Empowering Indigenous thriving : Identifying conceptions of wellbeing and enabling the voice and agency of Indigenous youth in higher education

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Empowering Indigenous Thriving: Identifying Conceptions of Wellbeing and Enabling the Voice and Agency of Indigenous Youth in Higher Education

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Georgia Durmush, 2021

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They say it takes a village to raise a child; well indeed this is true, and so there are many people I need to thank who have supported and guided me along this journey. To my loving parents, thank you for your endless love, support, encouragement, and for always being there. I am who I am, because of you both. To my beautiful twin sister, thank you for always being there and for your endless encouragement and support. I am very lucky to have you in my life. To my loving partner, your support and love have got me through this, and I am very blessed and grateful to have you. To my principal supervisor Professor Rhonda Craven, it was you who encouraged me to undertake this PhD. Thank you for believing in me and empowering me to believe in myself, even at times when I doubted myself. Thank you for your endless encouragement, expertise, advice, and words of wisdom, and as you say: "Eat the whole elephant, one bite at a time." I can now say, I have successfully eaten the whole elephant. You will forever be one of my biggest mentors and role models, and I am forever blessed and grateful to be taught by a powerhouse such as yourself. To co-supervisor Professor Janet Mooney, it has been an honour and privilege to be taught by you. You're also one of my biggest role models and mentors whom I look up to. It is people like you who have made studying in the academy a little easier, as your leadership and strength have paved the way for the next generations of First Nations researchers and academics. To Dr Robert Brockman, thank you for your support during the first year of my PhD, I greatly appreciate it. To Professor Alex Yeung, thank you for always being there. You're one of those supervisors whom I could always rely on whenever I felt unsure about something. I am thankful to have been guided and taught by a respected researcher such as yourself. To my community supervisor, mentor, role model, and family friend, Pat Anderson, AO. It has been an honour and privilege to be mentored by you. Thank you for your cultural mentorship and for the knowledge you have passed on to me. I am forever grateful to be mentored by a respected leader and activist such as yourself who has paved the way for First Nations people's health and wellbeing. Lastly and most importantly, I would like to thank the youth and students who participated in this research. This thesis would not be possible without your voices. Thank you for trusting me and for sharing your knowledge, experiences, and perspectives with me. This thesis is dedicated to you.

Table of Contents

xi

List of Tables

List of Figures

ABSTRACT

Although wellbeing is critical for an individual to live a happier and healthier life, and with higher education being a game changer for realising human potential, there is surprisingly a paucity of research investigating how First Nations youth attending higher education institutions conceptualise wellbeing. First Nations youth in Australia represent over half the Indigenous population and are the future leaders of their communities; thus, their voices and wellbeing needs are vital. This thesis weaves together Indigenous and western theoretical perspectives to honour the different knowledge systems that shape the different ways of knowing, being, and doing. This thesis comprises four research studies, which aimed to:

1) Conduct a systematic review to identify international literature which has engaged with the voices of Indigenous higher education youth and their sense of wellbeing (Study 1);

2) Identify broad perceptions of the significance, nature, and drivers of, and barriers to wellbeing for First Nations youth attending higher education institutions, and identify more broadly the potential strategies and policies that youth perceive higher education institutions can implement to enhance their wellbeing (Study 2);

3) Conduct individual interviews to explicate youth's in-depth perceptions of the significance, nature and drivers of, and barriers to, youth wellbeing (Study 3); and

4) Identify the potential strategies and policies that youth perceive higher education institutions can implement to enhance their wellbeing (Study 4).

The findings indicate that for First Nations higher education wellbeing, these drivers and barriers are largely associated with cultural wellbeing factors. The systematic review of international literature (Study 1) reveals that the international qualitative research engaging

with Indigenous youth voices and wellbeing is limited in its nature, quantity and scope. Identified drivers of Indigenous youth wellbeing in higher education included: Indigenous support units, connection to peer support, family and kinship, and resilience, whereas the barriers were: lack of cultural safety, lack of culturally appropriate wellbeing services, homesickness, and financial stress. Study 2, based on yarning circle focus groups held in each of four higher education institutions ($N = 30$) with Indigenous youth (age 18-25) identified the drivers of Indigenous youth's wellbeing as: identity (having a sense of 'self'), Indigenous role models and leaders, cultural identity, family and kinship, connection to Country, and spirituality. Barriers to wellbeing were: community wellbeing at risk, lateral violence, lack of cultural safety, not being Black enough, walking in two worlds, and institutional racism. Study 3, drawing from data from interviews with Indigenous youth *(N = 7)* identified the significance of wellbeing as: mental health, relationships and support, overall happiness, setting goals, and feeling good holistically. Study 3 identified that the nature of wellbeing was conceptualised by youth as holistic, interconnected, and multidimensional. Key drivers of wellbeing were: sense of self, goals, connection to culture and cultural identity, connection to family and kinship, and peer and community support, whereas barriers included: lack of community acceptance; COVID-19; historical, political and social determinants; and lack of cultural safety. Study 4 identified the proposed strategies voiced by youth to enhance their wellbeing as including: Implementing a First Nations wellbeing strategy and reconciliation action plans, increasing scholarships and financial support, including and embedding First Nations perspectives and ways of knowing across all disciplines, employing more First Nations academics, establishing platforms to enable role models and students to connect, employing culturally safe counsellors, and mandatory cultural competency training for all staff.

On the basis of these findings, the implications for theory highlight the importance of autonomy, and self-determining one's future, as echoed in self-determination theory and Indigenous standpoint theory. Youth's voices identified the importance of cultural wellbeing, which is also reflected in the social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) and multidimensional student wellbeing models (MSWM). The conceptualisation of wellbeing was perceived by youth as holistic, interconnected, and multidimensional, equally as it is in the SEWB and MSWM models. Given the paucity of research which engages with the voice and agency of Indigenous higher education youth and their wellbeing, future research could benefit from investigating how youth conceptualise wellbeing as a multidimensional construct, and engaging with Indigenous higher education youth as equal partners, deeming youth as experts of their wellbeing needs and conceptions. Future systematic review research could also benefit from an appraisal checklist specifically designed for Indigenous research. Such a checklist could advise researchers on ways to assess a paper in respect of its community relationships, partnerships, culturally respectful and safe research practices, and inclusion of Indigenous theoretical and methodological approaches.

The implication for practice, based on youth's voices, is to emphasise the need for higher education institutions to be actively culturally safe and responsive to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and ways of being and doing. Youth also suggested practices such as employing more First Nations academics, engagement with community Elders to provide cultural understanding and leadership, and embedding culturally appropriate wellbeing and counselling services. The overall significance of the thesis research is that it puts First Nations higher education youth's voices and agency at the epicenter of the

xx

research, enabling youth to define what their wellbeing needs are, thus providing future

theory, research, and practice with new insights and directions.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I would like to start by first introducing and locating myself in the research. This is an important custom and way of being, doing, and knowing in First Nations culture and Indigenous research (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Being a First Nations Australian, I find it natural and appropriate to firstly share and locate where my family and cultural connection is founded and where my identity is based. By doing so, I hope that readers can understand the standpoint I am taking in my research, and appreciate my intention and purpose when conducting this significant research (for further discussion on insider research see chapter 5).

I am a proud Wailwan and Gomeroi woman who is under the age of 25, which makes me a member of the youth population. Also, I come from a strong line of resilient First Nations women, one of whom is a respected matriarch of my family, my grandmother, Alma Rachel Darcy. Alma Rachel Darcy was born on the Beemunnel Reserve near Warren in the state of New South Wales (NSW) in Australia. I did not have a chance to meet my grandmother. What I know about her is that she suffered much of her life with trauma and grief, being forcibly removed from family at a young age and forbidden to learn her own culture, speak her language, and connect to Country. She had never enjoyed autonomy and most of her life was determined by discriminative governments with laws and policies that stripped of her self-determination. The only reason for denial of her fundamental right to receive an education was that she was born an Aboriginal woman. Indeed, what shines

brightly across my family today is my grandmother's resilience, grace, love, and the value she placed on the importance of a good education to achieve positive social change. Her value of education was passed down to my mother and to my twin sister and I. My family's story shapes my experiences and who I am, which thus informs my interpretations and grounds my perspective and practices as a young Wailwan and Gomeroi researcher. I share the belief of my grandmother and my mother that education is the key to a bright future for Indigenous Australians whose voices have been silenced.

> A university education can be a powerful game changer not only for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—but also for whole families, communities and the nation. (Universities Australia, 2019).

> Universities are well positioned with expertise, structural and human assets to make a positive difference. (Universities Australia, 2019).

The quotes above demonstrate that a university education is a powerful game changer for the thriving of Indigenous youth and Indigenous communities. Much research has recognised that completing a higher education degree increases health and wellbeing outcomes, increases self-determination, and enables a happier and healthier life (Pidgeon, 2008, Universities Australia [UA], 2019a). Despite literature identifying Indigenous completion and retention rates to be lower than for non-Indigenous students (UA, 2019a; UA, 2019b), Indigenous youth wellbeing in higher education remains a timely and important social justice issue of our time. However, little is known about how Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions conceptualise their wellbeing, what the facilitators and barriers to their wellbeing are, and what youth consider as salient strategies for facilitating their wellbeing and success in higher education institutions. This lack of research

is unfortunate, as Indigenous youth studying at university and higher education institutions are the future educators and leaders of Australia. Importantly, what works for the wellbeing of non-Indigenous students may not apply for Indigenous students. Therefore, it is critical that universities, higher education institutions, researchers, and educators learn what enables and supports Indigenous youth's wellbeing, so more Indigenous students can thrive and flourish in higher education, and beyond. As the quotes above suggest, universities can play a major role in supporting Indigenous students and communities to thrive.

In Australia, Indigenous youth wellbeing remains a high priority and risk factor, with issues like youth suicide rates being high (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021), and Indigenous youth representing over 50% of Australia's youth detention population, despite only representing 5% of Australia's youth population (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019a) [AIHW]. Much of the cause of Indigenous health and wellbeing issues today is that past and present governments and health policies were developed and designed for the purpose of controlling and harming the wellbeing rights of Indigenous peoples. Thus, the design of wellbeing policies was developed by non-Indigenous people without the voices, consent, and leadership of Indigenous communities, resulting in wellbeing models being based on western biomedical notions of wellbeing, and failing to support and increase Indigenous wellbeing. It is recognised by a vast literature (Dockery, 2010; Durmush et al., 2021; Gee et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2018) that Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing are different to western understandings of wellbeing. Notably, Indigenous youth under the age of 25 represent 53% of the Indigenous population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018), therefore it is vital and obvious to listen to Indigenous higher education youth voices.

Much of the vision of this present research is to co-partner with Indigenous youth, engage with them, and leverage Indigenous youth voice and agency. The voices of

Indigenous youth studying at university and higher education institutions are pivotal to the future success of Indigenous communities, and thus it is critical that researchers capitalise on their knowledges, recommendations, and expertise to identify issues and strategies that are salient for them to thrive and flourish. This thesis takes the position that it is only Indigenous youth's voices that should be defining Indigenous youth wellbeing needs, as youth are the experts and storytellers of their wellbeing, and thus youth voice is crucial for sustainable benefits of higher education and can provide a solution to issues pertaining to Indigenous youth wellbeing.

The thesis comprises four research studies, which aim to:

1) Conduct a systematic review to identify international literature which has engaged with the voices of Indigenous higher education youth and their sense of wellbeing (Study 1);

2) Identify broad perceptions of the significance, nature, and drivers of, and barriers to wellbeing for First Nations youth attending higher education institutions, and identify more broadly the potential strategies and policies that youth perceive higher education institutions can implement to enhance their wellbeing (Study 2);

3) Conduct individual interviews to explicate youth's in-depth perceptions of the significance, nature and drivers of, and barriers to youth wellbeing (Study 3); and

4) Identify the potential strategies and policies that youth perceive higher education institutions can implement to enhance their wellbeing (Study 4).

The significance of this research is that it provides a First Nations higher education youth's wellbeing perspective and is designed to contribute to the future of Indigenous youth wellbeing policy, higher education institutional reform, Indigenous youth's higher education success and wellbeing. The research is also highly unique in that it identifies the

drivers and barriers to wellbeing, from the voices of Indigenous higher education youth from across the globe as well as youth from Australia, hence offering solutions and strategies that are beneficial to enhancing the wellbeing and educational success of Indigenous youth in higher education across the globe. Hence in this thesis investigation, I played the role of both insider, as a First Nations youth, and outsider, as a researcher from a different First Nations Country to those from which most of the participants in this study belonged, to address this important issue. My position as an insider is significant in that I bring my youth knowledge and experience to the investigation. The findings of the thesis provide significant insights to the development of policy and practice by increasing our understanding of what is important to the wellbeing of Indigenous youth, and informing how to better support Indigenous higher education youth wellbeing. The findings contribute to the development of theory and are guided by the voices, knowledge, and perspectives of Indigenous youth. On a final note, this research is significant in being grounded in the voices and knowledge of Indigenous youth, who are the future leaders and solution to ensuring the success of Indigenous communities in thriving and flourishing.

CHAPTER 2: AN OVERVIEW OF THE SIGNIFICANCE AND NATURE OF INDIGENOUS YOUTH WELLBEING, VOICE, AND AGENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION, AND THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE

This chapter firstly provides a historical overview of the significance of Indigenous voice. Second, the importance of an Indigenous youth voice in wellbeing research is outlined. Third, the current literature pertaining to Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing is explored. Fourth, the health and wellbeing status of First Nations youth is discussed. Next the impact and nature of deficit discourse and narratives framing Indigenous peoples is explored, along with the rationale for the adoption of a strengths-based narrative and approach. Following this is a section on the differentiation between voice and agency, and an overview of my thesis research examining the drivers of and barriers to Indigenous higher education students' wellbeing. Concluding this chapter is a discussion of the implications of the literature reviewed for the present investigation.

The Significance of Indigenous Voices

Historical Overview

Prior to the 1788 British invasion, Australian First Nations peoples largely lived in balance with the land, waters, sea, animals, and with each other as sovereign peoples having their own unique cultural, kinship, and lore systems. Despite Europeans' initial ethnocentric, narrow perceptions of First Nations Australian peoples as being just hunters and gatherers,

First Nations peoples are the world's first inventors, innovators, archaeologists, agriculturalists, and bakers (Pascoe, 2014). From the beginning of British invasion in Australia, there was genocide and dispossession, with Europeans bringing diseases, ethnocentric beliefs, and the introduction of policies and laws that removed Australian First Nations peoples' self-determination and social justice rights, resulting in a detrimental impact on their social and emotional wellbeing.

Many First Nations peoples, such as Yorta Yorta leader and activist, William Cooper, fought for their rights. In particular, Cooper led political campaigns and in 1933 drew up a petition to King George V demanding an Aboriginal Voice in parliament, as policies and laws were being made about Aboriginal peoples without seeking the consent and voices of Aboriginal peoples (Attwood & Markus, 2004). There were 1,800 signatures presented on a petition to the federal government in 1937 (Attwood & Markus, 2004). In 1936, Cooper founded the Australian Aborigines League—an organisation that represented all Aboriginal peoples— and introduced a program called 'Up lift'. Up lift called for special rights to be granted to Aboriginal peoples as rightful owners who endured dispossession and exclusion. Cooper called for the Day of Mourning (often known today as 'Survival' or 'Invasion' day, and coinciding with white Australians'—'Australia Day') to acknowledge Australia's Black history. Cooper also used his voice to advocate for the Jews against their mistreatment by the Nazis in Germany (Attwood & Markus, 2004).

In 1967 a historic referendum was established to call the Australian public to vote on whether First Nations peoples of Australia could be also counted in the census. The result of the referendum led to a ground-breaking yes vote result of 90.77%, allowed for First Nations peoples to be included in the census and enabled the Commonwealth government

to make laws for Indigenous peoples (Attwood & Markus, 2007). Despite this turning point in history, Indigenous people's voices are still not being heard.

