focus group discussed how "connecting with other Indigenous women in leadership positions" was a useful strategy for those women "just starting out". This is consistent with previous literature and studies on women's advancement and the relevance of mentoring and networking (McMahon, Limerick & Gillies, 2004). It also affirms the appropriateness of the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-Ordination's (OIPC) 2005 strategy "Networking Indigenous Women" which promotes a network of mutual support among Indigenous women (See Chapter 1). Furthermore, published collections of Indigenous women's stories (Bin-Sallik; 2000; Nolan, Evans & White; White, Barwick & Meehan, 1985) have been found to be a valuable way of sharing Indigenous women's success narratives in contemporary life and should be further encouraged.

6.5.3 Complexities of leadership

The women believed that as Indigenous women they did not receive the same opportunities as Indigenous men. One of the women expressed the preference of support for Indigenous men's leadership because Indigenous women are not perceived as leaders. They are seen more in mothering roles, not as leaders. Furthermore, Indigenous women's roles are often more complex and demanding, and although women are very competent and able to undertake multiple roles, at times when they find this difficult this is pointed

out as a weakness in their leadership capabilities. Consequently, "because of their extra roles, it makes them look incapable, but they actually are very capable "(Dana).

Leadership roles demand considerable time and energy and it is difficult for women to adopt leadership roles whilst managing competing and complex responsibilities. The effective balancing of family, work, community and leadership commitments is the key to Indigenous females being able to participate more fully in leadership and decision-making roles (The Office for Women, 2005). Consequently, the study found that for Indigenous women to be able to develop their leadership role, there needs to be a greater support and understanding about how Indigenous women's leadership is constructed whilst managing their responsibilities.

The participants strongly expressed the need for leadership opportunities and training, and the accompanying support for Indigenous women wanting to become leaders.

> There are not enough opportunities for Indigenous women to develop their leadership due to community dysfunction and community perception. This needs to be appreciated and valued for them to move forward and grow as a group (Focus Group A).

Indigenous women want to be empowered but they are often thwarted in this goal because of the lack of opportunities. This finding confirmed the recommendations of Cranney & Edwards (1998) and Hannaford, Collins and Huggins (2003). It also affirms the aims of the OIPC's Indigenous women's development program which is to develop community leadership capacity through such strategies as leadership training, networking and forums*.*

Impact of socio-economic factors

The participants were realistic and very much aware of the socio-economic factors which limit their leadership development. They highlighted issues of

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domestic violence and alcohol, and poor health, all of which separately and together, impact on Indigenous women's abilities to take on leadership roles.

> What we haven't considered is the level of abuse that Indigenous women are suffering which makes it difficult for them to develop their skills and abilities while this is going on … and even when you have women in careers, in the background there is still this stuff going on … because of history and how men have been allowed to behave. When Indigenous women get qualifications, those things may not change for them … and that would really impact on their ability to move into positions of leadership within community and organisations (Focus Group A).

The study clearly emphasised the enormous impact that violence has on Indigenous women's ability to lead. But it also showed that despite these serious obstacles Indigenous women are trying to rise up and take on the responsibility of leadership. The study found as for the aspects of Indigenous women's work, careers and education, their leadership was compounded by much complexity including the lack of opportunities and training, the many roles, as well as the impact of socioeconomic factors.

6.5.4 Restoring Indigenous women's leadership

In order to restore Indigenous women's leadership and to create a model of Indigenous women's leadership, the women in the study felt that they could draw from Indigenous women's roles in traditional society. They believed that aspects of traditional leadership such as the networking and cultural support were important for contemporary leadership. But they understood that it was not simply a matter of returning to the past.

> It's not about going back – you can't remodel culture. You need to look at the underlying principles. For traditional women it was more about role-modelling and mentoring. It was group-orientated, not hierarchical – a different model of leadership which is not valued in western society.

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> The closest is flatter, team-orientated or a servant-leadership model. That fits close with Indigenous leadership in a more traditional leadership model … which is really about the nurturing the people in that group (Focus Group A).

This finding agrees with Pearson (2000a) who advocates learning from the past, but not romanticizing about it. The study also confirmed Pearson's belief that recovery and empowerment in Indigenous society today are linked to the restoration of Indigenous values and relationships.

In agreement with much of the literature, the study found that the women all believed strongly in the power of education to bring about changes in Indigenous leadership (Bruno, 2003), particularly a leadership characterised by Indigenous women's strengths and ways of leading. The Office for Women (2005) also recognises that it is important for organisations to validate a variety of leadership styles to include women's leadership styles and approaches. The participants spoke very positively about the support they needed to develop their leadership skills but emphasized that there must be much more to encourage more Indigenous women in the area of leadership. The women offered many suggestions for supporting women's leadership. Key principles for the restoration of Indigenous women's leadership identified by the women were leadership training, identification of appropriate leadership models and best practice, and support for women in developing their leadership as individuals, and as a group.

With respect to leadership, most of the women felt that this had to be learned and nurtured, and that leadership did not automatically come with age.
> We would like to see more authentic leadership … more people doing leadership training. So what if you are black and old, that doesn't mean you are leader (Focus Group C).

This quote may have some undercurrents about the dissatisfaction with the contemporary concept of "Eldership" in Indigenous communities being associated purely with age.   Currently there are few definitive guidelines for

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transition to eldership status in contemporary life, as there was in traditional Indigenous society. From the Focus Group C, it was discussed that "Elders" are sometimes self-appointed and there are often arguments within some families and communities about people calling themselves Elders when others feel they are not entitled to. There was also discussion and debate about the specific age that one becomes eligible for Eldership and whether there is a need for criteria for moving into this rank. This issue is often talked about privately but never openly challenged and may be one that should be discussed at the appropriate forum. Since many Elders, being seen as Indigenous leaders, are invited by the wider community to provide a traditional welcome to public events and to participate in important discussions, negotiations and community planning, this may well be an issue that needs to be addressed by the relevant Indigenous community.

Another finding from the study was the need for the nurturing of young women leaders. The women felt that their young women, particularly their daughters, held the promise of strong leadership handed down to them and there was a group responsibility to "grow them up" through support, mentoring and tutoring (Focus Group C).

> We've got young people coming through who need cultural support and we've been through the process so we can help them (Focus Group).

The implementation of several Indigenous youth leadership projects and initiatives in recent years justifies this point.

More than just making general statements about what could be done to support Indigenous women's leadership, in the focus groups and in the individual interviews, the participants were keen to provide practical strategies. They gave voice to these very strongly, thus confirming the purpose of the research, that is, to provide an avenue for Indigenous women to speak out about their lives. These women wanted their stories to be told. They wanted someone to know and act upon their suggestions. Some of their

recommendations are included below and expressed in the women's own language.

Suggestions for supporting women's leadership

- Validation of the wide scope of cultural experiences for Indigenous people - recognising the diversity of Indigenous women's experiences, giving women permission that their experiences are valid – not all locked into boxes;
- Giving voice – listening to other inspirational Indigenous women;
- Making education and training affordable and flexible so that all Indigenous women have opportunities;
- Educational and career opportunities that further career in an achievable ways;
- Support networks - regular gatherings "conversational dinners"; establishing an Indigenous women's club, network/group to meet regularly to socialise and support one another, to have a chat and just to have that cultural connection; retreats with motivational speakers, women's prayer time, and relaxation;
- Leadership training for all Indigenous women, whether they are working or not;
- Support from employers re domestic violence, counselling;
- Mentoring and support to give women more confidence to go further;
  - Support should include talking about issues and concerns;
  - Sharing successes;
  - Counselling;
  - A pool of people who can help, talk, support, not just same ones;
  - Alumni and/or network;
- Indigenous women working and collaborating with non-Indigenous women;
- An Indigenous women's conference – a gathering of women to share ideas, with speakers and time for relaxation and healing;
- The development of young women's leadership.

One of the women's recommendations was for regular gatherings which the participants in Focus group B named, saying we could call it "around the table" or "conversational dinners". Discussion around this idea was very excitable and the women talked about how this was the way they did things in the past, but because of busy lives these practices have been neglected.

> **"**Around the table", that's a good title for gatherings … naming it now (laughter). That's what our women used to do in the past, our mothers and aunties. Once we entered this world of work, we just don't have time, we're all so busy … not enough time for immediate let alone sister-girls outside (Focus Group B).

The women spoke of the focus groups in the current study, as such a gathering, indicating that the research methodology and the use of focus groups had provided a gathering place or "talking circle" (Status of Women Canada, 2006). But it also reminded this group of Indigenous women of the importance of their networking as Indigenous women. This validates the chosen research methodology and data collection methods.

It was clear from the study for this small group of Indigenous women, there is an untapped well of Indigenous women who could provide important information, wisdom and guidance for the development of Indigenous women's leadership. Consequently, the study has found that there needs to be much more consultation with Indigenous women about their experiences and leadership, what they want for themselves, and what support and training they need to accomplish their goals and dreams. This has significant implications for policy and practice.

6.6 SUMMARY

In conclusion, the study has found that Indigenous women have faced and continue to face enormous barriers to their attaining equal participation in their own communities, and the broader Australian society. Evidence from this chapter which considered their experiences in employment, careers,

education, and leadership, relative to the literature and the data obtained from their individual career stories and focus groups, suggests that Indigenous women construct their lives within a powerful socio-historical and cultural context. Their struggles to be educated, find work, develop careers and become leaders have not received the appropriate recognition and support. In this chapter, the collective voices of a group of Indigenous women have articulated their issues and concerns, their reflections on their own personal journeys, and their suggestions for improvements.

The chapter has highlighted the outstanding strength of Indigenous women who have overcome obstacles of past and present by drawing on their inner qualities, determination, and their support networks. Racism and sexism continue to be subtle and systemic vestiges of a colonial past (Pettman, 2002), yet these constructs are revealed by the women to be less problematic than the obstructions and oppression they face from within their own communities. In addressing the research questions, the responsibilities of families, Indigenous communities, employers and universities have been identified to support the women's development.

The implications of the study for policy, practice and further research are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7:   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to review and provide conclusions related to the career development of university educated Indigenous women.   It also attempts to provide recommendations for policy and practice to support the future career development and leadership of Indigenous Australian women in Australian society.

Previous studies on Indigenous people's participation in areas such as employment and education have provided a statistical framework for comparing the participation and performance of Indigenous people's against that of other Australians.   Yet, few have actually engaged with Indigenous people in such a way that allows them to express how they feel about their locations within a predominately "white" western based society.

I started this conversation with a group of Aboriginal women in my master's study about their women's experiences in postgraduate study. I knew from working with Indigenous students over an extensive period that they regarded their engagement in university education as an opportunity to bring about change in their lives. But gaining a university qualification for the women did not appear to level out the playing field, and bring about improved opportunities in their job and career aspirations.

I then began to reflect on whether a university education was clearly of benefit to Indigenous women in their career development, given that they are enrolled in greater numbers than Indigenous men in Australian universities. Therefore the current research was born out of a desire to understand the issues surrounding this phenomenon. This study was more about understanding about how Indigenous women make meaning out of their career development, rather than providing an analysis of the facts and figures.   The participants in this study were Indigenous female graduates from the Australian Catholic University at McAuley at Banyo campus in Brisbane.

This chapter firstly reiterates the purpose of the study and the design of the research. Secondly it addresses the research questions. Thirdly, conclusions of the research are presented, followed by implications for policy and practice. Finally, the thesis concludes with a personal reflection of the study, and pearls of wisdom from the women who contributed to the research.

7.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research was to explore how university educated Indigenous women negotiate their career development. Four areas were identified from the literature review and were used to generate the specific research questions to guide the study and to organise the data analysis, findings and discussion. These were:

1. Indigenous women in the workforce;
2. Indigenous women and careers;
3. Indigenous women and education;
4. Indigenous women and leadership.