First Nations leaders and community organisations continue today to advocate for an Indigenous voice in parliament, a treaty, and recognition in the Australian constitution as First Peoples. For example, the Uluru Statement from the Heart (https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement) was presented to the Australian public and government in 2017:

> Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago. *This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.* It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown. How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years? With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood. Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our

youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future. These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. *This is the torment of our powerlessness*. We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a *rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country. We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution. Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle*. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination. We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history. In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

This statement was rejected, due to members of the Turnbull government claiming a voice to parliament would "inevitably become a third chamber of parliament" (Hobbs, 2017). More recently, a Voice Co-design Senior Advisory Group was appointed by the Minister of Indigenous Affairs—the Honourable Ken Wyatt—made up of Indigenous community leaders such as co-chairs Professor Marcia Langton and Professor Tom Calma to advise on Voice proposal models, ensuring "Indigenous Australians are heard at all levels of government" (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2021). The process of voice proposals included over 9,000 members of the Australian public submitting voice proposals to inform the Australian government on how they would like an Indigenous

voice to be represented from a local and regional level (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2021). Based on the analysis conducted by public law academics from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) it was found that 90% of the Australian's surveyed believed First Nations peoples' voices should be constitutionally aligned with the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Many submissions argued against the government establishing a legislative voice, as it could reduce momentum and urgency for a referendum to enable the Australian public to vote to support a First Nations voice to parliament. A referendum is now being put forward to the Australian government.

Similarly, the Australian government has established a new Australian national agreement on Closing the Gap (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). This new agreement is a historic first as it is the first time an agreement to work in partnership between governments on Indigenous issues has been negotiated and signed by Indigenous Australians. A key purpose of the agreement is to "drive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led outcomes on Closing the Gap" including a priority reform to increase the number of regional data projects to support Indigenous communities to make decisions about Closing the Gap (Australian Government, p. 15). Indigenous health experts and leaders such as Pat Turner (Allam, 2020) have advocated for new Closing the Gap targets to include cultural wellbeing targets such as increasing the number of Indigenous languages spoken in Indigenous communities. Hence, there remains a long trajectory to achieving an Indigenous voice.

The Importance of Voice and Wellbeing for Indigenous Higher Education Youth

Despite Indigenous youth in Australia representing over 50% of the Indigenous population, there has been limited research that partners with and involves youth in studies with the intention of empowering and leveraging their voice and agency (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS, 2017]; Craven et al., 2016; Durmush et al., 2021). It is widely known that Indigenous peoples remain the most underprivileged peoples across the globe (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020; Lowitja Institute, 2021). Gaps remain across all social and economic indicators for Indigenous youth, including but not limited to: High incarceration rates, high suicide rates, and low university retention and completion rates [AIHW] 2019a; Gibson et al., 2021). The United Nations (UN) has set a primary goal by 2030 to ensure quality tertiary education for Indigenous peoples (UN, 2015). Similarly, Universities Australia (UA, 2019a) has acknowledged that "universities have historically underperformed against their obligations to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" (p. 10). They also emphasise that effective practices need to "recognise the contribution, potential and insight" (p. 11) of Indigenous students and that "universities can and must do more to improve Indigenous success in higher education" (p. 17). Recent research advocates for education policy to turn to the voices and insights of Indigenous communities and students (Durmush et al., 2021; Gillan et al., 2017) to close the gaps in educational attainment and completion.

An additional missing component in Australian education research is Indigenous youth's voice and perspectives on educational success and their wellbeing. For far too long Indigenous youth voices have been ignored and their knowledge has not been recognised as valuable in education research (Craven et al., 2016; Durmush et al., 2021; Martin, 2008;

Murrup-Stewart et al., 2020; Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021; Powell, 2017). Researchers' and educators' interpretations and understandings of what they think Indigenous youth want and need are far from youth's reality. Notably, Indigenous youth are the future potential leaders of their communities and so it is critical that higher education institutions begin to listen to youth's recommendations and voices regarding their wellbeing at university, so that youth's voices can shape and contribute to improving educational outcomes for future Indigenous students.

Past research has identified that Indigenous conceptualisations of wellbeing differ to western understandings (Dockery, 2010; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2018; Kingley et al., 2013;Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2017; Sutherland & Adams, 2019; Togni, 2016). As recognised by Dudgeon et al. (2016):

> For Indigenous peoples, health itself is not understood as the concept often assumed by non-Indigenous people, rather it is a culturally informed concept, conceived of as 'social and emotional wellbeing'—a term that is increasingly used in health policy but in this context carries a culturally distinct meaning: it connects the health of an Indigenous individual to the health of their family, kin, community, and their connection to country, culture, spirituality and ancestry. It is a deep-rooted, more collective and holistic concept of health than that used in Western medicine (p. 17).

Ultimately, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students' university retention and completion is wide (Behrendt et al., 2012; Bowen et al., 2011; Nakata et al., 2017).

Hence, the youth voice is critical to transform higher education and enable youth to thrive and flourish within and beyond university.

Section Summary

This section provided a brief historical overview and some examples of the significance of Indigenous voice historically, and in relation to higher education. Indigenous 'voice' is not a new concept and movement, but rather is an ongoing protest for Indigenous self-determination. The importance of universities, researchers, and policy makers listening to the voices of Indigenous higher education youth was also discussed. This section concluded with an important note acknowledging youth's potential to transform the university system into one that is culturally safe and culturally rich with Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, notably enabled by the elevation of youth voice and agency.

The Wellbeing of Indigenous Australians

Section Introduction

This section firstly presents the current health and wellbeing status of First Nations peoples in Australia. Second, the current literature on the conceptions of Indigenous wellbeing is discussed. Third, it is argued that higher education is a game changer in improving the wellbeing, agency, and success of Indigenous communities.

Status of Indigenous Health and Wellbeing

Australia has failed to 'close the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. An extensive number of government reports (e.g., AIHW, 2020; Closing the Gap Report Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017b, 2018, 2019, 2020) demonstrates that Indigenous Australians are far behind non-Indigenous

Australians in relation to all socioeconomic indicators (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020). Davis (2015) contends that this is a result of the ongoing processes and impacts of colonisation and systemic racism that still endure within some of Australia's social structures: court rooms, boardrooms, hospitals, and classrooms today. Similarly, Sherwood (2013) concludes that past and present policies, laws, and a lack of rights, have denied Indigenous Australians access to social services. Sherwood contends that "Today the burden of disease, poor socio-economic status and severe disadvantage of the Indigenous Australians is a testament to a history of colonisation and its continuation" (p. 30). The Healing Foundation's Make Healing Happen report (2021) reveals the ongoing impacts of colonisation and government policies like the Assimilation Policy and the Stolen Generations, on the direct health and wellbeing of Stolen Generation survivors and their descendants, and their families and communities.

Indigenous health is still below national health standards as for Indigenous Australians, life expectancy is still 10 years lower than non-Indigenous Australians (AIHW, 2018; 2020). It is also evident that in Australia we have an Indigenous youth suicide epidemic. Indigenous youth are four times more likely to commit suicide than non-Indigenous youth (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021). In addition to high suicide rates, Indigenous youth make up 5% of Australia's youth population; however, they represent 50% of Australia's youth detention population (AIHW, 2019a). Since 2008, the Australian government has produced an annual Closing the Gap Report. The government report aims to measure and address the disadvantage some Indigenous Australians are experiencing, whilst tracking improvements (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). For example, the Closing the Gap Report (2019), identified that only two targets out of seven were on track. These were Year 12 attainment and early childhood education. Nonetheless, school attendance rates are still

lower for Indigenous students, with 82% Indigenous and 93% non-Indigenous students attending school. Employment rates also have not improved. More specifically, Indigenous youth living in remote areas continue to have little access to job opportunities. Indigenous youth employment is a main cause of stress, with 26% of Indigenous young people aged 18-24 struggling to secure employment (AIHW, 2018). Hence, almost 12 years since Closing the Gap was introduced, many conditions have not improved, nor have many of the targets been met.

Recently, new Closing the Gap targets have been established to better support First Nations peoples' health and wellbeing. Some of the new targets include: increasing the number of languages spoken by 2031, increase by 15% Indigenous legal rights and interests of land and sea by 2030, reduce suicide rates to zero, decrease violence and abuse rates, and reduce by 45% the rate of children in out of home care by 2031 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). Hence, Australia still has a long way to go in closing the gap for First Nations peoples' health and wellbeing.

Present Understandings on Indigenous Conceptions of Wellbeing in Australia

Over the past three decades health experts, researchers, educators, and policy makers have realised the importance of an individual's wellbeing in order to live a happier and healthier life (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Dudgeon et al., 2020; Dockery, 2010; Gee et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2018). For too long mental health issues have retained a stigma (Ahmedani, 2011; Westerman, 2010), and it is only recently that workplaces, educational institutions, and corporations have taken the wellbeing of their staff and students seriously, by implementing wellbeing strategies and practices to better support wellbeing. For Indigenous peoples and their communities across the globe,

wellbeing continues to be challenged and impacted by colonial systems and institutions that have failed to empower them and grant social justice rights to enable Indigenous notions of self-determined wellbeing (AIHW, 2021; Gee et al., 2014; Salmon et al., 2019). Much of the health and wellbeing programs and initiatives designed in the past for First Nations peoples were designed and led without the leadership and expert knowledge of Aboriginal communities, leaders, health experts, and Aboriginal controlled and led organisations, leading many health programs to fail and putting many First Nations peoples' health and wellbeing at risk (Bulloch et al., 2019).

Western wellbeing and health practices and frameworks have often failed, as they do not reflect the wellbeing needs of First Nations peoples. This is evident since western biomedical notions of wellbeing view wellbeing factors from an individual level rather than in a holistic positioning (Thiessen et al., 2020). For example, western wellbeing models often do not account for cultural factors as important components of wellbeing. Definitions such as mental health fail to recognise that Indigenous peoples do not have a word for health. Rather, colonial deficit biomedical models and agendas continue to dominate the health system, resulting in unequal health and wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous peoples (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015; Thiessen et al., 2020; Wexler, 2009). For instance, according to Gee et al. (2014), "Aboriginal health does not mean the physical wellbeing of an individual, but refers to the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community" (p. 56). First Nations wellbeing encompasses everything from the overall wellbeing of the community to the land and waters. Notably, this notion of wellbeing is founded on the relationship First Nations peoples have with their strong cultural identity. Cultural factors have been identified by research (Gee, 2014) as: connection to Country, connection to Culture, connection to spirit, spirituality, and

ancestors, family and kinship, community, and connection to Body and Mind as intrinsic factors to First Nations' wellbeing.

Researchers (e.g., Anderson et al., 2019; Dudgeon et al., 2018; Dudgeon et al., 2020; Gee et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2018; Kingsley et al., 2013; Salmon et al., 2019; and many others) have argued that wellbeing should be conceptualised as holistic, relational, subjective, and multidimensional; and as a self-determined concept. Jones et al.'s (2018) research identified that there is a dearth of large-scale data research which highlights cultural practice and expression, despite First Nations' connection to culture and identity being widely known as vital. To contribute to addressing this, research is in progress aiming to highlight the importance of culture for First Nation peoples' wellbeing. For example, Mayi Kuwayu, a national longitudinal research study (Mayi Kuwayu, 2021) being undertaken at the Australian National University, aims to highlight the role culture plays in First Nations' wellbeing, and its relationship to culture. It is estimated that 16,000 people will complete the survey covering "cultural practice and expression, sociodemographic factors, health and wellbeing, health behaviours, experiences and environments, and family support and connection" (Jones et al., 2018, p. 1). Overall, the relationship between culture and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples remains a focus in wellbeing research. Salmon and colleagues' (2019) literature review found the following broad cultural domains frequently cited and referenced across the literature between 1990-2017 as fundamental to enabling happiness and positive health and wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous peoples in Australia: Connection to Country; Indigenous beliefs and knowledge; Indigenous language; Family, kinship and community; Cultural expression and continuity; and self-determination and leadership. Hence, "culture (the maintenance, revitalising, embracing, nurturing and growth of it) is important to our [Indigenous peoples] happiness and wellbeing and for improving health outcomes" (Salmon et al., 2019, p. v).

Higher Education a Powerful Tool for Change

Higher education is a demonstrated game changer for all human beings. It is widely known

that higher education can provide opportunities such as employment, financial security,

improved health outcomes, and social and cultural capital (UA, 2019a). For First Nations

peoples graduating from a higher education degree, it goes beyond the economic and social

benefits, as graduation enables self-determination and other benefits valued by First

Nations. For example, in Canada, Pidgeon (2008, p. 340) highlights that: "Higher

education is valued for capacity building within Aboriginal nations toward their goals of

self-government and self-determination. Higher education is also connected to

empowerment of self and community, decolonization and self-determination". Historically,

First Nations peoples in Australia were only granted the right to go to university in the

1950s. The Gough Whitlam government made higher education free and accessible for all

Australians (1972-1975), which enabled First Nations peoples and others who could not

afford higher education the opportunity to study (Nakata, 2013). Due to this, universities

were never designed to be places that respect, recognise, and embrace Indigenous

knowledges and ways of knowing, being, and doing into the academy. Notably,

universities were founded to suit and benefit western culture and knowledge. For instance,

> Although colonial universities saw themselves as being a part of an international
>
> community and inheritors of a legacy of western knowledge, they were also part of
>
> the historical processes of imperialism. They were established as an essential part
>
> of the colonising process (Smith, 2012, p. 68).

It is evident that universities need to do more to support Indigenous students, as a stronger evidence base of enablers of retention and completion for Indigenous students is needed, to be based on the insights of Indigenous students (Craven et al., 2016; UA, 2019b) and to deliver research-derived recommendations for salient policy, practice, and intervention. Internationally, Indigenous university enrolment rates are lower than those for non-Indigenous students. For instance, in New Zealand, "there was a decrease in Māori domestic enrolments between 2019 and 2020 (-5.2 percent, or 3,825 students) while all other ethnic groups had either increased or stable domestic enrolments" (Education Counts, 2021). In 2019, Māori students' completion of a Bachelor degree was 80%, compared to 88% of European students, 71% of Pacific students, and 86% of Asian students studying in New Zealand (Education Counts, 2021). Despite the still-lower retention and completion rates, Indigenous youth are now going to university and graduating, more than ever. For example, the 2016 Australian census highlights that the number of Indigenous students who have enrolled in university has doubled over the past decade (UA, 2019b). Not only are 92% of Indigenous Australian graduates, versus 87% non-Indigenous graduates, engaged in full-time employment within four months of course completion, but they earn on average $4,000 more than non-Indigenous graduates (UA, 2019b). Despite these improvements, Indigenous students are underrepresented in university and still have a lower completion rate than non-Indigenous university students (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). Completion rates are a critical concern, because research shows that completing some university education without graduating provides very little advantage over high-school graduation (Bowen et al., 2011). A total of 53% of Indigenous Australian students who enrol in a degree do not complete the same course within 9 years; compared to 26% of non-Indigenous students (UA, 2019b). A stronger evidence base of enablers of

retention and completion for Indigenous students is needed, to be based on the insights of Indigenous students (Craven et al., 2016; UA, 2019b) to deliver research-derived recommendations for salient policy, practice, and intervention. Internationally, Indigenous university enrolment and completion rates are lower than non-Indigenous students (Fandry & Griffith, 2010).

It is important to note that *not all* Indigenous Australians are living in poverty and are disadvantaged. Whilst there remains inequality and issues amongst Indigenous youth, there are many youth who are succeeding and thriving. Consequently, we are witnessing more Indigenous people graduating from university, becoming business owners, entrepreneurs, and working in the corporate world, thereby spreading Indigenous perspectives and worldviews in our boardrooms, classrooms, and performing arts centres. As notable Indigenous scholar and anthropologist, Professor Marcia Langton claims, we are seeing a growing Indigenous middle class whereby ,"A new generation of Indigenous peoples are turning dreams into reality, Education; economic participation, self-esteem and success are part of this new Indigenous world, and there is no going back" (Langton, 2013, p. 149). Patfield et al. (2019) on the basis of their research examining middle class Indigenous students' aspirations to go to university, concluded that there is little attention paid to exploring Indigenous success, and there is a major research gap in the literature. Several non-profit organisations have also recognised the importance of attending university to enable Indigenous youth to thrive. For example, CareerTrackers (2019) conducts an Indigenous internship program that provides paid corporate internships to Indigenous university students in the university holidays, with the choice of working with 90+ corporate organisations. This successful program has over 1,000 alumni who have

successfully graduated from university and the program. Currently 95% of the alumni are in full-time employment within three months of graduating (CareerTrackers, 2019).

Section Summary

The purpose of this section was to firstly review the current health and wellbeing status of Indigenous peoples. Second, current literature of research pertaining to Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing was contextualised. Last, the importance of higher education as a tool for change was discussed to demonstrate the game changing effects higher education has on the health and wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous individuals and communities.