These four dimensions of Indigenous women's lives were used to provide a framework for the women to talk about their career journeys. The study also sought to highlight the personal experiences and background factors such as education, cultural factors, gender issues, barriers and supports, management of family and work commitments, and the influence of racism and sexism on the women's work, career, education and leadership experiences.

7.3 DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

In keeping with the purpose of the research, that is to understand the meaning Indigenous women make of their careers, the epistemological framework of Constructionism was used to underpin the research. Constructionism was deemed the most appropriate fit because it focuses on the meanings that human beings construct of the world they are interpreting. Furthermore these constructions are developed through social interaction and cultural

frameworks, historical and sociocultural contexts. Constructionism was also chosen because it is congruent with the Indigenous worldview and the way Indigenous people attach meaning to themselves, their relationships and the world around them.

Consequently, it was also important that the career and life experiences of the women were shared through an Indigenous world view. For myself as an Indigenous woman and researcher, I had to find a way of respecting Indigenous ways of knowing and researching whilst interfacing with western research frameworks, methodologies, and methods. This was achieved by using a mix of existing methodological approaches and Indigenous practices (Smith, 1999). Throughout the study, there was a strong emphasis on the appropriate conduct of research on and with Indigenous people. In particular, cultural aspects in the data collection, analysis and presentation of findings were considered pivotal to the integrity of the project. Ethically, the study was guided by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) research guidelines.

A case study approach was chosen as the most appropriate way of exploring the career experiences of a specific group of Indigenous women. The women shared their experiences, their reflections and their dreams through focus groups and in-depth interviews. The career stories that were constructed from five of the women maintained the cultural tradition of oral stories that is central to both Aboriginal culture and Torres Strait Islander culture. As the women's stories unfolded it allowed them to make meaning of their journeys, and the challenges that they had overcome. This approach provided the women with a voice where previously they may have been silenced or had little opportunity to speak about their struggles and achievements. Through their stories, the participants were able to name and express many of the emotions that was part of the journey: anger at the racism and stereotyping in education and work; humiliation from cruel remarks made by teachers, frustration and stress with coping with work, family and study; lack of confidence in their own abilities; pride in getting that degree; love for family; and respect and admiration for other Indigenous women. The richness of the

data was enhanced by the words of the women themselves and there were some absolute gems.

The design of the research also allowed the women's stories to reveal the incredible inner strength of Indigenous women who have suffered enormous hardships but through their spirit have risen above the many obstacles, both past and present. Being part of the study, also encouraged the participants to consider their futures and what further supports might be needed to promote their own careers and leadership together with other Indigenous women. Danielle went on to pursue her dream about being a doctor and was accepted to study medicine in 2006. Maxine became a coach with the Indigenous women's leadership program and began mentoring other Indigenous women. She is now traveling to Indigenous communities throughout Australia to deliver literacy workshops to Indigenous parents. Dana attended a motivational weekend on personal success and is now keen to train as a personal coach. She is also in a new relationship with another child on the way. Margaret is undertaking a master's degree and is now lecturing other Indigenous students in the same course in which she started. Krishna is continuing her postgraduate study and considering other leadership options.

The overall conclusion of the study is that Indigenous women are seeking opportunities and support to develop their careers and leadership. Their personal and professional growth is pivotal to the restoration of their communities. However, there are enormous barriers, both personal and institutional, to their successes. Many of the obstructions such as racism, sexism, socio-economic and educational disadvantage, are the result of colonisation, the vestiges of which remain entrenched in contemporary Australian society. Therefore, their experiences and meanings are embedded within a strongly defined socio-historical context. Subsequently it was important that the four specific research questions were reconsidered to ascertain the extent to which they have been addressed by the findings of this study.

7.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS ADDRESSED

7.4.1 Identification of the research questions

The research questions emerged from the purpose of the research and the four major themes of the literature review. The central question of this research was:

How do university educated Indigenous women negotiate their career development?

The study, and especially the data-gathering process, was guided by four specific research questions which are:

Research Question 1
What experiences do Indigenous women have in entering and maintaining their position in the workforce?

Research Question 2
How do Indigenous women move from being a member of the workforce to pursuing a career?

Research Question 3
How does achieving a university education assist Indigenous women with work and career opportunities?

Research Question 4
How do Indigenous women develop their leadership in contemporary society?

These questions have also been used to provide a framework for the summary of findings and discussion. Each question has been presented separately, however each of the questions are closely interrelated and contribute to the central question. This is in keeping with the concept of *the Dreaming* where all aspects of an individual's life are inter-connected

(Edwards, 1988). Whilst the individual parts may be described separately for the purpose of understanding the elements, they impact on each other and come together in the whole.

7.4.2 Research Question 1

What experiences do Indigenous women have in entering and maintaining their position in the workforce?

The women's stories revealed that their early experiences in the workforce were limited to unskilled or lay professional work. This was generally influenced both by their lack of education and lack of opportunities. For some of the participants, their being part of a culture which valued women staying at home and being mothers, was a disincentive to work. The latter also meant that a number of them became mothers at a much earlier age than other Australian women and had larger families, reflecting the characteristics of the Indigenous profile in Australian demographics.

The study revealed that the women found that being in the workforce created many challenges for them in balancing their family, community and other responsibilities. The multiplicity of their roles resulted in enormous stress. A major issue was the lack of childcare or locating childcare that suited them culturally i.e. finding an Indigenous childcare provider or a provider that had culturally affirming care. The flexibility of employment was also a problem for most of the women with young children. Good part-time jobs or options to job-share or work at home were simply not available. Consequently, many of the women chose jobs that fitted in with their families and available childcare and these jobs were often not the most appropriate or preferred choices.

The women reported that they were motivated to work by a number of factors including the desire to improve their lives, to have more money available and to improve their standing in the community. However, a significant motivation was also the desire to help their communities by being an advocate for Indigenous issues. But they also realised that this was often more idealistic

than practical. If they were in Indigenous identified positions, they found pressure from both their non-Indigenous colleagues to be the Indigenous expert and from the Indigenous community to be the Indigenous advocate/saviour.

As workers, the women revealed that even though it was not a requirement of their job, they expended a lot of energy trying to change racist attitudes in the work environment by promoting cultural awareness. This was met with mixed results.

7.4.3 Research Question 2

How do Indigenous women move from being a member of the workforce to pursuing a career?

The research revealed that the women had a good understanding about the concept of career and how that differed from merely having a job. They expressed the career journey as a pathway to fulfilment of goals and dreams, suggesting that there was a definite progression that they as Indigenous women were undertaking in reaching their potential. They spoke strongly about the difficulties faced by Indigenous women in making this journey and how they believed that their experiences were vastly different to non-Indigenous women. They recognised that the playing fields were not level. They felt that non-Indigenous women do not have to face the same structural barriers and that non-Indigenous women were able to better negotiate the system because of their longer career histories as a group.

The participants admitted that they often did not seek promotion or leadership positions because of their lack of confidence and also because of the attitudes displayed towards them. Their career development was also impacted by the demands of work/life balance which often meant that career decisions and choices were influenced by family, community and cultural factors.

To enable them to develop careers, the women recognised that they require support, mentoring and networking. This needed to be from family, employers and resource areas such as childcare. Social issues including domestic violence were acknowledged as keeping Indigenous women in subordinate roles.

Racism, sexism and sabotage from other Indigenous people were a big problem for the participants. Like "white women", Indigenous women suffer from workplace sexism which locks women generally out of management roles. But they felt that their being Indigenous and women created a double obstruction for them. Indigenous women were overlooked in favour of Indigenous men who were more often less qualified for the position. The women emphasised that many Indigenous communities and organisations have been poorly managed by Indigenous males yet there is a still reluctance to employ Indigenous women in senior management positions. More alarming, was what the women said about being sabotaged in their careers by other Indigenous people, more often males, but also other Indigenous females. The women contended that these antagonists tended to be Indigenous people who entered the system before formal qualifications were required, and who now are unwilling to let recently qualified Indigenous people go ahead. In such situations, some of the participants stated that they had to underplay their abilities to keep in favour and to keep their jobs or so that their work would not be poached.

7.4.4 Research Question 3

How does achieving a university education assist Indigenous women with work and career opportunities?

The research revealed that the women's prior educational experiences were generally limited and of poor quality. Several reported that they did not enjoy school due to the environment, the curriculum and the negative attitudes and racism of teachers and other students. These experiences contributed to the women having a poor self concept and lack of confidence. Later, when they

plucked up the courage to attend university they had to work hard to overcome the mental barriers that had impacted on them.

However, once they started their university, they encountered things about themselves that they had not appreciated before – that they were worthwhile and able to learn and that they weren't "dumb". Through this journey of self-discovery, the women found that they were able to grow intellectually, culturally and spiritually to the point that they could not always believe the changes they had made, or how far they had come. This affirms that a university education for Indigenous people is as much about personal growth as it is about getting a degree - a university education must reflect this.

The women's stories revealed that as in work and careers, they faced many barriers in adjusting to academic life, coping with their studies and managing their multiple roles and commitments. Sometimes families did not understand the demands of university study and the women felt that there is an important role for the university to play in educating families about the importance and demands of study, involving them in the journey and sharing in the celebration of graduation day. There needs to be a greater promotion of education to Indigenous communities to encourage them to use education to improve their lives and to provide support to their family members who are on that education journey.

The research found that the women all had very positive experiences at Australian Catholic University and attributed this to the teaching staff, the university environment and the support of the Indigenous unit. Those who had participated in Indigenous specific programs felt strongly that the mixed-mode residential programs were appropriate for community people especially those who had been away from study for a long time. Culture was regarded as an important consideration. This included lecturers receiving cultural awareness training to understand and work with their students better, students undertaking cultural studies to learn more about their culture and to affirm their identity, and cultural activities on campus to demonstrate the university's commitment to reconciliation.

Although the women said they did not face overt racism, they felt the negative attitudes of other students, and sometimes lecturers, who believed they were being given unnecessary advantages because of their Aboriginality. This suggests that the university has a responsibility to promote reconciliation activities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and making it clear that Indigenous students are not unfairly advantaged but rather they are given special consideration in respect of their disadvantage. Also, it should be acknowledged that Indigenous students are required to meet the same course requirements as other students and that the Indigenous courses are comparably rigorous to mainstream programs. This would confirm the quality of Indigenous graduates in the wider community particularly to potential employers.

Through a process of reflection, the participants all agreed that receiving a university education had benefited them in a number of areas including personal growth, gaining employment and developing careers. However they felt that the university could be doing more to assist them make the transition into the workforce. It appears that there is a need for post-graduation support, firstly to help new graduates to move into their new roles and secondly to assist them to cope with any negative people who are threatened by their newly developed expertise.

7.4.5 Research Question 4

How do Indigenous women develop their leadership in contemporary society?

The research revealed that the women believed that the current leadership operating in Indigenous communities and community organisations is dominated by Indigenous males and that this leadership is poor and needs to be changed and challenged. They felt strongly about the importance of promoting Indigenous women's leadership. They suggested that we could learn from the past by looking at the role of Indigenous women in traditional society. The women's comments highlighted the strength of Indigenous women which has been under-utilised in contemporary society.

The women agreed that there are too few Indigenous women leaders and those that are brave enough to "step up", did not get the support they needed. In fact, many were clearly obstructed by those who were unwilling to share power. They recognised that there is an enormous well of Indigenous women to be tapped, but that Indigenous women themselves need to be encouraged to see themselves more as leaders. The participants also acknowledged the social and economic issues such as domestic violence which cripples Indigenous women's attempts to take on leadership roles.