The Nature and Impact of Deficit Discourse

Section Introduction

This section addresses the need for future Indigenous education research and policy to turn to a strengths-based narrative and approach. First, deficit discourse is defined and its impact on First Nations peoples is discussed. Second, a strengths-based approach is introduced, and the importance of stories of success and resilience is explored. Third, intergenerational trauma and intergenerational healing are explained to highlight the social, political, and historical impacts of policy on the status and outcomes of Indigenous wellbeing. Hence the following section places an emphasis on the role of strengths-based research in guiding the future of Indigenous education.

Definitions of Deficit Discourse

Little is known about how successful Indigenous peoples thrive, and what drives educational success and wellbeing (Craven et al., 2016). Much of Australia's knowledge and research about Indigenous peoples is focused on disadvantage narratives and

discourse. This discourse speaks to the negative outcomes experienced in health, education, and the justice system (Fogarty et al., 2018). Davis (2015) shows that Indigenous men and women are at risk, and experience obstacles due to discrimination, intergenerational trauma, lack of basic human rights, and access to services. For generations the academy and Australian government have failed to improve Indigenous health and educational outcomes, often by simply ignoring the recommendations voiced by Indigenous leaders and community members for years (AIHS, 2021; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). Fforde et al. (2013) also suggest that a major reason for this inequality is the lack of embedding Indigenous perspectives and worldviews into our classrooms, parliamentary chambers and boardrooms, to address the negative mindsets and stereotypes that Australians and Indigenous Australian peoples have observed and internalised.

Fforde et al. (2013, p. 162) say, "we use the term 'deficit discourse' to describe a mode of thinking, identifiable in language use, that frames Aboriginal identity in a narrative of negativity, deficiency, and disempowerment". Fogarty et al. (2018) also emphasise: "Discourse is powerful in determining what can and cannot be considered 'truth' and influencing group and individual relationships accordingly" (p. 2). The discourse around Indigenous peoples has been associated with the narrative of failure and negativity (Fogarty et al., 2018). This mode of thinking has shaped most Australians' understanding of Indigenous peoples, identity, and culture, which have been categorised under a negative frame.

The Impact of Deficit Discourse

Fforde et al. (2013, p. 164) note, "Assumptions and accusations of Indigenous deficit have saturated the history of cultural relations in Australia since contact and are a key component of racism and prejudice". They also emphasise that: "There has been substantial research to show that colonial ideology adhered to constructed 'truths' about Aboriginal people that were underpinned by notions of deficiency and had very little to do with how Aboriginal people saw themselves" (p. 164). Deficit discourse has also been reinforced by the Australian media referring to racist and ethnocentric narratives. In 2016, a survey found that 57% of First Nations peoples reported they believed they were portrayed negatively (Reconciliation Australia, 2017).

For Indigenous Australians deficit discourse continues to cause a negative social impact, leading many individuals to internalise racism and feel disempowered. The cause of this is the colonial ideology which framed Indigenous culture and identities as inferior and deficient. As a result of discriminatory and racist policies and laws, Indigenous voice and agency has been limited and controlled, causing intergenerational health effects. Likewise, research has proven that deficit thinking has been the main barrier to improving health outcomes for Indigenous Australians (Fogarty et al., 2018). Fogarty et al.'s (2018) research consisted of two Change the Conversation (CTC) workshops between 2009 and 2011 with Aboriginal peoples across Australia, to discuss deficit discourse and eurocentric representations of First Nations peoples' identities. The participants from the workshops voiced how deficit language, narratives, and discourse informed race relations in Australia, shaped policy delivery, and impacted adversely on health and educational outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Further, Fogarty et al. (2018) concluded that continuous deficit discourse and negative ways of thinking are harmful (Fogarty et al., 2018).

A review by the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Steering Committee aimed to measure the wellbeing of First Nations peoples, identified through broad consultation with First Nations Australians and organisations, governments, and academics. It was concluded that there was a dire need for "more 'strengths-based' reporting and for more visible engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians" (OIDSC, 2014). Due to the entrenched nature of deficit discourse, it is imperative for First Nations peoples' voices and worldviews to be embedded in all research and in particular, education research whereby Indigenous knowledges and voice can shape the narrative and focus regarding education policy. It is profoundly important that Indigenous Australians hold the authority not only to frame their cultural identity but also to redefine narratives that frame Indigenous positioning, as it is First Nations peoples who understand their own needs and values and they should be allowed to exercise agency and authority to define the future of their communities.

Strengths-Based Approaches: Moving Beyond Deficit Discourse

The counteractive perspective to a deficit approach is a strengths-based approach. As argued and defined by Fogarty et al. (2018, p. 9), strengths-based approaches "seek to move away from the traditional problem-based paradigm and offer a different language and a set of solutions to overcoming an issue". Positive psychology is an example of a strengths-based approach which focuses on understanding how individuals thrive and get the most out of life. Positive psychology "is the study of optimal experience—people being their best and doing their best" (Park & Peterson, 2008, p. 85). It aims to investigate research such as: Resilience attributes, strengths-based counselling approaches, empowerment, strength and decolonisation, wellness and wellbeing (Fogarty et al., 2018). Strengths-based approaches have been widely discussed by scholars as having multiple

forms of benefit (Fogarty et al., 2018). This enables academics to explore further areas that increase knowledge in the foundations of thriving for Indigenous Australians. A key justification for using strengths-based approaches is that they challenge the negative stereotypes that are generated by the deficit narrative. Strengths-based approaches also give First Nations people and groups, whose voices have been ignored and silenced, the opportunity to counteract such false claims and to decolonise the academy (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015; Smith, 2012). Strengths-based approaches are also argued to be an appropriate framework as they focus on empowerment, healing, and self-determination, which are aspects that are central to First Nations cultural values (Fogarty et al., 2018).

A methodological framework that reflects a strengths-based approach is the EMU framework (Exemplars of thriving, Measurement of drivers of thriving, and Utilisation of drivers) proposed by Craven et al. (2016). Incorporating positive psychology principles, the EMU framework promotes ways to enhance and replicate models of Indigenous thriving and success. The framework is designed to encourage researchers and educators to focus on and identify exemplars of thriving in Indigenous communities, such as education models, programs, and individuals' methods to enhance success (Craven et al., 2016). This approach, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, contrasts with the deficit approaches that focus on issues that prevent Indigenous individuals from flourishing. Likewise, the framework proposes the need for researchers to measure the drivers of thriving—more specifically, to measure and test how successful models or exemplars enable thriving. Importantly, the EMU framework's main objective is to replicate, utilise, and augment the drivers of thriving identified, once researchers understand how thriving is achieved and measured (Craven et al., 2016). Crucially, the framework embraces the research process being conducted in a way that is built on respectful and genuine research

partnerships with Indigenous peoples and communities, ensuring research is of benefit to the community.

From Intergenerational Trauma to Intergenerational Healing

Many Indigenous peoples, families, and communities today still experience intergenerational trauma as a result of the policies of colonisation. For example:

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been exposed to generations of trauma through colonisation, dispossession, assimilation, child removal policies, and marginalisation. Owing to past and present government policies, trauma has taken place at the community, family and individual levels. Trauma can be transferred from one generation that have experienced or witnessed traumatic events, to the next generation, potentially leading to a cycle of worsening social, economic, and cultural consequences (The Lowitja Institute, 2018, p. 21).

Hence, the removal and separation of families, such as happened with the Stolen Generations in Australia, has led to the disconnection of culture and identity, leaving many Stolen Generations survivors and families with grief, unresolved trauma, and detrimental impacts on wellbeing (Healing Foundation, 2021). As a result, many Stolen Generation survivors and individuals who have experienced trauma, abuse, and neglect have passed down their experiences of trauma to other generations of family members (The Lowitja Institute, 2018). For example, a report produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019b) noted that children who lived at home with a Stolen Generations member were more likely to: "1) have missed school without permission in the last 12 months, 2)

live in a home not owned by a family member, 3) report having been treated unfairly at school for being Indigenous, 4) have experienced stress in the last 12 months, 5) live in a household that had cash-flow problems in the last 12 months, and 6) have poor self-assessed health" (p. IV). Hence, research evidence has established that intergenerational trauma exists and is still prevalent in many Indigenous families today.

The Healing Foundation is an organisation that supports Stolen Generations survivors and families in healing from trauma and reconnecting to culture, identity, and their communities. The Healing Foundation was developed as a result of one of the recommendations made by the landmark 'Bringing Them Home' report (over 20 years ago), which documented the experiences of members from the Stolen Generations and communities (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). The Healing Foundation (2018) has advocated that there needs to be more of a focus on healing, and in particular intergenerational healing within communities. For instance, institutions such as schools, universities, health, legal, political, and media need to focus on ways to enhance wellbeing and healing. They also suggest that rather than passing down experiences of trauma, for communities to heal themselves they need to pass down positive experiences that encompass: Strong identity, cultural connection, thriving in education and employment, stories of resilience, and survival. In addition, the Healing Foundation recognised the need to privilege Indigenous knowledge of healing and developed four key pillars to support trauma recovery: 1) Safety; 2) Identity; 3) Reconnection, and 4) Trauma awareness. These pillars were identified to champion: 1) "Creating safe spaces, healing places and identifying safe people; 2) Building a strong cultural identity by reconnecting to our cultural values and practice; 3) Rebuilding relational support systems with family, community and services that can support us; and 4) Learning about the impact of trauma

on our minds, bodies, spirits so we can find paths to healing" (Healing Foundation, 2018, p. 17).

Section Summary

This section discussed the notions of deficit discourse and the impact it has on the representation and the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations peoples. Intergenerational trauma and healing were discussed and it was suggested that universities and workplaces need to consider healing strategies and strengths-based approaches to better support the healing and wellbeing of Indigenous students. The following sections provide an overview of the literature pertaining to Indigenous voice and agency and Indigenous youth wellbeing.

Indigenous Voice and Agency

What is an Indigenous Youth Voice?

In recent years, educators, researchers, and policymakers have slowly realised the importance and power of Indigenous youth voices in shaping the future success of Indigenous education. Scholars like Craven et al. (2016) and Durmush et al. (2021) have advocated for more education research to capitalise on the voices and agency of Indigenous youth, as youth voices can improve future education policy and wellbeing outcomes. Similarly, the *Australian Education Review* (2017) concluded that: "The catalyst for the change being advocated in the review is that it has to be predicated on the insistence that the elevation of the Indigenous voice in education is pivotal" (Gillan et al., 2017, p. iii). Hence, the review called for education practitioners to engage meaningfully with Indigenous communities and families. Likewise, the importance of an Indigenous youth

voice stems back to what the iconic Uluru Statement from the Heart called for in 2017: "In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard" (Uluru Statement.Org, 2017). Ultimately, the concept of listening to Indigenous voices is not new. Rather, the concept is pivotal to the long historical fight for self-determination and agency. Voice and agency are also two unique concepts that go hand in hand, as without a voice one cannot exercise autonomy and be an agent of one's own life.

What is agency?

Many sociologists and social theorists have studied and researched concepts of agency (Amundsen, 2019; Arab, 2016; Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1979). There are many debates concerning agency and structure (Giddens, 1984; Parsons, 1937), such as whether individuals act as independent agents constructing their own world, use autonomy, and exercise control, or whether individuals can ever truly be independent of external political, social, and cultural structures and systems (e.g., race, gender, culture, social class, religion). Within the context of this research, Indigenous higher education youth agencies are highly influenced by higher education structures. Because the structure of higher education systems is highly westernised and serves western knowledge, culture, and peoples, this has a bearing on the low rates of Indigenous transition, retention, and completion of higher education degrees (Barney, 2018a, 2018b; Carter, 2018; Gorman, 2017; Hutchings et al., 2018). For example, Amundsen (2019) draws on how agency and structure influence Indigenous Māori students' identity and transitions into higher education. Amundsen (2019) identified that: "the socio-political context as a whole could not be ignored when considering the transition experiences of Maori students in this research" (p. 426). Amundsen was referring to New Zealand's neoliberalism model of education and its direct impact on Māori students, many of whom come from communities

with low income and poverty gaps. Notably, racism was found to be a major barrier for Māori students in higher education, with dominant racist attitudes and stereotypes existing in university structures. Bainbridge (2011) explored the underlying process of agency and empowerment through the voices of 20 First Nations urban women. Bainbridge (2011) found that "agency relates to the ability of women to participate in the change process through choice and as significant actors" (p. 29). More specifically, for the women in this study the process of becoming empowered and having agency included: Defining moments of self, seeking authenticity, authoring narratives of self, and capturing autonomy (Bainbridge, 2011).

Why is agency important for First Nations youth wellbeing?

For so long, Indigenous peoples' agency has been challenged and contested by dominant colonial systems of power. The extension of colonisation has been felt by government policies and laws that have denied the basic rights of First Nations peoples and limited their exercising of autonomy and agency (Sherwood, 2013; Smith, 2012; Sunseri, 2007). This thesis takes the position that for a person—in this case a First Nations youth—to exercise agency, the structures (higher education institutions) need to be designed to value youth voices and credit Indigenous knowledge as legitimate sources of knowledge. Equally, higher education institutions are neoliberally designed—therefore, they support students who often already have the resources (human, social, and material) derived from social and cultural capital. Hence, the wellbeing needs of First Nations students are essential to inform future research and policy, to support future students who may not have agency and the resources to fully thrive in higher education. In this thesis, when alluding to giving First Nations youth 'agency', what I refer to is deeming Indigenous youth agents of their own wellbeing. Through the process of listening to youth's voices, experiences, and

exchange of recommendations, youth become the agents and storytellers of their own wellbeing.

Section Summary

This section defined the concepts of voice and agency from an Indigenous youth standpoint. Relevant research pertaining to Indigenous higher education youth exercising voice and agency was explored. The next section presents an overview of the current literature regarding Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing.

Indigenous Higher Education Youth's Wellbeing

Section Introduction

Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and academics have attempted to close the gap in university retention and completion rates by researching what enables and supports First Nations students from staying at university and completing higher education degrees, and what blocks them (Barney, 2013; 2016; Carter, 2018; Craven et al., 2016; Gorman 2017; Schwartz, 2018; Theodore et al., 2017; Trudgett, 2009; Trudgett, 2011). However, little attention has been paid to First Nations higher education youth wellbeing, despite the importance of youth being potential leaders and game changers for the future success of Indigenous communities. As a result, there is a limited nature and scope of research which engages with the voices and agency of Indigenous higher education youth (18-24 years) and Indigenous students' general wellbeing (Craven et al., 2016; Durmush et al., 2021; Murrup-Stewart et al., 2020; Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021; Powell, 2017). The following section outlines key international literature that has investigated Indigenous higher education students and youth's wellbeing. Following this, the drivers of and barriers to First Nations higher education students' wellbeing are discussed.

Indigenous Higher Education Wellbeing Research

Powell's (2017) masters thesis research examined Indigenous university students'

wellbeing. Powell identified the following themes as important to Indigenous university

students' wellbeing: Family, community, place, learning, physical and mental health,

spirituality, connectedness, and belonging (Powell, 2017). Durmush et al.'s (2021)

research with ($N = 30$) First Nations higher education youth (18-25 years) found that the

drivers of Indigenous higher education youth wellbeing were: Cultural identity, connection

to Country, spirituality, having a sense of self, family and kinship, Indigenous support, and

peer role models. Hence, Durmush et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of universities

being culturally empowering and safe higher education environments. Murrup-Stewart et

al. (2021) explored how young urban First Nations peoples in Naarm, [Melbourne]

Australia perceive, experience, and interact with culture. The findings emphasised that

culture is perceived through connection and disconnection. The following factors were

reported as shaping young First Nations peoples' connectedness to culture and thus

wellbeing: colonisation, relationships, cultural knowledge, community support, and agency

(Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021).

Wellbeing Drivers and Barriers

The importance of culturally safe learning environments

Much research has suggested the importance of establishing culturally safe learning

environments in universities (Bin-Sallik, 2003; Durmush et al., 2021; Schawrtz, 2018;

Trudgett, 2011) where Indigenous culture, knowledge, worldviews, and ways of knowing,

being, and doing are respected, embraced, and embedded into higher education institutions.