The women offered some excellent suggestions on ways to restore Indigenous women's leadership. Many of these ideas centred on networking and mentoring, and the women themselves felt that they could make a contribution in this area. Indeed they felt the focus groups which primarily were organised to gather data was an informal gathering of graduates.

7.5   CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The following conclusions drawn from the study represent an effort to understand how Indigenous women make meaning of their career development. Such conclusions are made from the basis that these are the women's perceptions at this time in their lives and in their careers. It is recognised that Indigenous people's lives have changed dramatically since colonisation, and continue to undergo significant changes as a consequence of government policies and practices, societal changes and the ebb and flow of their own life journeys.

This study concludes that Indigenous women are attempting to carve out careers for themselves against a backdrop of societal barriers that impact on them as Indigenous people, and women. A number of contextual factors combine to impede their progress in their careers. A primary concern for the women involved in this project was how to achieve getting an education, getting and keeping a job and developing careers, whilst balancing their lives as mothers, partners and community members. Most of the women felt the

pressure of cultural expectations and obligations, which strongly influenced why, when, where, and how they worked. The findings suggest that there is much more we need to know about Indigenous women's lives in order to support them on their life's journey. More importantly, this needs to come from the women themselves so that they are active participants, using their own voices to speak about these matters.

The research findings also conclude that Indigenous women face extensive pressure in the workplace or education setting, merely because of who they are. To a greater degree than other cultural groups, Indigenous people are expected to be Indigenous experts and advocates for Indigenous issues. They are also expected to defend rights to native title and to justify the funding provided to Indigenous people. As a consequence, most of the participants found that they were delivering cultural awareness informally on a regular basis. Some felt this as a very strong obligation. This suggests that there is a great need for better promotion of Indigenous issues in the wider community to foster more positive attitudes to Indigenous people and Indigenous culture. The study identified a need for greater emphasis on cultural awareness training in the workplace and universities as well as cultural support for Indigenous workers and students.   Further research, conferences and symposiums could identify best practice models for sharing and implementation.

However, the study revealed that although the women were concerned with racism and sexism, their greater concerns were about the "horizontal violence" referred to by one of the women. This related to the obstructions that several of the women working in Indigenous areas, experienced from "white" people who did not want to give up their power and status as "experts" in Indigenous areas. Far worse, was the sabotage the participants believed they had been subjected to by other Indigenous people, often less educated, and for the same reasons as the previous group. This raises implications for the support of new graduates from both the universities and the employing authority, and the mentoring of women workers in their career development. It also calls for support of the "old guard" of Indigenous workers who did very

good work in the early days and obtained their positions at a time when university qualifications were not required. To help long-term Indigenous employees cope with the loss of status and to avert any threats or negativity towards new Indigenous graduates and emergent leaders, employers and universities should be developing ways for this group to receive qualifications through recognition of prior learning and experience and professional development in leadership and management. Else, we will see a serious division between old and new leaders in Indigenous communities. In respect to the "white" experts, a positive discrimination policy towards recruitment and employment of Indigenous people, including the "indigenising" of specific and relevant positions, would signal a time for them to move on to let Indigenous people run their own affairs.

The research left little doubt that although Indigenous women face many barriers, they also show enormous strength and resilience. The findings also indicate that the women still believed in the power of education to bring about changes in their lives and their communities. The benefits of education were clearly articulated as pathways to better jobs and careers. This confirmed the findings of other research that there is still a great need for educational policies and practice to focus on providing appropriate access, successful participation and outcomes as expressed by the goals of the National Indigenous Education Policy (1991).

Despite an original lack of confidence and poor education, many of the participants had progressed to postgraduate study and managerial positions. The study provided them with the opportunity to reflect on that journey and in doing so allowed them to appreciate the growth they had overcome and to contemplate their futures. Some seemed surprised and modest about their achievements. Another response was anger for the all the years they had been down-trodden and made to believe they were "dumb". Thus, consideration should be given to providing Indigenous women regular opportunities to reflect and speak about their journeys, and to heal from past hurts, to enable them to go forward. These times to gather and network are a renewal of traditional women's business still practiced in some communities,

but not so often in cities. This would enable the individual to reflect, evaluate and plan future choices to assist their career development. The women's networks would embrace those traditional aspects of culture that Indigenous women need, to maintain their identity.

All the participants were interested in developing their leadership skills and supporting other women leaders. They understood and valued many of the aspects of women's leadership in traditional Indigenous society. Although they acknowledged that being colonised had disrupted traditional forms of leadership and that it was not possible "to turn back time", the women believed the we could learn much from "the old ways". Certainly they believed that the current leadership dominated by Indigenous males had done little to restore Indigenous communities. Therefore, a significant conclusion drawn from this study is that Indigenous women's ways of leading may have beneficial consequences for rebuilding communities. This has considerable implications for policy and practice.

7.6   IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is important because it contributes to the body of knowledge about Australian Indigenous women, to the theoretical understandings about career development of minority women's groups, and to the implications for policy and practice relating to the above.

Despite an increased interest in Indigenous issues, I found little empirical research which explored the links between education, employment, careers and leadership for Indigenous women. Yet the successful participation of Indigenous women in all these areas is central to their survival, growth and development as empowered individuals and leaders in both their own communities and the wider society.

Furthermore, an extensive search of the research literature identified a lacuna concerning the career development of Indigenous women in Australian society. This research is an original contribution to the growing body of

knowledge about Indigenous women's experiences and provides insight into what encourages successful careers for Indigenous women. The study does not purport to provide a model for all Indigenous women to develop their careers. However, it is hoped that this study will encourage Indigenous women to better understand their own career development and leadership – what barriers there are for them as individuals against a contextual background of social and cultural factors. Furthermore, it will encourage those women to plan the supports, development and training they need to reach their goals and dreams.

In the past, Indigenous women have had few opportunities to speak and be heard. In particular, the voices of Indigenous women have been largely ignored. This thesis aimed to provide a voice for a particular group of Indigenous women who have been marginalized within the tertiary sector, and within the broader Australian society. A significant outcome of the study is that it provides an insight into how successful careers for Indigenous women can be supported within the university they are attending.