In 1992, the concept of cultural safety was introduced and developed by the Nursing

Council of New Zealand in response to culturally unsafe nursing practices within the nursing and health sector (Papps & Ramsden,1996). The importance of cultural safety is applied to all workplaces, including higher education institutions (Bin-Sallik, 2003). According to the Lowitja Institute (2020, p. 21):

- A culturally safe environment has been created when Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples report that:

- their experiences are believed and validated

- their cultures are centred and valued in policy development, research, evaluation and service design and delivery

- they feel welcomed and respected in policy, research, evaluation and service environments

- they see other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in the policy, research, evaluation, or service context

- they do not experience any form of racism in policy, research, evaluation and service contexts or processes.

Paucity of First Nations senior level academics and leaders within the higher education space

A recognised barrier to Indigenous students' wellbeing, as argued by scholars is drawn from students' limited experiences, interactions and mentorship with Indigenous academic staff, supervisors, and examiners (Behrendt et al., 2012; Trudgett, 2011). The limited number of Indigenous academic staff can result in First Nations students experiencing feelings of being an imposter (Schwartz, 2018). As higher education systems were not

originally designed for First Nations peoples, and with currently 43 universities yet only 430 First Nations academics employed in Australia (Thunig & Jones, 2020) it is not surprising that Indigenous university students experience issues with cultural safety. As voiced by a First Nations postgraduate student:

> I have three supervisors, all of them from three different universities, all of them are white because there is nobody who's senior enough in those universities who's Aboriginal who can supervise me. Because all the Aboriginal staff are—they're either lowly academics or they're professional staff or there just simply aren't any (Carter et al., 2018, p. 251).

Whilst non-Indigenous supervisors are very capable of supporting Indigenous students to succeed and thrive in postgraduate studies (Trudgett, 2008), the presence of Indigenous academics is vital in providing a level of cultural understanding (Trudgett, 2011).

Community and Elders support

To make a higher education space more culturally safe, research has argued the need to employ cultural mentors, community members, and Elders for students to connect with and receive support and guidance from (Trudgett, 2011). Indeed, Elders have always been salient to the success and flourishing of Indigenous societies and cultures through their leadership, knowledge, wisdom, and cultural mentorship (Viscogliosi et al., 2020). Notably, young people in contemporary Australian society continue to look to Elders for their knowledge, wisdom, and guidance as this has always been a part of cultural protocol and a way of knowing, being, and doing. Busija et al. (2018) investigated the role of Elders in relation to the wellbeing of Indigenous communities. The study found that a significant area of Elder influence was "caring for Indigenous youth, passing down knowledge, dealing with racism and oppression, building a better resourced community,

intergenerational connectedness and safeguarding our identity" (Busija et al., 2018, p. 513). Trudgett's (2011) research also identified the importance of Indigenous postgraduate students having an Indigenous community member or Elder in the supervision process, enabling postgraduate students to receive community support and cultural mentorship. In addition, Kippen et al.'s (2006) research with Indigenous students undertaking health courses in rural Victoria, found that community support was a driver of enhancing Indigenous university retention and completion. For instance:

> You are taught culture. But you are taught by a non-Aboriginal person, who hasn't got a clue anyway whilst doing the very best they can with the information and resources they've got. What I would have really liked, was to have more community people and Elders that come in and talk to the groups (Kippen et al., 2006, p. 6).

Hence, cultural mentors and community support members suggested measures higher education institutions could take to enhance the wellbeing, cultural safety, and thus retention and completion rates of First Nations youth.

Culturally appropriate holistic wellbeing services and support

Many First Nations students and non-Indigenous students have mental health issues. Research has recognised that studying at university is a stressful period in one's life (Headspace, 2016). However, for First Nations students there are additional stressors largely caused by the ongoing effects of colonisation such as: racism and discrimination, unresolved trauma, intergenerational trauma, loss of identity and cultural connection, living away from Country, family and community, and poorer physical health (AIHS, 2021). A study by Toombs (2011) with Indigenous students from eight universities identified that many students have mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety. The

students noted the importance of their studies in "busying their minds" and redirecting their mind from the daily struggles of their illness (p. 2). Therefore, the results of this study highlight the need for universities to prioritise all students' mental health and wellbeing, especially First Nations students' wellbeing, as many Indigenous communities and families are still living with intergenerational trauma (Healing Foundation, 2018). Implications for higher education institutions include the need to consider developing wellbeing strategies and policies which are specific to supporting the cultural and holistic needs of Indigenous students' wellbeing.

Institutional racism and discrimination

Racism and discrimination are widely known as determinants of ill-health for First Nations peoples (Thurber et al., 2021). In particular, racism is a cause of poor social and emotional wellbeing outcomes (Paradies et al., 2008). Health advocate and researcher Dr Pat Anderson AO highlights that racism causes adverse health effects for First Nations peoples: "Studies here and from around the world tell us that racism is associated with causing psychological distress, depression, poor quality of life, and substance misuse. Prolonged, it can have significant physical health effects, such as on the immune, endocrine and cardiovascular systems" (Lowitja Institute, 2020). Anderson (Lowitja Institute, 2020) also identifies that racism is largely entrenched in our healthcare system and it is the lack of cultural safety that also remains the cause for these unequal health outcomes: "We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will not seek out health care and will not work in health services if we do not feel culturally safe" (Lowitja Institute, 2020).

Paradies et al. (2021, p. 9) identified the impacts of racism on Indigenous health in Australia and New Zealand as:

- reduced and unequal access to the societal resources required for health (e.g. employment, education, housing, medical care, social support);

- increased exposure to risk factors associated with ill health (e.g. differential marketing of dangerous goods, exposure to toxic substances (Krieger 1999);

- direct impacts of racism on health via racially motivated physical assault;

- stress and negative emotion reactions that contribute to mental ill health, as well as adversely affecting the immune, endocrine and cardiovascular systems; and

- negative responses to racism, such as smoking, alcohol and other drug use.

Racism

Research which has engaged with Indigenous higher education students' voices and agency continues to identify racism as a barrier to Indigenous higher education students' wellbeing and thriving in higher education. For instance:

> Well, I had one lecturer, and in a group of other white people said, "Oh, you're the Indigenous student, aren't you", and I said, "Yeah", and he said, "Oh, how are you, Koori. You don't look … ". I sort of just shrank. He was probably thinking he was being really open and oh, no, it was so embarrassing (Kippen et al., 2006, p. 6).

Another student voice noted:

> … things like role-playing and setting assessments up that really put Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in an awkward position. For example, in this role-play, [students] are allowed to be racist, they're allowed to be farmers,

or Aborigines, or they're allowed to be a Pauline Hanson. They're allowed to take on that role. There are Aboriginal people in that class who have lived through that and get to hear that again while on campus. That's not safe to me (Carter et al., 2018, p. 250).

Sacrificing Country, family, and community to pursue higher education

Indigenous students sacrificing cultural values and responsibilities—such as leaving Country, community, and family to pursue a higher education—remains a major challenge to the wellbeing of many Indigenous students and youths (Amundsen, 2019; Barney, 2018; Chirgwin, 2014; O'leary, 2020). Notably, many Indigenous youth see supporting community particularly as a cultural and moral obligation. For instance:

> Transport issues are huge, finances are huge, living away from families are huge, and you know, family's family, it doesn't matter where you are, but it is not the same as your own mum and dad, and brothers and sisters. So I guess people can get homesick, I mean I've lived away too, and I've hated it. And that's just not you know in Indigenous communities, that is in the broader population as well so, we are not alone as far as that sort of stuff goes (Kippen et al., 2006, p. 5).

Many Indigenous students also juggle the responsibility of studying and caring for their immediate and extended families whilst supporting their communities back home as well. For example, "I always have to make sure that my assignments are done as soon as I get them, when that phone rings and it's family calling, I know I am in the car and driving back to community, that's just how it is" (Toombs & Gorman, 2010, p. 15).

Section Summary

This section outlined the relevant literature concerned with Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing. In particular, the drivers and barriers of Indigenous higher education youth wellbeing were presented as an important body of research informing the present research investigation.

Implications for the Present Investigation

From the literature overview it is evident that there is a paucity of international research concerned with the wellbeing of Indigenous higher education youth and that is founded upon their voice and agency. This research adds to a developing body of research that puts Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing, voice, and agency at the epicentre. The historical overview and literature pertaining to Indigenous youth voice and agency were presented to enhance understanding of the historical context in shaping the present wellbeing and higher education status of Indigenous peoples. As discussed earlier, the need for more research to focus on Indigenous thriving and strengths is pursued in this investigation by identifying the drivers, nature, and significance of wellbeing for Indigenous students attending higher education. The barriers to wellbeing were also examined in the present investigation so as to recognise potential roadblocks preventing Indigenous youth from flourishing in higher education. Notably, with a shortage of research partnering with the voices and agency of Indigenous higher education youth, this present investigation contributes to informing and shaping Indigenous higher education theory, research, and practice by founding the research on their voices and agency.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the literature pertaining to Indigenous youth wellbeing and Indigenous students' participation and completion in higher education. First, the chapter explored the historical overview of Indigenous voice, for example recognising the movements that have advocated for Indigenous voice and agency. Second, the current status of Indigenous youth wellbeing was reviewed. Third, the importance of trauma-informed and healing-aware approaches and strengths-based research to empower First Nations higher education students was discussed. Next, the literature on Indigenous higher education wellbeing was reviewed. Finally, the implications of previous research for the present investigation were discussed. The following chapter will discuss the theoretical perspectives that guide and inform the present research investigation.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND MODELS UNDERPINNING THE PRESENT INVESTIGATION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the theoretical perspectives and models that informed and guided this investigation. Each theory and model represents a unique but synergistic interrelated set of ideas, values, and principles which informs this research. First, the social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) model and the multidimensional student wellbeing model (MSWM) are introduced and discussed. Second, Indigenous standpoint theory (IST) principles are explored that encompass putting Indigenous higher education youth voices, worldviews, and ways of knowing, being, and doing at the epicentre of research. Third, an overview of self-determination theory (SDT) is provided and its relevance to research with First Nations peoples described. Fourth, the new positive psychology of Indigenous thriving, which encourages researchers to focus on strengths-based research that empowers and benefits the future thriving of Indigenous Australian communities, is discussed. Finally, the implications of the findings of this chapter for theory, research, and practice are discussed.

Indigenous Australian Worldviews

Australian First Nation's culture views land, waters, animals, and peoples as intertwined, and so Indigenous wellbeing is postulated to be intertwined with them. Prior to invasion, Australian First Nations peoples shaped society and culture to suit the environment, in contrast to western societies and worldviews ,which were to change and destroy the land to suit the society and culture (Pascoe, 2014; Wexler, 2009). Today, First Nations peoples continue to remain sovereign peoples, and exercise their sovereignty through their

enduring and ongoing connection to culture, Country, waterways, skies, land, language, and to each other. These different cultural understandings and worldviews are evident within universal health policies. For example, western biomedical notions of wellbeing often fail to include culture as a determinant of wellbeing. Hence, western definitions of wellbeing often perceive wellbeing as acting in isolation, rather than being holistic and interconnected. This remains a continuous problem where western understandings of wellbeing have dominated the health and wellbeing systems and health policies imposed on Indigenous peoples have failed, as they do not properly reflect Indigenous conceptualisations of wellbeing. For example:

> What Indigenous peoples consider as being a mental health illness may not be considered as such from a Western psychological framework. The Western psychological framework did not consider cultural factors at all within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual until the DSM-IV. As a result, mental distress in the Indigenous community often goes unnoticed undiagnosed and untreated. (Sutherland & Adams, 2019, p. 51)

The Social and Emotional Wellbeing Model

The social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB; Gee et al., 2013) model represents an Australian First Nations peoples' perspective of wellbeing. The SEWB model identifies that Indigenous conceptualisation of wellbeing are grounded within seven domains: connection to family and kinship, culture, community, Country, spirit, spirituality and ancestors, mind and emotions, and body (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. *The Social and Emotional Wellbeing Model* **(SEWB; Gee et al., 2013)**

Note: Permission has been granted to allow use of image.

© Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly, 2013
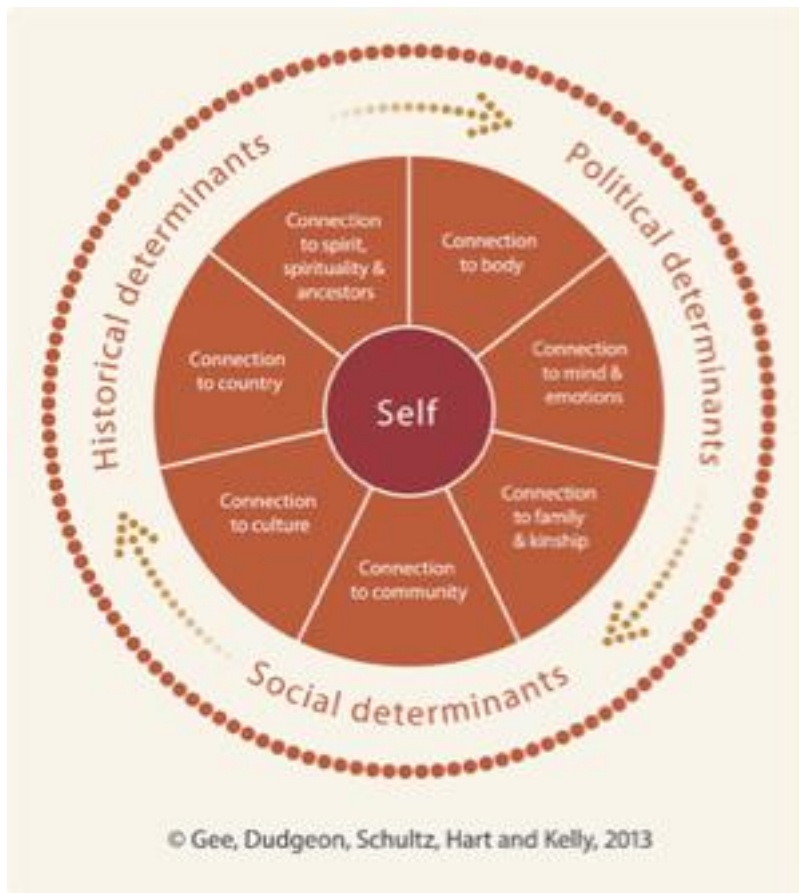
Family and Kinship

Family and kinship refers to a person's connections to an extended or immediate group of people who share similar ties of moiety, totem, skin name or language (The University of Sydney, 2014). Traditionally, Aboriginal kinship systems were "complex and sophisticated systems of social organisations" which were designed to inform the structure of "covering responsibilities, roles and reciprocal bonds, determining how peoples are related, who one can marry and who supports who" (The University of Sydney, 2014).

Connection to Culture

Culture is fluid, and connection to culture encompasses a person's ties to their knowledge, connection, and expression of cultural identity. Cultural engagement, participation, and expression come in many forms and practices and are not limited to participating in cultural dancing, painting, and weaving. For example, it can be also expressed through wearing Indigenous-designed clothing and accessories and participating in cultural community events. It is important to note that the expression of and engagement with connection to culture is practised and conceptualised differently for each individual and community. Australian historical policies and laws have challenged the traditional notion of what it means to be Aboriginal, and many First Nations individuals today are grasping and redefining what it means to be a First Nations person living in a contemporary society (Carlson, 2016). Therefore, cultural expression and participation remains a subjective experience and wellbeing journey for many (AIHS, 2021; Carlson, 2016; Heiss, 2012; Lowitja Institute, 2021; Murrup-Stewart, 2021).

Community

Connection to community consists of a multitude of relationships which make up family and kinship networks. These networks are not necessarily connected solely by familial relations or in the wider Indigenous community; however, a community can consist of close ties with people who are considered closely connected, regardless of a shared ethnicity. Indeed, community makes up a person's self and cultural identity and is where the first stages of socialisation take place (Durmush et al., 2021; Gee et al., 2014).

Country

First Nations peoples' connection to Country is a "deep spiritual connection that is different from the relationship held by other Australians" (Gee et al., 2013). Country is the land, water, sea, air, animals, family, kin, law, language and is referred to as being like a person, which is strongly connected to the Dreaming (Muller, 2014). Country sustains life socially, culturally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Unlike, western conceptions and relationships to land which are based on ownership, capital, and destruction, First Nations peoples' relationship to Country is built on the principles of law, respect, cultural obligation, spiritual connection, sustainability, healing, and ontological belonging (Kingsley et al., 2013). Ontological belonging is described by Moreton-Robinson (2020) in these terms: "Indigenous people's sense of belonging is derived from an ontological relationship to country derived from the Dreaming which provides the precedents for what is believed to have occurred in the beginning in the original form of social living created by ancestral beings". Traditionally, to survive on Country, Country must be protected and cared for. Notably, there were complex and structured systems, such as kinship and law systems, which were established to ensure that the traditional custodians of each 500+ Nations had enough to live on whilst allowing for Country to be sustainably cared for, protected, and restored (Pascoe, 2014).

In contrast to this, Indigenous belonging to land is founded on dispossession, theft and the legal fiction of Terra Nullius (Parbury, 1988). The British colonial and imperialist agendas stemming from ethnocentric ideologies continue to impact the health, wellbeing, and social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, and economic position of First Nations peoples. As a result of dispossession and dislocation, contemporary experiences of connection to Country remain subjective and complex (Kingsley et al., 2013). Many Indigenous peoples

were either removed themselves or are descendants of the Stolen Generations, and it is
common to not know the Country one's ancestors and spirit belong to. Therefore, for some
survivors and young people who may have not been raised on Country, it is common to
feel a sense of disconnection. For the fortunate families who know their Country and
Nation ties, a strong spiritual connection and obligation to care for Country continues.

Spirit, Spirituality, and Ancestors

Traditionally, spirituality is grounded in the Dreaming, with each of 500+ Nations and
clans having their own language, lore, practices, and worldviews: "These understandings
of spirituality broadly refer to a cultural group's traditional systems of knowledge left by
the ancestral beings that typically include all of the stories, rituals, ceremonies and cultural
praxis that connect person, land and place" (Gee et al., 2014, p. 60). The contemporary
Australian context shows that ongoing impacts and outcomes of colonisation have
disrupted traditional ways of knowing, being, doing, and spirituality. As a result of living
in a multicultural contemporary society, many Indigenous peoples connect their spirituality
to other cultures' healing and religion, often intertwining traditional and contemporary
Indigenous cultural and healing practices together (Gee et al., 2014).

Mind and Emotions

Connection to mind and emotions refers to a person's mental and emotional health. For
instance:

> Connection to mind and emotions refers not only to an individual's experience
> of mental wellbeing (or mental ill-health) but also the whole spectrum of basic
> cognitive, emotional and psychological human experience, including
> fundamental human needs such as: the experience of safety and security, a

sense of belonging, control or mastery, self-esteem, meaning making, values

and motivation, and the need for secure relationships. (Gee et al., 2014)

Body

According to Gee et al. (2014, p. 58), "Connection to body is about physical wellbeing and

includes all of the normal biological markers and indices that reflect the physical health of

a person (i.e., age, weight, nutrition, illness and disability, and mortality. Likewise, the

physical health of a person's body is inextricably tethered to the social, emotional, spiritual,

cultural, and financial factors.

Thus, the SEWB model highlights wellbeing as a holistic, culturally shaped, self-

determined, and collective concept (Dockery, 2010; Gee et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2018;

Sutherland & Adams; 2019). The SEWB model recognises that Australian First Nations

peoples' social and emotional wellbeing is conceptualised holistically, whereby a

multitude of factors affecting Indigenous Australians' lives are considered to impact upon

their wellbeing. For instance, if one loses a loved one or connection to family and kinship,

this can result in an impact on one's spiritual, psychological, cultural and physical health.

Determinants of Wellbeing

Surrounding the SEWB model's domains are political determinants, social determinants,

and historical determinants, which identify external social and environmental determinants

that directly impact upon Indigenous wellbeing. These determinants recognise that First

Nations peoples' health and wellbeing has been at risk due to colonial and ethnocentric

government policies and laws, such as the protection and assimilation policies (AIHS,

2021; Healing Foundation, 2021), which have controlled First Nations peoples and

prevented them from exercising self-determination. Wellbeing has also been challenged through government efforts to control and deny First Nations peoples equal and equitable access to services in health care, education, and housing (Davis, 2015; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Sherwood, 2013). As a result of these policies, connecting to fundamental wellbeing determinants like culture, Country, and family and kinship has been challenged (Dockery, 2010; Dudgeon, 2017; Gee et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2018). For these reasons, many First Nations peoples and communities have experienced, and continue to experience, colonisation-related trauma (Healing Foundation, 2017; Menzies, 2019), as has been acknowledged by the Australian Commonwealth government:

> Social and emotional wellbeing is affected by the social determinants of health including education and unemployment and a broader range of problems resulting from colonisation and its intergenerational legacies: grief and loss, trauma and abuse, violence, removal from family and cultural dislocation, substance abuse, racism and discrimination and social disadvantage.
> (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, p. 7)

Therefore, the SEWB model recognises the traumatic effects of colonisation such as the historical, political, and social determinants of intergenerational trauma effects (AIHS, 2021; Healing Foundation, 2021; Menzies, 2019). Notably, it is widely accepted that for First Nations communities to heal, connection to culture, which enhances Indigenous wellbeing, is critical. For instance, "Culture and cultural identity is critical to social and emotional wellbeing. Practising culture can involve a living relationship with ancestors, the spiritual dimension of existence, and connection to country and language" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, p. 6). From a holistic wellbeing perspective, traditionally and for many First Nations peoples today, the wellbeing status of community, Country, and waterways also directly impacts wellbeing. This is because Indigenous

wellbeing is shaped by strong cultural values which are one's relationship and obligation to care for and protect Country, family, and kinship lines (Muller; 2014; Wexler, 2009).

Implications of the SEWB Model for the Present Investigation

The SEWB model is an important model that guided this research investigation. Firstly, the SEWB model is particularly relevant in that the model focuses purely on Indigenous wellbeing which, importantly, is what this thesis research aims to explore in relation to First Nations higher education youth's wellbeing. Secondly, the seven domains from the model serve as an initial guide to what might be some First Nations youth's conceptions of important factors in their wellbeing. Hence, the SEWB model was used to inform aspects of the coding of Indigenous responses in the present investigation (see Chapter 5). Theoretically, the model holds similar aims to this research, which is to recognise and advocate for First Nations peoples having self-determined wellbeing, whereby First Nations peoples define their wellbeing needs, rather than having non-Indigenous people asserting distorted assumptions of what they think might be important to First Nations youth's wellbeing. Hence the SEWB model provides a useful cultural wellbeing perspective which informs and guides the present investigation.

<div align="center">

The Multidimensional Student Wellbeing Model

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The Multidimensional Student Wellbeing Model (MSWM) was developed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics to elucidate and test the nature and structure of wellbeing for high-ability Indigenous primary and secondary students from urban and rural schools within Australia. Similarly, to SEWB, this theoretical model hypothesised that Indigenous students' wellbeing was multidimensional (see Figure 3.2). This model is unique in that it

was designed to reflect Indigenous wellbeing in educational settings, and the hypothesised model has been rigorously tested.

Multidimensional Domains

Multiple dimensions of wellbeing are measured to test the model (Marsh et al., 2019). For instance, the model explores students' Academic Self-concept, such as their perception of how well they are performing academically (Cognitive Self-concept) and whether they enjoy school subjects (Affective Self-concept). Psychological wellbeing includes a student's demonstration of positive attitudes, such as having feelings of Hope and Positive Emotions towards schooling and their educational wellbeing. Physical wellbeing comprises Vitality (such as having energy) and Physical health: a student's perception of the status of their physical body's health. Self-esteem encompasses Self-worth, Self-efficacy, and Buoyancy. Self-worth is an evaluation of beliefs and the value of oneself. Self-efficacy is a student's belief in achievement and success in a school task or in a subject, and buoyancy refers to a student's ability to overcome a problem or issue and gain strength from a challenging experience. Within this model, Relationships comprise Peer support, Teacher support, Family support, and Community support. This is a student's perception of their relationships and the support they receive from their peers, teachers, family, and the local community where they live. Cultural Cognitive and Cultural Affective factors recognise the importance of cultural wellbeing in educational contexts. Cultural cognitive alludes to students showing their knowledge of their cultural identity and connection to culture, whilst cultural affective reflects cultural pride and connection to cultural identity.

Empirical Tests of MSWM Structure

The theorised structure of the MSWM has been empirically tested with a sample of

Indigenous (n = 590) and non-Indigenous (n = 568) primary and secondary high-ability

students. Participants were Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who scored within the

top 3 bands of the National Assessment Program -Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

subjects (reading, writing, language conventions, and numeracy; Marsh et al., 2019).

NAPLAN is an annual test in which students in Australia undertake to test their numeracy

and literacy skills levels. In the study, the second- and first-order factors tested were:

Academic Self-Concept (cognitive, affect); Psychological Well-Being (hope, positive

emotions); Physical Well-Being (vitality, health); Self Esteem (self-worth, self-efficacy,

buoyancy); Relationships (peer relations, support from friends, support from teachers,

support from community); and Cultural Identity (cultural knowledge, cultural affect;

Marsh et al., 2019).

Figure 3.2. *Multidimensional Model of Student Wellbeing* **(MSWM; Marsh et al., 2019)**
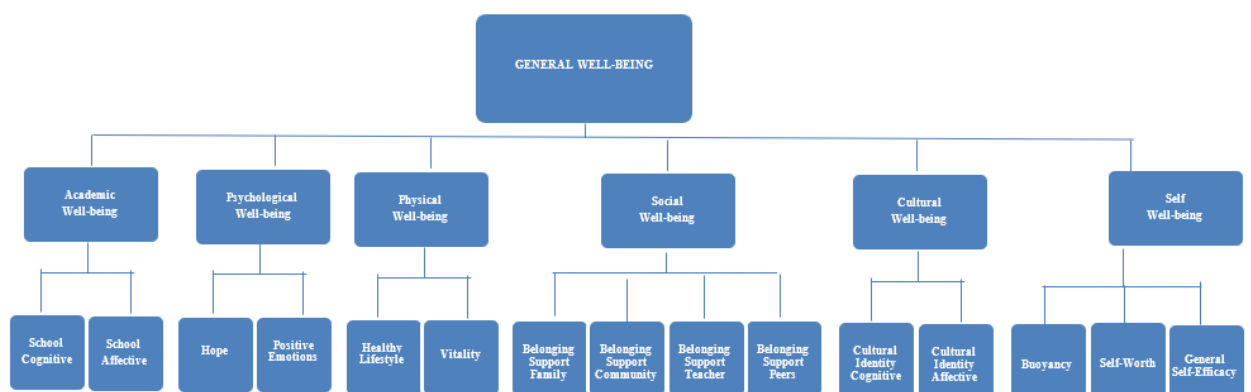
For this research, which focuses on understanding how First Nations higher education

youth conceptualise wellbeing, the MSWM model is very useful. This is because the

MSWM provides an educational, cultural, and psychological wellbeing perspective. Importantly, it recognises the role of academic self-concept as an important determinant of student wellbeing and is vital, considering that research has demonstrated that academic self-concept and achievement share a reciprocal and dynamic, mutually reinforcing relation (Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2012; Seaton et al., 2013). Hence, previous research has demonstrated that student academic self-concept is a key driver of students' educational participation and outcomes, as well as their overall wellbeing (Marsh et al., 1988). However, this research has not been fully extended to Indigenous populations, and not to Indigenous university students in particular. Secondly, as the present research aims to empower Indigenous voice and agency and to represent Indigenous knowledges and cultural values, cultural wellbeing and relationships in the model are crucial dimensions to include. The model also recognises and accounts for First Nations youth's strong connection to culture and cultural values of developing relationships with teachers, peers, and community.

Notably, the MSWM model is useful in providing an educational wellbeing perspective. Furthermore, this hypothesized model of wellbeing is a rare example of an empirically tested and validated model. Given that the theory, research, and practice are inextricably intertwined (Craven et al., 2016), whereby weakness in any one of these three areas produces weakness in the others, this is critically important. Research has clearly demonstrated that the model is salient for Indigenous children and youth, with sound psychometric properties. Even though the model is not specifically designed for First Nations higher education youth, but rather for primary and secondary students who performed well academically in NAPLAN, this model provides a rich theoretical understanding of what potentially could shape the educational wellbeing of First Nations

higher education youth. Hence the MSWM was used to inform initial coding of Indigenous youth's responses in the present investigation (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Indigenous Standpoint Theory

The Cultural Interface

The theoretical underpinnings of Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) stem from Nakata's prominent concept known as the Cultural Interface. Nakata (2007) defines the cultural interface as the space "where we live and learn, the place that conditions our lives, the place that shapes our futures and more to the point the place where we are active agents in our own lives—where we make decisions—our lifeworld" (p. 285). In this definition, Nakata speaks to the role of the cultural interface in facilitating the process of socialisation.

Equally, Nakata also acknowledges that Indigenous peoples are "entangled in a very contested knowledge spaces at the Cultural Interface" (p. 350). Hence, Nakata (2007) is speaking about the intersections of the different knowledge systems: Indigenous and western. He recognises that the cultural interface is, "a place of tension that requires constant negotiation", in particular for Indigenous peoples (p. 5). Notably, the reason for the problematisation of the cultural interface is that western knowledge continues to be widely normalised and understood as the "universal truth' whilst Indigenous knowledge production is discounted, silenced, and referred to as the Other" (Moreton Robinson, 2019; Smith, 2012). It is widely accepted that this remains the case within the Australia education system, where Indigenous perspectives and knowledges are lacking (Nakata, 2007).

Core Question

IST theory asks the core question, "How are Indigenous students, academics and researchers in disciplines to navigate the complexities of Indigenous experience within such contested spaces?" (p. 346). Nakata's response to overcoming the challenges of the cultural interface is through employing IST theory principles to: 1) "Generate accounts of communities of Indigenous people in contested knowledge spaces"; 2) "Afford agency to people"; and 3) "Acknowledge the everyday tensions, complexities and ambiguities as the very conditions that produce the possibilities in the spaces between Indigenous and non-Indigenous positions" (Nakata, 2007, p. 217).

According to Nakata (2007) knowledge systems are:

> culturally embedded, dynamic, respond to changing circumstances and constantly evolve. It is not strictly about the replacement of one with the other, nor the undermining of one by the other. It is about maintaining the continuity of one when having to harness another and working the interaction in ways that serve Indigenous interests, in ways that can uphold distinctiveness and special status as First Peoples (p. 6).

Hence, it is crucial that First Nations youth's knowledge and conceptualisations of wellbeing are embedded into the academy to enable voice and agency, and serve Indigenous youth's wellbeing needs.

Implications of IST for the Present Investigation

The present investigation capitalises upon and embeds the three principles of IST. The first IST principle relates to the present research investigation, as the exact location First Nations higher education youth are situated in is contested knowledge spaces in higher education institutions. The second IST principle is reflected through the aim and vision of

this doctoral research, which is for First Nations higher education youth within contested knowledge spaces to exercise agency. Agency alludes to First Nations youth having a say on research and issues that impact youth's wellbeing and overall higher education experience. Notably, this involves youth acting as agents by using their voices, experiences, and knowledge to transform knowledge spaces such as higher education institutions. Equally, it involves ensuring these knowledge production spaces are more culturally safe and are embedded with Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Ultimately, culturally safe spaces are important to ensure that Indigenous students no longer have to negotiate and sacrifice their cultural identity in order to obtain a university degree.

The third principle of IST is adopted through Indigenous higher education youth's voices and the process of youth reflecting upon their experiences of the everyday complexities and tensions of being a First Nations student in a white-dominated knowledge space. Agency is achieved through the process of First Nations youth telling their stories, sharing experiences, voicing recommendations, and having control over research which impacts the future of their communities. Through this important yarning exchange (see Chapter 5), youth are contributing to revolutionising higher education institutions and are challenging the cultural interface by privileging Indigenous knowledge and worldviews.

Towards a Positive Psychology of Indigenous Thriving

Despite major gaps in education, employment, and health outcomes, it is important to note that *not all* First Nations peoples and communities are disadvantaged. Focusing on strengths, Craven et al. (2016) called for more research to identify, measure, and emulate examples of Indigenous success, as there is a lack of "concerted research being founded

upon the voices, agency of Indigenous children, youth, and communities, and a lack of large-scale quantitative research" (p. 1).