The recommendations which follow are based on the findings and conclusions of this research study.

7.6.1 Recommendations for policy

The improved participation of Indigenous women in work, careers, education and leadership must be based on their personal growth and development in a holistic way that incorporates their culture and identity. In order to encourage more positive attitudes towards Indigenous people and Indigenous cultures and to foster better understanding of Indigenous issues, it is recommended that reconciliation and cultural awareness be promoted widely in the community, in organisations and universities. It is further recommended that the rights of Indigenous workers and students are protected by cultural diversity policies, anti-discrimination and racial harassment policies and anti-bullying policies**.**

Indigenous employment polices encourage a greater percentage of Indigenous people participating in the workforce and a broader participation in occupational areas. Therefore it is recommended that all organisations, government departments and educational institutions develop Indigenous employment policies that include appropriate recruitment, selection, and working conditions including cultural leave, career support and mentoring schemes for Indigenous workers. It is also recommended that employment policies focus more on implementing strategies to improve job and career opportunities in remote and rural areas for Indigenous people.

Indigenous people are still under-represented at undergraduate and post-graduate level in higher education. Therefore it is recommended that educational policies continue to focus on the access, participation, decision-making and successful outcomes of Indigenous university students, as recommended by the 21 goals of NATSIEP.

Women's participation in work, careers, education and leadership is severely impacted by their family responsibilities. Therefore, it is recommended that childcare policies include strategies to provide Indigenous women with more culturally appropriate childcare, to encourage the training of more Indigenous child-care workers and family day-care providers; and to disseminate childcare information to Indigenous families about the range and availability of childcare to suit their needs.

The development of genuine, un-biased and balanced leadership, based on cultural values, is central to the recovery and empowerment of Indigenous communities (Pearson, 2000a). It is recommended that policy be developed to support the emergence and maintenance of effective Indigenous leaders especially women, from community to representative levels.

7.6.2 Recommendation for practice

Indigenous Education and Support Units continue to play an important role in the academic, cultural and personal support of Indigenous students in

universities. It is recommended that universities provide appropriate resources and funding to these Units to enable them to continue the excellent work that they do. It is further recommended that staff within these units receive professional development and training to enhance their roles and to provide career paths. They should be given opportunities to work collaboratively with staff in other areas of the university, so that they are not isolated or marginalised, and so that support of Indigenous students is a seen and practised as a collective responsibility.

Indigenous students are more likely to be successful in their course of study, when they experience a learning environment that enables them to grow intellectually, emotionally, culturally and spiritually. It is recommended that universities acknowledge the important links between, culture, identity, learning and spirituality by affirming these through the inclusion of Indigenous issues, perspectives and history in curriculum, through valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultural activities on campus, the employment of Indigenous staff throughout the university, and by catering for cultural and linguistic diversity in university assessment. In respect to Indigenous students' unique socio-economic circumstances, it is recommended that university assessment guidelines are made more flexible to take into account the difficulties faced by Indigenous students. It is further recommended, that universities such as Australian Catholic University with established "away from base" programs, continue to receive funding to deliver these residential programs which meet the life circumstances of specific Indigenous individuals and communities. But that these programs are regularly evaluated to meet the changing needs of Indigenous people and communities.

Indigenous students continue to be clustered in the more traditional areas of study, and this situation impacts on their participation in the broader spread of occupations. Therefore it is recommended that universities implement strategies to attract Indigenous students, especially women, into the non-traditional courses through special entry considerations, specialised support within disciplines, partnerships with industry such as the National Indigenous Cadetship program, and tertiary scholarships in specific disciplines.

Indigenous graduates do not always achieve access to job and career opportunities despite qualifications. Therefore to encourage graduates to make a better transition from university to work, it is recommended that universities work with employing authorities to develop links with students in their final year of study and that each university establish an Indigenous alumni to continue links with graduates. It is also recommended that organisations and government departments be encouraged to establish or continue an Indigenous graduate employment program, a central component of which is a mentoring scheme.

To promote the greater appreciation of university education within workplaces, so that graduates are not subjected to threats or internal oppression, it is recommended that universities work with employing authorities to give recognition of prior learning and experience with credit towards programs of study for existing Indigenous employees without formal qualifications.

In recognition of the multiple roles and pressures experienced by Indigenous women in work and education, it is recommended that employers provide flexible work arrangements for Indigenous women to enable them to meet family commitments, and that universities implement more flexible study options for Indigenous women.

Indigenous women have proved to be strong leaders in the community but they have a complexity of roles and are hindered by social obstacles and lack of support. It is recommended that the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-Ordination (OIPC), other women's organisations such as the Office for Women, employers and universities provide opportunities for women to engage in leadership training, mentoring programs and women's networks. It is further recommended that Indigenous women be encouraged to establish networks and informal gatherings at the local level to support one another in their everyday lives.

Universities are appropriate places for Indigenous women to obtain formal leadership qualifications and training. It is therefore recommended that

universities develop Indigenous leadership subjects within established disciplines of study, or as complete courses which may be delivered on-line and in summer or winter institutes. These should be developed in collaboration with the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre (AILC). Furthermore, it is recommended that courses delivered through the AILC receive advanced standing into relevant university courses.

7.6.3 Recommendations for future research

The following are recommendations for future research that have grown out of this study. Future research may further illuminate the lives of Indigenous Australian women and provide some answers in how to support these women to take their rightful place in Australian society.

1. A more in-depth study on the impact of social issues such as domestic violence on the ability of Indigenous women in respect to their obtaining work, education, and career development and how these might be addressed to support Indigenous women's development.

2. A longitudinal study following the careers of a group of first year Indigenous students through their university study and into the first five years of work following their graduation.

3. Further research on mentoring and role models for Indigenous women with a comparison and analysis of models and programs which are presently working in Australia and overseas.

4. Further research into leadership models for Indigenous people especially for Indigenous women with a comparison and analysis of models and programs which are presently working in Australia and overseas.