The Reciprocal Research Partnership Model

The notion of a positive psychology of Indigenous thriving derives from a positive psychology standpoint which focuses on strengths and emulating strengths, rather than problems and deficits. As a growing movement, positive psychology explores how individuals get the most out of life and emphasises the importance of psychosocial factors for an individual to thrive in life (Craven et al., 2016). The Reciprocal Research Partnership Model (RRPM) model underpins a holistic and strengths-based position, informed by both Indigenous and western worldviews and values. Notably, the aim and vision of the RRPM model is to create a new research agenda which "enables Indigenous children, youth and communities to thrive" (Craven et al., 2016, p. 5). Equally, the RRPM model encourages researchers to engage with Indigenous communities as equal partners by following the principles from the reciprocal research framework partnership model (RRPM).

Research Programs

The RRPM model (see Figure 3.3) comprises four interrelated and interdisciplinary research programs representing: educational, psychological, physical, and family/community thriving which Craven et al. (2016) argues to be "fundamental to enable Indigenous children and youth to get the most out of life" (p. 1). Educational thriving recognises the importance of education in being a game changer for Indigenous communities in improving health outcomes, enhancing employment, enabling self-determination, and supporting the social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, and economic

wellbeing of Indigenous peoples and communities (Universities Australia, 2019a). Psychological thriving refers to the importance of good mental health and wellness in living a healthier and happier life. Physical thriving is the need for an individual to have a healthy body, supported by living a healthy and nutritious lifestyle to enable physical thriving. Family and Community Thriving is about enabling Indigenous families and communities to thrive and flourish through educational, psychological, physical, and cultural thriving, heavily grounded in Indigenous values and ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Values

The RRPM also emphasises the importance of four values: Respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationships.

Respect. According to Craven et al. (2016), respect is about researchers developing respectful research relationships with the communities and individuals they interact with, to enable trust. Researchers must show respect and be aware of the cultural protocols, values, and ways of doing, of the community partners they are partnering with.

Reciprocity. Reciprocity represents the need for researchers to demonstrate to the research community the benefit or return from partnering and participating in the research. This benefit or return needs to align with the community partner's values.

Responsibility. Responsibility refers to researchers carrying out research that does not exhibit harmful ways of doing. Researchers have a set of responsibilities and obligations to the community they are partnering with, and to ensure their research is empowering and beneficial to their community. Therefore the "research must be ethical and truthful with a congruency between the researchers and the community so that information sharing is maintained and protected" (Craven et al., 2016, p. 5). Hence,

research must be ethical, congruent, and ensure cultural safety and community cultural protocols are practised.

Relationships. Relationships refers to establishing an ongoing partnership: Respectful, trustful, transparent and equal partnerships, and connections with communities. This process entails researchers acknowledging and reflecting on their biases and privilege and putting the values and worldviews of the partnering communities first.

Hence, the values the RRPM promotes are fundamental to establishing culturally safe research partnerships with First Nations communities. Further, the RRPM upholds the ethical conduct and integrity of research, as identified by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS, 2019) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2018).

EMU Framework

EMU is a research framework which stands for Exemplars of thriving, Measurement of drivers of thriving, and Utilisation of drivers to replicate thriving (Craven et al., 2016). EMU provides a research agenda which is grounded in Indigenous worldviews, values, positive psychology, and strengths-based approaches. Notably, EMU encourages researchers to investigate and write about topics which highlight Indigenous peoples succeeding and thriving rather than focusing on deficit models. The first step for researchers is to identify exemplars of Indigenous thriving. Secondly, research needs to measure what enables success and to capitalise on the voices and agency of Indigenous children, youth, and communities. Lastly, researchers need to utilise the drivers of thriving to emulate and replicate success more broadly, and thus achieve Indigenous thriving futures (depicted in the centre of Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. *Reciprocal Research Partnership Model* **(RRPM; Craven et al., 2016).**
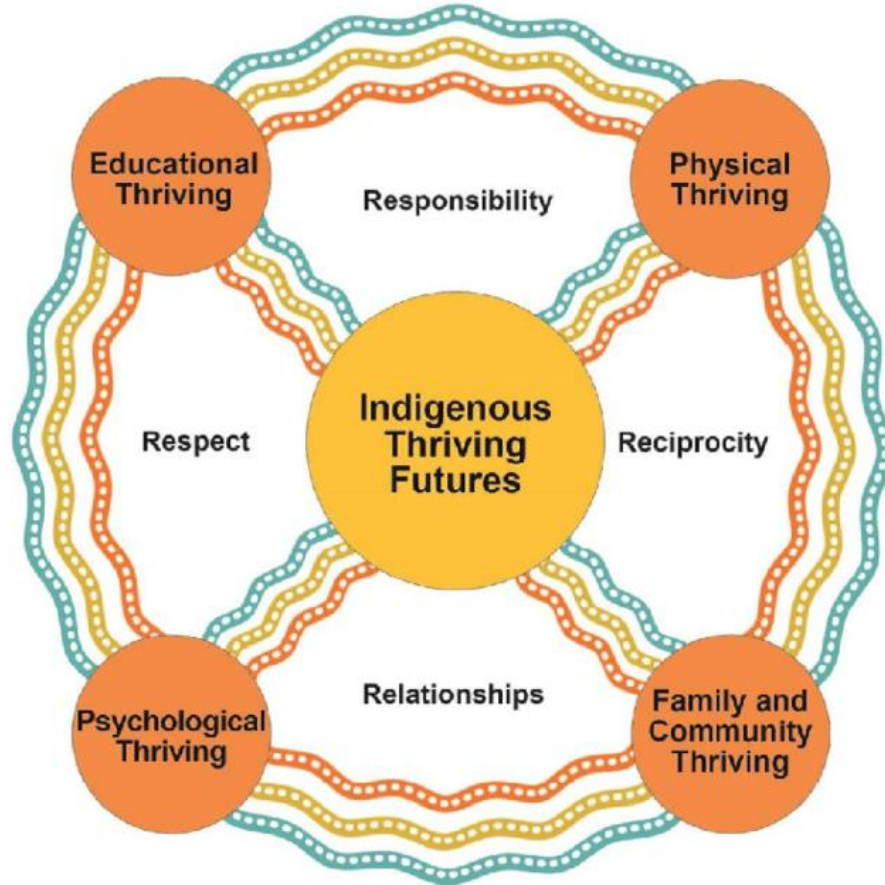
Implications of the Reciprocal Research Partnership Model for the Present Investigation

The RRPM is significant for the present investigation as it serves to establish the nature of the partnership with Indigenous higher education youth. Further, the present investigation employed a strengths-based and positive psychology standpoint as proposed in the new positive psychology of Indigenous thriving and Indigenous higher education youth's voices and agency. Equally, from a higher education perspective, this research advocates for the

educational thriving of Indigenous Australian youth to enable positive change in employment, health, and educational outcomes, as well as the enhancement of their overall psychological, physical, cultural, and spiritual wellbeing. The partnership and engagement with Indigenous higher education youth in this present investigation aligns with the values and principles of the RRPM model and thus with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Ultimately, RRPM ensures that respect, responsibility, relationships, and reciprocity are put at the epicentre of my practice as the researcher.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) was coined in the mid 1980s by Professor Edward Deci and Professor Richard Ryan. SDT is a motivational and behavioural theory which has recognised universal and innate psychological needs that are integral to an individual's wellbeing. SDT has identified 3 innate psychological needs: Autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Firstly, the theory recognises the importance of intrinsic motivation, which is one's own interests and values, rather than being controlled by external forces (i.e., extrinsic motivation). Intrinsic motivation enables one to flourish in contexts and environments through satisfaction of the psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

Autonomy

According to SDT theory, autonomy refers to individuals having the right to freely choose and self-initiate and self-endorse their behaviours. When an individual has autonomy, SDT claims a person is able to self-endorse their behaviours freely. Historically, and for many First Nations communities today, this does not remain the case, as governments continue to contest and challenge First Nations peoples' right to self-determination and their right to

express their voice, co-design and implement policies and laws which shape their health, wellbeing, education, and the preservation of culture and care for Country and Waters. For too long, non-Indigenous leaders and policy makers have been making policy decisions which have failed to support the wellbeing and autonomy of First Nations peoples (Axelsson et al., 2016; Biddle, 2012; Gooda, 2010). In the current Indigenous affairs and political context, Indigenous politicians, community leaders, Elders, and youth are calling for an Indigenous voice in parliament, Treaty, and an enshrined voice in the Australian Constitution, as "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Peoples, but today they are less than 3% of the Australian population. In Australia's system of democracy, that can make it hard to have their voice heard in elections for the Parliament. It can also make it hard to influence laws that are made about them in the Parliament" (Referendum Council, 2019).

The United Nations (UN) recent report on the 'Rights of Indigenous Peoples' has called for a sustainable and resilient future for Indigenous peoples whereby "the world's over 476 million Indigenous persons rights and wellbeing are advanced" by 2030 (UN, 2020, p. 2). Therefore, it is important for First Nations youth to define their wellbeing needs in research, as First Nations youth's voices have the power to transform future policies and research and thus advance Indigenous communities' wellbeing. Hence, autonomy is vital for any individual to thrive in life, as it can lead to people and communities feeling satisfied with their life and thus having positive wellbeing and health outcomes.

Relatedness

Following SDT, one of any human's universal psychological innate needs is relatedness. Relatedness is defined as, "the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others'' (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Relatedness recognises an individual's need to feel a sense of belonging to individuals within their social environments. According to SDT, this entails a two-way process whereby an individual is being cared for by others and is giving care to others around them. It is widely known that First Nations peoples' culture and wellbeing is related to strong connections and relationships with community, family and with land (Gee et al., 2013). For instance, Durmush et al.'s (2021) research with First Nations higher education youth identified that strong support and connections with family, university academic staff, and peer community were drivers of youth's wellbeing. Policies of colonisation and the continued systems which deny and disrupt Indigenous peoples' connection to relatedness factors such as families, kinship circles, and communities are largely responsible for the unequal health and wellbeing outcome, including intergenerational trauma, as experienced by many Indigenous families today (AIHS, 2021; Healing Foundation, 2021). Therefore, relatedness is vital for all human beings and is particularly important for Indigenous higher education youth to thrive and flourish.

Competence

SDT's third innate psychological universal need is known as competence. Competence is essential to an individual's wellbeing as it addresses the important role of one's environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Competence involves an individual mastering their own environment and having the right skills to successfully achieve a task. This can take place within a person's workplace and within their home environments. Hence, education is widely accepted as a game changer when it comes to enhancing an individual's skills and

confidence to master several environments (Durmush et al., 2021; Pidgeon, 2008; UN, 2019a). The role of education is significant to Indigenous higher education youth as they can use their skills and knowledge to upskill and build community capacity and change. However, it is higher education institutions' environments and culture which can support this process by supporting a student's wellbeing and thus influence a student to graduate with a higher education degree. Therefore, this investigation enables youth to be agents and voice their recommendations to institutions on what needs to be done to change the culture of the 'ivory tower' into a culturally safe place for Indigenous students' wellbeing.

Implications of SDT for the Present Investigation

SDT comprises three important and universal psychological needs that are critical to First Nations higher education youth wellbeing. Firstly, enabling First Nations higher education youth to exercise autonomy through voice and agency was the core focus of the present investigation. Notably, SDT enables youth to be the experts of their wellbeing and ensures youth decide what is important to their wellbeing and how they conceptualise it. Relatedness is evident in Study 2 (see Chapter 7) ,where youth could yarn and connect with other higher education youth in the focus groups. This investigation ensured youth received support for competence by having control and agency over the representation and accuracy of the data findings through the process of member checking. The process of member checking was established to ensure youth had the final approval and validation of the data findings, mainly to ensure the findings accurately and appropriately reflected youth's conceptions of wellbeing (see Chapters 8 & 9).

Within this research, relatedness was achieved through youth's experiences and voices advocating for higher education environments to better support Indigenous students'

wellbeing through better practices, such as supporting and caring for students' wellbeing needs and ensuring the research was conducted in culturally safe environments. Notably, the focus group experienced by the participants in Study 2 (see Chapter 7) empowered youth to build peer community connections and relationships through the yarning methodology process.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the theoretical perspectives which guide and inform the theoretical underpinnings of this research. First, the SEWB model was discussed in detail to highlight the current notions of First Nations wellbeing, and to provide a guide to setting a framework for First Nations higher education youth wellbeing. Second, the MSWM was presented to provide an insight and focus on educational wellbeing, with the purpose of highlighting the relevance of educational wellbeing for the thriving and success of Indigenous higher education youth and communities. Third, a detailed analysis of IST was presented, along with its shared principles in empowering and leveraging the voices and agency of First Nations higher education youth in research, including the critical focus of enabling youth as the agents and experts of their own wellbeing needs. Following this, the RRPM model was discussed, to highlight the importance of employing respectful research practices which centre Indigenous values, knowledge, voice, and agency at the forefront. Lastly, SDT was discussed, with an emphasis on the integral need for all humans to exercise autonomy, competence, and relatedness; a similar focus to this investigation, acknowledging youth as the agents and experts of their own wellbeing needs.

Notably, the selected theories (SEWB, MSWM, IST, RRPM, and SDT) presented in this chapter all stem from both Indigenous and western worldviews. Both Indigenous and

western theories and models complement each other by offering different worldviews and points of reference that support the vision of this research, which is to give First Nations higher education youth a voice in research to advance future research and policy to support First Nations wellbeing. The following chapter outlines in detail the aims, the research questions (and their rationales) for this investigation.

CHAPTER 4: AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND THEIR RATIONALE

Introduction

The present investigation consisted of four synergistically interrelated studies. This chapter outlines the aims of this research, the research questions to be addressed, and the rationale for each of the research questions that underpin the present investigation. First, the overarching purpose of the study is presented, followed by (second), the overarching statement of the problems to be addressed. Third, statements of the problem, aims, research questions, and their rationale, are presented. The aims and their related research questions are numbered in such a way that each related aim and research question can be easily observed. Research questions are posed, as clear directions to formulate hypotheses could not be ascertained from previous research. Finally, a summary of the chapter is presented.

Purpose

The overarching purpose of this research was to make a positive impact in education research by embedding Indigenous youth voices, worldviews, and recommendations into education research and the academy. It attempts to decolonise present research that misrepresents, misinterprets, and ignores Indigenous youth's conceptualisations of wellbeing. It seeks to further broaden and expand our understanding of Indigenous youth's conceptualisation of wellbeing and how best to enable youth wellbeing from the standpoint

of successful Indigenous youth who are university or higher education students. Four studies are conducted in this research, their purposes being to:

1. Conduct a systematic review of extant international research seeking to elucidate the nature and scope of research engaging with Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing, to identify factors supporting or hindering First Nations youth's wellbeing, and that capitalise on Indigenous voice and agency to synthesise international research findings and identify new research directions (Study 1);

2. Conduct focus groups to identify how Indigenous Australian youth who are higher education students broadly conceptualise the significance, nature and structure of their wellbeing, and its drivers and barriers, to identify key construals of salience to Indigenous youth to inform the shaping of further research (Study 2);

3. Conduct individual interviews with Indigenous Australian youth who are higher education students to explicate in depth what they perceive as the significance and nature of their educational wellbeing, its drivers and barriers (Study 3); and

4. Conduct individual interviews with Indigenous Australian youth who are higher education students to elucidate in depth what they perceive as useful strategies for enhancing Indigenous youth wellbeing in higher education (Study 4).

The research questions are numbered first with the Study number, then the Aim number, and last the research question number. For example, research question 1.1.1 is Study 1, Aim 1 and research question 1.

Statement of the Problem

There are four key questions centralised on the problems to be addressed:

1) What is the significance of wellbeing for Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions? 2) How do Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions conceptualise their wellbeing? 3) What are the drivers of and barriers to Indigenous youth's wellbeing? and 4) What do Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions perceive as the strategies and solutions to enhancing their wellbeing in higher education? Wellbeing is paramount for any individual or community to thrive in education and in life more generally (Durmush et al., 2021; Mosselson et al., 2017; UA, 2019a). However, there is a paucity of research that identifies how Indigenous Australian youth conceptualise their wellbeing, and in particular in relation to Indigenous students attending university or other higher education institutions.

The present investigation gives primacy to the voices, worldviews, and recommendations of Indigenous youth attending university or higher education institutions. This was achieved by co-partnering with Indigenous youth and deeming Indigenous youth experts of their own wellbeing. Ultimately, this research is designed to contribute to the literature of knowledge production to better understand how Indigenous youth conceptualise their wellbeing and what they perceive as strategies that will facilitate it. In addition, the research reveals barriers that Indigenous youth identify in their higher education institutions that affect their wellbeing. Thus, the expected outcomes of this research include influencing and guiding future education and health policy to better support Indigenous youth to succeed and thrive in higher education.