7.7   FINAL REFLECTIONS

When I began this thesis, I used my own journey as a starting point to reflect on Indigenous women's career development. I wanted to understand how Indigenous women might make meaning out their experiences in the workforce, in education and how that related to their career development. Through the data that came out of the focus groups and the in-depth interviews, I felt I was able to construct a number of career stories that provided significant information on what the women thought and felt. So I learnt a lot about that. But I also learnt a lot more in the process. I learnt about myself as an Indigenous woman. I loved hearing the women's stories and their stories of triumph. It reminded me of who I am. I was touched by their strength and saddened by their sorrows. I felt anger for the way they had been treated as I would for any sister of mine. One of the women mentioned a lecturer who had been good to her. Tragically, only a few weeks after I had transcribed her story, I had heard that the teacher had committed suicide and had to pass on the sad news. I struggled with some of the comments about domestic violence which "cut a bit close to home" especially when my sister was killed tragically, a victim of domestic violence, during the final stages of the thesis.

When you write about people's lives, you become inextricably linked with them, bonded beyond the research/participant relationship. I know we will keep in touch and their words will echo in my heart long after the study is completed. I am honoured to have known these women, to have shared their stories and brought their words to life. I pray that I will always be blessed by their love and friendship and we will journey together to that place where Indigenous women will lead in the restoration of Indigenous communities in Australia.

7.9   GEMS FROM THE WOMEN

Throughout the study, I have incorporated wonderful illuminating quotes from the women which have strengthened their individual career stories and

underpinned the findings and discussion. As a final word, I include what I believe is a single quote from each women which is significant to their journey. It is only fitting that in a study that purports to enable the voices of Indigenous women that the final comments are theirs.

Margaret

> Indigenous women are such powerful strong women and would be able to do so much more if they were supported. I want to make a difference. I want to do something to make a change. I want to get the kids out of the circle. I want my children to grow up happy in what they do and very proud of the Aboriginal heritage.

Krishna

> I have tried to go with the opportunities that have been put in front of me and its things I have been passionate about. But they have also been good opportunities for me and for my family. A lot of Indigenous women think like that … will it be good for my family, will it be beneficial for the community, in respect to training. Maybe this is something I can bring back into my community.

Maxine

> Growing up in an Indigenous family, I saw the need to build relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Through my studies I have been given the opportunity to work in the area of Reconciliation, promoting its purpose. When I first began my studies, I never imagined that my work would be acknowledged in such a tremendous way, and I am thankful to be able to make a difference in the lives of my people.

Danielle

I am a bridge between white and Indigenous culture; between healing and medicine. I am like the lizard with the eyes up and I can see two worlds.

Dana

It doesn't matter what we become. It's just who we become. We try. That is the most important action in our lives. Through trying, we can reach self actualisation. We can reach for the stars. We can reach for whatever we have dreamed about. Whether we touch it, is not important. But it's the people we leave, and it's the history we contribute to this mankind that makes its mark. It is what lies within us! (From Nolan, Evans and White, 2004 and inspired by Ralph Waldo Emerson)

APPENDIX A

Roslyn's painting of Aboriginal women in postgraduate study
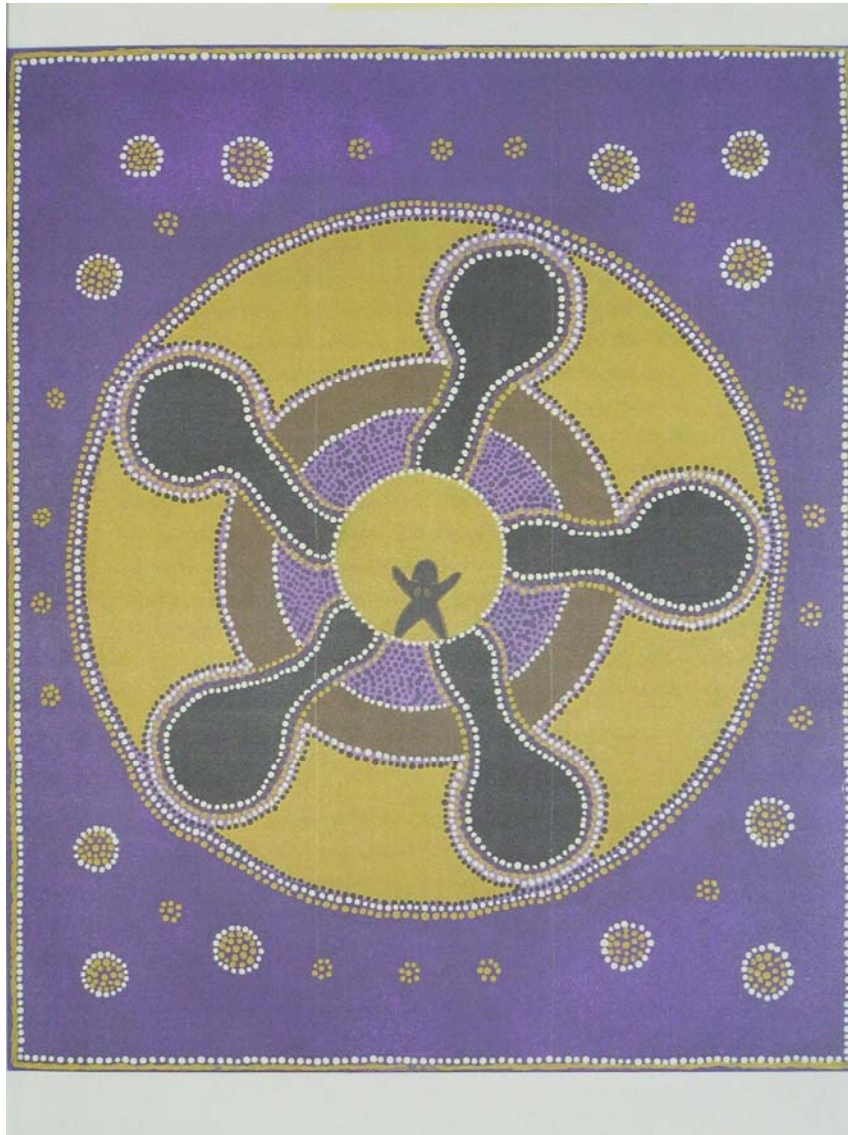
Roslyn Maree Dunlop 1957-2005

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) Goals

MAJOR GOAL 1 - Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Educational Decision-Making

Long Term Goals

1. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children.

2. To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and con-temporary society, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

3. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

4. To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

5. To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate in educational decision-making.

6. To develop arrangements for the provisions of independent advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities regarding educational decisions at regional, State, Territory and National levels.

MAJOR GOAL 2 – Equality of Access to Education Services

Long Term Goals

7. To ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children of pre-primary school have access to pre-school services on a basis comparable to that available to other Australian children of the same age.

8. To ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have local access to primary and secondary schooling.

9. To ensure equitable access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to post-compulsory secondary schooling, to technical and further education, and to higher education.

MAJOR GOAL 3 – Equity of Educational Participation

Long Term Goals

10.To achieve the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in pre-school education for a period similar to that for other Australian children.

11.To achieve the participation of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in compulsory schooling.

12.To achieve the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in post-secondary education, in technical and further education, and in higher education, at rates commensurate with those of other Australians in those sectors.

MAJOR GOAL 4 – Equitable and Appropriate Educational Outcomes

Long Term Goals

13.To provide adequate preparation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through pre-school education for the schooling years ahead.

14.To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.

15.To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.

16.To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attain the same graduation rates from award courses in technical and further education, and in higher education, as for other Australians.

17.To develop programs to support the maintenance and continued us of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages.

18.To provide community education services which enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people develop the skills to manage the development of their communities.

19.To enable the attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults with limited or no educational experience.

20.To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.

21.To provide all Australians students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary cultures.

(Department of Education, Science and Training, 2006)

APPENDIX C

Information letter to participants

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29 July, 2004

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS (INTERVIEWS)

TITLE OF PROJECT: Indigenous women's career development

 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin
STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Nereda White

Dear Graduate,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project which will explore how university educated Indigenous women negotiate their career development. This research project will be conducted as part of studies by Ms Nereda White in the Doctor of Education (EdD) at ACU**.**

The project involves interviewing Indigenous female graduates from ACU McAuley and reporting on their career journeys, personal experiences and background factors such education, cultural factors, gender issues, barriers and supports, management of family and work commitments, and the influence of racism and sexism on their careers.

To undertake this project, Nereda will be conducting two focus groups in Brisbane. In the first focus group, she will be asking women such as you to identify the issues relating to Indigenous women's career development. Following the focus groups, Nereda will be asking five women whom she has selected from the group of 75 female Indigenous graduates to participate in an in-depth interview.   The five women's stories will be written up as individual case studies. These individual stories will contribute to a larger story or case study that will identify common themes and individual differences. After the in-depth interviews, Nereda will ask the original focus groups to reconvene to discuss the emerging issues.

It is envisaged that the focus groups will take approximately 2 hours, with the individual interviews no longer than an hour. The focus groups will be carried out at McAuley campus. Individual interviews may be held at McAuley campus or at a location of the interviewee's choice.

This project has many potential benefits. It will give Indigenous women the opportunity to share their career journeys and to reflect on their experiences. This will contribute to a better understanding of Indigenous women's lives, their career development and their leadership within their own communities and in the wider

Australian community. The project will also provide information that will encourage support for Indigenous women in their career development and aspirations.

Should you agree to participate in this project, you have the right to withdraw from the project at anytime and do not have to provide reasons for that decision. I do not expect there to be any risk to participants, although you may feel concerned about criticising aspects of your career journey with respect to ACU, personal experiences or workplaces. You do not have to answer any questions or discuss issues that you are uncomfortable with. Participants will be audiotaped and they will have the opportunity to read what is written following the interviews, and to make changes to their stories. Copies of interview tapes can be provided on request.

Confidentiality in this project will be ensured through the use of pseudonyms in any reported data. Results from this study will be reported in my doctoral thesis and may be summarised and appear in publications and conference presentations in a form that does not identify the participants in any way.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any questions that the Researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee on the address below. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

Chair, HREC
C/o Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Locked Bag 2002
Strathfield, NSW 2135
Tel: 02 9701 4159 Fax: 02 9701 4350

If you agree to participate in this project, could you please sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to myself as Principal Investigator. Could you also please indicate your availability for the focus groups on the separate sheet provided. I have included a reply paid envelope for your convenience.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please do not hesitate to ring me on 07 3623 7154 or Nereda White on 07 3623 7194.

Regards,

Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin,
School of Educational Leadership,
Australian Catholic University
P.O. Box 456, Virginia, Q 4014.

APPENDIX D

Consent Form Participant's Copy

ACU National

CONSENT FORM
PARTICIPANT'S COPY

TITLE OF PROJECT: Indigenous Women's Career Development

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Nereda White

I .... *(the participant)* have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time.

I agree to being audiotaped and that if selected, I will be willing to participate in individual in-depth interviews.

 I agree that data collected may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ....
(block letters)
SIGNATURE ....   **DATE** ....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: ....

DATE:……………………………………..

APPENDIX E

Ethics approval letter

✛ ACU National

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: A/P Denis McLaughlin   Brisbane Campus

Co-Investigators: Brisbane Campus

Student Researcher: Mrs Nereda White   Brisbane Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:
Indigenous Women's career development

for the period: 1st July 2004 - 31st December 2004

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: Q2003.04-21

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

(i)   that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
   - security of records
   - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
   - compliance with special conditions, and

(ii)   that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
   - proposed changes to the protocol
   - unforeseen circumstances or events
   - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimal risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimal risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: *K. Pashley.*   Date: 1 July 2004
         (Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)

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