Study 1: Systematic Review of International Research on the Wellbeing and Voice and Agency of Indigenous Youth Attending Higher Education Institutions

Purpose

The purpose of Study 1 is to identify leading international research that has researched Indigenous youth wellbeing in higher education. Importantly, this study evaluates qualitative primary research that has capitalised upon Indigenous youth voice and agency and their conceptualisations of the significance, nature, and drivers of, and barriers to wellbeing in higher education.

Statement of the Problem

What is the nature and scope of extant international research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous higher education youth, and what has international research identified as the drivers of, and barriers to Indigenous wellbeing?

Aims

The aims of Study 1 were to identify and evaluate:

- 1.1 The nature and scope of extant international research that capitalises on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth studying at a higher education institution;

- 1.2 International research which has identified the drivers of Indigenous youth's wellbeing; and

- 1.3 International research which has identified the barriers to Indigenous youth's wellbeing.

Research Questions

- 1.1.1 What is the nature and scope of international research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions to explore Indigenous wellbeing?

- 1.2.2 What has international research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth identified as the drivers of wellbeing?

- 1.3.3 What has international research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth identified as the barriers to wellbeing?

Statement of Research Question Rationales

Rationale for Research question 1.1.1. Research question 1.1.1 asked: What is the nature and scope of international research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions to explore Indigenous wellbeing? This research question is profoundly important as it identifies what international research asserts about Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing, and more specifically, research results about the significance, nature, and drivers of, and barriers to Indigenous youth's wellbeing in higher education. In the Australian context, some Indigenous higher education wellbeing research has emerged (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2020; Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021; O'Leary, 2020; Powell, 2017; Toombs, 2011; Yap & Yu, 2016). However, international wellbeing research has not been synthesised internationally through analysis of multiple databases to evaluate the extant literature on this critical research topic. Importantly, an analysis and synthesis of international research will contribute to a broader scope and knowledge production about Indigenous youth's wellbeing in higher education, and may also identify important gaps and guide future research directions in the literature (see Chapter 2). From a positive psychology standpoint and strengths-based position (Craven et al., 2016; Fogarty,

Bulloch et al., 2018; also see Chapter 3), this research question addresses this study's aim 1, which is to locate, evaluate, and reveal what other research studies have found on the nature and scope of Indigenous youth's wellbeing internationally.

Rationale for research question **1.2.2.** Research question 1.2.2 asked: What has international research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth identified as the drivers of wellbeing? This research question tackles an important social justice issue of our time, which is Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing (see Chapter 2). The research question aims to understand the key drivers and enablers of youth's wellbeing. Past research has recommended engaging Indigenous youth voices (Amundsen, 2019; Craven et al., 2016; Durmush et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2018, also see Chapter 2). Importantly, research on Indigenous Australians' wellbeing has identified the following key drivers: cultural wellbeing (Cairney et al., 2017; Dudgeon et al., 2018; Gee et al., 2014; Wexler, 2009; Wilson et al., 2018), connection to Country, family and kinship, spirituality (Dudgeon et al., 2017; Grieves, 2009), and empowerment (Tsey et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2018; also see Chapter 2). Therefore, this research question aims to locate and evaluate research that specifically engages youth voices and focuses on the drivers of Indigenous youth's wellbeing. The systematic review contributes to identifying international studies that put Indigenous voices and wellbeing at the forefront. It also locates and evaluates research studies that focus on a strengths-based positioning and identify what enables and supports Indigenous youth students' wellbeing (Fogarty et al., 2018).

Rationale for research question 1.2.3. Research 1.2.3 asked: What has international research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth identified as the barriers to wellbeing? In the Indigenous Australian context, some barriers to Indigenous wellbeing have been highlighted, including the following factors: racism and discrimination (Sahdra et al., 2019; Priest et al., 2011), culturally unsafe environments (Coffin, 2007), and lateral

violence (Durmush et al., 2021). It is important to note that although this research stems from a positive psychology standpoint, it is crucial to identify factors that block Indigenous youth studying in higher education from experiencing wellbeing. Ultimately, the barriers serve to give us the fuller picture and understanding of Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing. Therefore, this research question enables elucidation of the barriers, which gives researchers and policy makers a clearer holistic view of Indigenous youth's wellbeing.

Study 2: Identifying Indigenous Higher Education Youth's Broad Perceptions of Wellbeing

Purpose

The purpose of Study 2 was to explicate a broad initial understanding of Indigenous Australian youth's wellbeing today. Through the use of focus groups, Study 2's purpose was to identify how Indigenous youth as a collective broadly conceptualise their wellbeing and the drivers of, barriers to, and strategies for wellbeing.

Statement of the Problem

How do Indigenous higher education youth broadly perceive their wellbeing?

Aims

Study 2 aimed to capture and capitalise upon the voices and agency of Indigenous youth to broadly:

- 2.1.1 Identify how Indigenous youth who are university or higher education institution students broadly conceptualise the significance, nature, and structure of their wellbeing;

- 2.2.2 Explicate what Indigenous youth at university or higher education perceive broadly as the drivers of and barriers to their educational wellbeing; and

- 2.3.3 Elucidate what Indigenous youth at university or higher education broadly perceive as general strategies for enhancing Indigenous youth wellbeing in higher education.

Notably, Study 2 aimed to solicit broad and collective views on Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing through the use of focus groups. The results of Study 2 also served to inform the development and implementation of Study 3.

Research Questions

- 2.1.1 How do Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions broadly conceptualise the significance, nature, and structure of their wellbeing?
- 2.2.2 What do Indigenous youth in higher education broadly perceive as the drivers of their educational wellbeing and success?
- 2.3.3 What do Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions broadly perceive as barriers to their wellbeing and success?

Statement of Research Questions Rationales

Rationale for research question 2.1.1. Research question 2.1.1 asked: How do Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions broadly conceptualise the significance, nature, and structure of their wellbeing? The significance of this research question is to firstly understand more broadly the nature and structure of Indigenous youth's wellbeing. In focus groups and as a collective, Indigenous youth were asked about the significance, nature, and structure of their wellbeing (see Chapter 5). Previous research has established that Indigenous wellbeing is conceptualised as holistic and multidimensional (see Chapter 2). Research testing the Multidimensional Model of Student Wellbeing (Marsh et al., 2019; see Chapter 3) found that wellbeing was multidimensional for both Indigenous

and non-Indigenous high ability primary and secondary students. Similarly, the Social and Emotional Wellbeing model theorises Indigenous wellbeing to be multidimensional, holistic, interconnected, and relational (Dudgeon et al., 2017; see Chapter 3). In addition, Powell's (2017) thesis, which explored how university spaces enacted, supported, and strengthened Indigenous wellbeing in university spaces, also investigated Indigenous voice by looking at Indigenous students' experiences at the Australian National University. The study found that Indigenous students perceived their wellbeing as holistic and that themes such as community were critical to Indigenous students' wellbeing at university, as community "was central to the wellbeing of Indigenous students at ANU, provided a sense of belonging and created space for wellbeing" (p. 76). However, theorised models and Powell's (2017) research did not capitalise upon Indigenous higher education youth's perceptions of wellbeing. Therefore, this research question was posed to address this gap in research by identifying Indigenous youth's broad construal of the significance and nature of wellbeing for them.

Research question 2.2.2: Broad drivers of higher education success and wellbeing.

Research question 2.2.2 asked: What do Indigenous youth in higher education broadly perceive as the drivers of their educational wellbeing and success? This research question provided Indigenous youth studying in higher education institutions the chance to voice their perceptions of what drives them to succeed academically. In particular, this question enabled youth to reflect on their experiences as Indigenous youth and speak about what helped them thrive and what supported their wellbeing at university and higher education institutions. Previous research (e.g., Durmush et al., 2021; also see Chapter 2) identified the need to deem Indigenous people agents of their own wellbeing. This research deems Indigenous youth as the experts of their wellbeing. For example, Lovett (2016) claims that the major barrier in effectively measuring Indigenous health and wellbeing was the lack of evidence-based

research that directly asked Indigenous people what they thought important in contributing to better enhancing their wellbeing. Therefore, this research considers Indigenous youth as the experts of their own wellbeing and serves to understand a broad perspective of the drivers of Indigenous youth wellbeing.

Research question 2.3.3: Broad barriers to higher education success and wellbeing. Research question 2.3.3 asked: What do Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions broadly perceive as barriers to their wellbeing and success? The rationale behind this research question was to understand a broad perception of the concepts and factors that may block youth from achieving educational success and wellbeing. As with drivers, it is equally vital that we understand what may prevent youth from thriving in higher education and what may affect their wellbeing. Taylor et al.'s (2019) systematic review identifies the following factors that affect the retention of Indigenous health students in the tertiary education system: Family and peer support; competing obligations; academic preparation and prior educational experiences; access to an Indigenous Student Support Centre; financial hardship; racism and discrimination. Study 2 extends Thompson's study to broaden our understanding of the barriers affecting Indigenous students' wellbeing and higher education success from multiple disciplines. Stemming from a strengths-based approach and positive psychology standpoint (Craven et al., 2016, also see Chapter 3), this research question aims to identify the barriers to wellbeing so future research can focus on positive solutions (Halliday et al., 2019) and elucidate whether the drivers of Indigenous youth wellbeing may assist in counteracting the barriers to wellbeing.

Study 3: In-depth analysis of Indigenous Higher Education Youth's Perceptions of the Significance, Nature, Drivers of, and Barriers to Wellbeing

Purpose

To address the overarching aims of the present investigation, Study 3 was designed to build upon the broad understandings identified in Study 1 and to undertake a more in-depth analysis of construals of the significance, nature, and enablers of, and barriers to wellbeing for Indigenous youth attending higher education. (See Study 2 for a rationale for the research questions posed when research questions overlap with this investigation).

Statement of the Problem

What are Indigenous higher education youth's in-depth perceptions of the significance, nature and enablers of and barriers to their wellbeing?

Aims

The overarching aim of Study 3 is to build on the findings emanating from Study 2 by employing in-depth individual interviews with Indigenous youth from Study 2, to explicate how Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions conceptualise the nature, and enablers of, and barriers to their wellbeing. Study 3 aimed to capitalise on the primacy of voice, worldviews, and agency of Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions by identifying their in-depth perceptions on these points. Specifically, it addressed the:

- 3.1 Significance of wellbeing for enabling Indigenous youth to flourish and thrive in higher education;

- 3.2 Nature and components of youth wellbeing that are salient for Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions;

- 3.3 Enablers of wellbeing for Indigenous higher education students; and

- 3.4 Barriers to wellbeing for Indigenous higher education students.

Statement of the Research Questions

Research question 3.1.1: The significance of wellbeing in enabling Indigenous youth to thrive and flourish in higher education. Research question 3.1.1 asks: What is the significance of wellbeing for enabling Indigenous youth to thrive and flourish in higher education?

Research question 3.2.2: The nature and components of wellbeing salient for Indigenous youth attending higher education. Research question 3.2.2 asks: How do Indigenous youth conceptualise their wellbeing?

Research question 3.3.3: Indigenous youth's in-depth perceptions of the enablers of wellbeing. Research question 3.3.3 asks: What do Indigenous youth attending higher education perceive in-depth as the enablers of their wellbeing?

Research question 3.4.4: Indigenous youth's in-depth perceptions of the barriers of wellbeing. Research question 3.4.4 asked: What do Indigenous youth attending higher education in-depth perceive the barriers of their wellbeing?

See Study 2 for the rationale for these research questions.

Study 4: Indigenous Higher Education Youth's In-depth Perceptions of Potential Strategies to Cultivate their Wellbeing

Purpose

The purpose of Study 4 was to build further on Study 2 results by yarning with Indigenous higher education youth through individual interviews about their in-depth views on strategies

they think important in cultivating their wellbeing. Hence, see Study 2 for an overview of the rationale for the research question.

Statement of the Problem

What are potential policies and strategies Indigenous higher education youth perceive will cultivate their wellbeing?

Aims

The overarching aim of Study 4 is to capitalise on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions, to identify potentially potent policies and strategies that could facilitate their wellbeing. Study 4 aims to empower and capitalise upon Indigenous youth agency and voice to:

- 4.1.1 Identify in-depth strategies that Indigenous youth perceive are important to cultivate Indigenous youth wellbeing whilst undertaking higher education.

Statement of Research Questions Rationales

    Research question 4.1.1: Policies and strategies for cultivating wellbeing. Research Question 4.1.1 asked: What do Indigenous youth attending university perceive as the solutions and strategies to enhancing their wellbeing in higher education? In Chapter 2, it was noted that there is a gap in the literature regarding research-derived and Indigenous youth-devised policies and strategies (AIHW, 2018). This research question was posed to address this gap in the literature. It is important as it capitalises on Indigenous youth's voice and agency by giving them the opportunity to reflect and provide recommendations on strategies and policies that can enhance Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provide an overview of the aims, of research questions and their rationales, for the present investigation. For each of the four studies comprising the present investigation, a statement of the research problem, study aims, research questions and their rationale, was presented. Study 1 contributes to the international research literature by analysing and synthesising extant international research that has researched Indigenous youth's wellbeing in higher education, through a systematic review. Study 2 contributes to developing a broad perception of how Indigenous youth conceptualise the nature of wellbeing, including the barriers and enablers of, and suggested strategies for supporting wellbeing, derived by conducting focus groups. Study 3 builds on the findings of Study 2 to enable a more in-depth analysis of Indigenous higher education youth's perspectives on their wellbeing, through individual in-depth interviews. Study 4 is critical in capitalising on higher education youth's perceptions through using individual in-depth interviews to identify the policies and strategies youth believe are important to cultivating their wellbeing. Importantly, Studies 3 and 4 were conducted with the same youth from Study 2, through the medium of individual interviews, thereby getting a more in-depth youth perspective on aspects of wellbeing that are salient for them. In summary, all research questions were framed and structured to allow Indigenous youth to respond with rich, detailed responses that enabled youth to share their voices, personal experiences, worldviews, and recommendations with reference to their wellbeing. The next chapter presents the methodology that was employed to address the aims and research questions posed.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This investigation employed Indigenous and western qualitative research methods to explore how Indigenous youth attending higher education conceptualise, interpret, and make sense of their wellbeing. This research consisted of four interrelated studies (see Chapter 4). The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological approaches that underpinned these studies. The first section of the chapter outlines the chosen Indigenous and western research methods and provides a rationale for employing these methods in this investigation. The second section of the chapter outlines the research design and ethical considerations. The third section discusses the specific procedures employed in this investigation for each of the four studies separately. Overall, this chapter demonstrates the rigorous methodology utilised that capitalised on a synergistic combination of Indigenous and western research methods. It also demonstrates how culturally appropriate research methodologies were respectfully employed while undertaking this research.

Indigenous Research Methods

Decolonising Methodology

As this research investigation puts Indigenous youth worldviews, voices, and knowledges at the epicentre, it was essential to identify, outline, and include methods that appropriately explain and represent the reasoning behind and significance of, engaging Indigenous youth in research. Decolonising methodology encourages researchers to reflect and question the knowledge they learn (Smith, 2012). More specifically, the purpose is to ask questions and learn to locate where the research perspective comes from, such as who is producing the knowledge and whose knowledge and voice is being ignored (Smith, 2012). For a thesis

that explores Indigenous youth and wellbeing and that aims to capitalise on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth, it is essential to recognise where this need for leveraging Indigenous youth voice and agency actually comes from. Much of the reasoning for embracing Indigenous voice and agency is directly linked to Australia's history and its founded colonial systems (Sherwood, 2013). It is important to note that colonial practices constructed by colonial systems oppressed Indigenous peoples, reducing their capacity to have a voice and to self-determine their lives and culture (Smith, 2012). Within this colonial agenda, it is crucial to make the point that First Nations narratives, cultural perspectives, and human experiences in research and education institutions were, and continue to be, ignored by the academy (Kovach 2009; Martin, 2008; Thunig & Jones, 2020) and particularly so with research based on Indigenous wellbeing (Dudgeon et al., 2014; Durmush et al., 2021; Wexler, 2009). As Indigenous peoples, our ways of knowing, being, and doing (Muller, 2014; Smith, 2008; Wilson, 2009) were, and have continued to be, little investigated, or else were taught through a western lens that often continues to colonise and make misleading claims and assumptions about First Nations peoples. Therefore, it is crucial for an Indigenous higher degree research student to 'research back/talk back', as prominent Indigenous researcher, Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) argues:

> Decolonisation is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values which inform research practices. (p. 21)

Smith (2012) identifies that research, stories, and knowledge in Australian society have always been constructed and regulated by colonialism and its historians (mostly white men). For example, Smith (2012, p. 20) says: "The 'talk' about the colonial past is embedded in

our political discourses, our humour, poetry, music, storytelling and other common sense of ways of passing on both narrative of history and an attitude about history.". In addition, Smith (2012) argues that it is fundamental for Indigenous peoples' perspectives and worldviews to be embedded into research, so that they can redefine and talk back to past research that has produced incorrect information and claims. A decolonising perspective lays the foundation for truth-telling to take place, an important and much-needed process in the academy. Decolonising methodology requires Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to reflect on and recognise past history, with truth and perspectives told via an Indigenous lens. As a result, decolonisation is a vital perspective as it enables Indigenous storytelling to emerge, resulting in the exercise of self-determination and healing, which are both essential for Indigenous wellbeing and thriving. Hence, decolonising methodology was applied to this research by utilising Indigenous youth voice and agency to enable youth to define their wellbeing needs.

Yarning Methodology

The importance of conducting culturally appropriate research has led to an important process for all researchers partnering with Indigenous groups and individuals. Along with establishing respectful research relationships and collaborations, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers have employed yarning as a research method (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010; Dunleavy, 2013; Mooney et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2014). Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) emphasise that yarning is important, and it enables "researchers to establish a relationship with Indigenous participants and to collect information during the research interview" (p. 37). This is crucial as research in the past, and sadly in some cases even today, is done with little respect, partnership, cultural competency, or collaboration. Additionally, past dominant ideologies, such as

ethnocentrism and colonisation, were persued in disciplines such as anthropology and the natural sciences (Davis, 2015; Smith, 2012).

For Indigenous people yarning is regarded as narrative or storytelling; essentially it is having a conversation or talk with someone. In Indigenous culture, storytelling and yarning have always been a way of transmitting knowledge, stories, songs, and oral histories (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Importantly, it was how traditional information, culture, and language were passed down to each generation (Mooney et al., 2018). For research that is centred around Indigenous voice, perspectives, and stories, the use of yarning methodology was fundamental. Recognising Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural processes is important and should be embraced, in that it brings Indigenous storytelling to the forefront. The types of yarning that can be applied in the yarning research process include: social yarning, research topic yarning, collaborative yarning, and therapeutic yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Leeson et al., 2016; Robinson, 2018). In the following section the nature and benefits of each of these types of yarning is explained and how these approaches were capitalised upon in this investigation is outlined.

Social yarning

The social yarning process is described by Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010, p. 40) in these terms: "Conversation that takes place before the research or topic yarn is informal and often unstructured, follows a meandering course that is guided by the topic that both people choose to introduce into the discussion". Social yarning can be a conversation either about the research topic or about a non-related research topic (Robinson, 2018). The purpose is to facilitate open dialogue and establish relationship and connection with the participant. Arguably yarning is the most important stage of research, as it breaks down the formality walls and statuses of the researcher and participant (Robinson, 2018). It enables trust to

develop and relationships to be built, is a key to conducting successful research and is one that has been applied for over 65,000 years in Indigenous culture (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). For Study 2 social yarning was practised by the Indigenous insider researcher prior to the focus group as a way of developing rapport and building respectful, trustful, and culturally safe research relationships between the students and research facilitators (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010).

Research topic yarning

Research yarning is described as an unstructured or semi-structured research interview (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). With the yarning focusing solely on the research topic, the purpose is listening to participants' stories and experiences, to better understand the research questions and topics. Research topic yarning is understood to be "a means through which information is gathered, a 'conversation with a purpose' aimed at addressing the fundamental questions of the project" (Leeson, et al., 2016, p. 7). In Study 2, I utilised research topic yarning to explain to the participants the nature of the research and its overall objectives. It is important to take note that yarning as a research method is conducted in a relaxed setting that is interactive in nature for the purpose of participants' stories to make way. During the focus groups, I created a safe and comfortable environment by actively listening, remaining respectful, open and allowing youth to lead the conversation. In addition, I created a relaxed research environment for Indigenous youth by providing morning tea and lunch, enabling everyone to yarn and to connect. This contributed to developing a trustful and open research relationship with these knowledge holders.

Collaborative yarning

The main goal for this style of conversation is for more than two individuals, being participants and researchers, to come together and collaborate (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Importantly, it also involves sharing ideas and information such as research findings to better empower and bring about further change for the participants. Collaborative yarning was practised through Studies 3 and 4, wherein the lead researcher returned back to Indigenous youth to get their thoughts and perspectives on the results.

Therapeutic yarning

Due to the interpersonal nature of yarning methodology, it is likely in some cases that if participants feel comfortable, they will disclose personal information such as a traumatic and emotional experience. This is known as 'therapeutic yarning', where the researcher is told information that was unintended and plays the role of listener and support agent. It is important to also make clear that this is not a counselling yarn but rather a yarn that emerges into a therapeutic one (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). The strength of yarning methodologies is identified by Leeson et al. (2016): "A yarning style represents a way of ensuring cultural safety, respect and the utilisation of First Peoples ontology" (p. 1). Therefore, yarning methodology was vital, as it encourages a culturally safe and respectful research practice. Importantly, therapeutic yarning was practised through making sure the lead researcher was actively listening and showing support to the participants.

Systematic Review

What is a systematic review?

Study 1 consisted of a systematic review to synthesise the extant international research regarding the topic under investigation. A systematic review is a paper that reviews relevant studies, based on formulated research questions, and provides a summary of the evidence about a specific research topic (Alexander, 2020; Denyer & Transfield, 2009). The purpose of a systematic review is to synthesise and present all the knowledge and findings about a specific research topic into one research paper, to enhance researchers' and societies' understanding on a specific topic of interest.

Rationale for Undertaking a Systematic Review

Systematic review was selected as a useful method to employ in this investigation as the results of a systematic review can guide and influence future research and policy, identify gaps in the literature and set the agenda for future research (Alexander, 2020). Additionally, for this reason, a systematic review is noted to be very valuable literature, and is frequently cited in journal articles (Alexander, 2020; Johnson & Hennessy, 2019). Gopalakrishnan and Ganeshkumar (2013) identify the key advantages of conducting systematic reviews:

> Systematic reviews have specific advantages because of using explicit methods which limit bias, draw reliable and accurate conclusions, easily deliver required information to healthcare providers, researchers, and policymakers, help to reduce the time delay in the research discoveries to implementation, improve the generalizability and consistency of results, generation of new hypotheses about subgroups of the study population, and overall they increase precision of the results (p. 12).

Therefore, systematic reviews are effective in that they benefit and inform future research and policy by synthesising and analysing the extant literature on a specific research topic.

Despite the benefits of systematic reviews, there appears to be no systematic review summarising the extant research literature in relation to Indigenous youth's wellbeing when completing a university of higher education degree (see Chapter 2). Hence, a systematic review was deemed the most appropriate and rigorous systematic approach to analysing and synthesising the international research literature to identify new research directions and gaps in current research that explores Indigenous higher education youth student's wellbeing.

Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research methods are carried out to find out about the human experience, worldviews, and how individuals interact with the social world. Importantly, qualitative research methods allow for open-ended responses that reflect narrative-rich responses (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Qualitative research methods were selected as the most suitable research method to undertake Studies 2, 3, and 4. Qualitative research methods as defined by Hammarberg et al. (2016), "are used to answer questions about experience, meaning and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participant" (p. 499). Qualitative research methods are argued to hold important strengths that can contribute to new theory and reflect participants' experiences which give context to the research topic. For instance, Latunde (2016) explains the strengths of qualitative research methods:

> Its strengths are that a topic or issue can be studied in detail, the direction of the study can be changed as needed, it deals with value-based questions, research questions can be added, interview questions can emerge, the information gathered about participants'

experiences provides context, explanations, and complexities about the participants, phenomena may emerge that were not previously known, and findings can be transferable. Additionally, qualitative research builds new theory and explores new areas of research (p. 109).

This research was situated around discourse and is concerned with Indigenous youth's voice and agency. Hence, qualitative research methods were useful to capture Indigenous youth voice and agency as articulated by them about their wellbeing in higher education. The vision and results of this research were driven by Indigenous youth's perspectives, worldviews, experiences, recommendations, social realities, and knowledges. Importantly, qualitative research methods enabled me as an insider Indigenous researcher to analyse and synthesise these important perspectives and Indigenous youth worldviews. Given the critical importance of Indigenous worldviews and perspectives, a qualitative methodology was also selected as being culturally appropriate and powerful in addressing the aims of this research.

Focus Groups

Study 2 capitalises on Indigenous higher education youth's broad perceptions of wellbeing. In study 2, focus groups were selected as the most appropriate qualitative research method to carry out this critical research investigation (see Appendix C for focus group schedule). Focus groups are a research method consisting of a small group of people who have an in-depth discussion with each other and the researcher about an important social issue (Breen, 2007). As a research method, focus groups are widely recognised to facilitate a social space that enables the participants to connect, interact and ultimately produce rich, detailed data. Kook et al. (2019) highlight the strengths of focus groups as a research method: Focus groups, create a shared social space for individuals to interact with each other. In this way, they seek to recreate a more authentic research setting and facilitate open conversations, in

a social setting, it is assumed, that helps generate data and insights that would have been otherwise inaccessible to the researcher (p. 88).

This qualitative study aimed to amplify Indigenous youth voices and wellbeing agency; therefore I deemed it important to utilise focus groups. The overarching vision of the research was to partner with Indigenous youth and discuss ways in which universities and youth themselves can empower their wellbeing at university. The utilisation of focus groups enabled the students and research facilitators to meet as a collective and community and yarn (see yarning methodology section below) concerning their wellbeing. Therefore, focus groups were successful in establishing a culturally safe (Rodriguez et al., 2011) and comfortable environment for the participants and provided support in building respectful relationships with researchers and other participants.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a research method that enables researchers to seek, learn, and understand the human experience (Clandinin, 2006). It recognises the individual person and context and, importantly, how individuals interpret and perceive the social world. Clandinin (2006) makes the point that narrative inquiry is very much about storytelling and experience. Thus, the role of stories/storytelling and narrative is to inform individuals about social institutions and human experience as a whole. Clandinin (2006) also raises important ethical considerations about using narrative inquiry as a method. He notes, for example, "For those of us wanting to learn to engage in narrative inquiry, we need to imagine ethics as being about negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices" (p. 52). Therefore, in the storytelling process it is important to gain consent and negotiation and listen and remain open to the individuals' stories and perspectives. Kirkman (2002, p. 33) identifies the role

of the plot when applied to research in psychology and narrative identity, in the construction of narratives: "I take plot to be that narrative device that confers order, sequence, and meaning on a collection of otherwise isolated events". Indeed, the role of the plot is to transform narrative experience into meaning. Crucially, the purpose of using narrative inquiry is to take human experience and narrative to generate meaning in our social world. Kirkman also argues that these narratives constructed by "human beings" are more than narratives but are rather complex theories. In this case, "Narrative theory allows us to conduct research as though our 'subjects' are human beings with complex theories of their own about the meaning of life" (p. 36). Narrative inquiry was practised in all phases of data collection and analysis.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Studies 3 and 4 capitalise on Indigenous youth's in-depth perceptions of the significance, nature, drivers, and barriers of wellbeing. Thus, youth's perceptions of the strategies that contribute to cultivating their wellbeing. Jamshed (2014, p. 87), notes that "Semi-structured interviews are based on a semi-structured interview guide, which is a schematic presentation of questions or topics and need to be explored by the interviewer". Semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to ask Indigenous youth in-depth questions concerning their wellbeing at university. Additionally, semi-structured interviews enabled the interviewer to follow the question guide to tackle the gaps in data from Study 2 and to seek enriched and more nuanced explanations. The benefits of using semi-structured interviews are discussed by Adams (2015), who said, "If you need to ask probing, open-ended questions and want to know the independent thoughts of each individual in a group" (p. 494). Therefore, semi-structured interviews allow for researchers to ask probing open-end and in-depth questions with individuals who may not be comfortable in a focus group setting.

The critical reason for selecting interviews was to engage each of the ($N = 30$) Indigenous youth with the results from Study 2 and to explore in more depth what wellbeing meant for Indigenous youth attending university. For example, before conducting the semi-structured interviews, all youth were sent a summary to read of the results from a journal article summarising the results of Study 2, which included the results and themes that emerged from the focus groups. It was paramount that we invite Indigenous youth to read the themes and results, as they represent their perspectives and worldviews of wellbeing at university, and allowed member checking (Birt et al., 2016), whereby the researcher goes back to the participants and shares the results from the study to confirm with the participants if the researcher has interpreted and represented their responses accurately and appropriately. This is for the purpose of making the research more creditable, trustworthy, and valid. Importantly, the purpose of member checking was to ensure that the data analysis of youth's responses accurately represented and reflected youth's conceptions of wellbeing.

Another purpose for employing semi-structured interviews in Studies 3 and 4 was to enable Indigenous youth who were less vocal and who responded in short answers through a community/mob mindset rather than from an individual position in the focus groups (Study 2) to freely express their voice, free of judgement from the group setting. This led to extremely rich, detailed data that serves to close the gaps in the data in relation to subjective concepts that requires individual responses, based on individual reflection and experiences with concepts like 'Connection to Country'. As a result, semi-structured individual interviews were deemed valuable in gaining data that better reflects the diverse Indigenous youth voice. Semi-structured interview schedules (see below and Appendix E) were adopted to allow for a flexible interview structure that also enabled the researcher to have a question guide to follow (Jamshed, 2014). Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed yarning

to take place, which enhanced the connection and lessened the formality between the insider researcher and Indigenous youth. An equally important rationale for employing semi-structured interviews was that they allowed the participants (Indigenous youth) to openly discuss and reflect on their own personal experiences and worldview concerning wellbeing determinants and university experiences. Therefore, the utilisation of semi-structured interviews was deemed the most suitable research method to allow participants to express their perspectives in a way that enabled them to openly answer the researchers' questions.

Rationale for Chosen Methodology

The chosen research methodologies outlined above were selected to facilitate the conduct, analysis, and interpretation of the findings of this research. Importantly, each chosen methodology places as its foundation the vision and practice of this research investigation, leveraging Indigenous voice and agency. Notably, all of the methods selected in this study are complementary research methods, which engage with narrative and Indigenous voice, and advocate for culturally respectful and inclusive research practices. More specifically, Indigenous research methodologies such as decolonising methodology and yarning methodology are the drivers of this methodological foundation. Hence, this investigation has applied Indigenous methodology to reflect the experiences and worldviews of Indigenous youth. The rationale for choosing both western and Indigenous research methods is that they complement each other in a way that focuses on human experiences, narrative, and perspectives (Peltier, 2018). This is importantly relevant for this significant research that puts Indigenous youth voice and agency at the forefront.

Insider and Outsider Perspectives

It is important for researchers to locate themselves and practice reflexivity, which involves recognising one's social position and its impact on the research. Importantly, by identifying how their social position can inform and guide their interpretation of the research, and ultimately their interactions with the participants (Miligan, 2016). As a proud Wailwan and Gomeroi woman who belongs to the Indigenous youth community and who is under the age of 25, I also bring my own personal experiences, worldviews, perspectives and knowledges to the research investigation. My positioning as an insider and as an Indigenous youth who is also studying at a higher education institution, ultimately enabled me to easily connect, yarn and build open, trustful and respectful relationships with Indigenous youth during the data collection process. Smith (2012) emphasises: "Insider researcher has to be ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research" (p. 140). This is imperative as throughout this investigation and beyond the thesis, I acknowledge my position and moral obligation to perform culturally safe and inclusive research that benefits Indigenous communities and elevates their voices and agency. In the focus group we were able to discuss topics that young Indigenous people can relate to and connect with. My insider position made the yarning process easy, enabled the focus group setting to feel casual and comfortable, and broke down the formal walls. Importantly, as an Indigenous youth who belongs to the Indigenous youth community and knows through personal experience what it is like studying at university, I personally felt like I could bring my own experience into the conversation, to help build connection and rapport with the participants. Voicing their opinions freely to an insider rather than to an outsider prevented Indigenous youth from feeling being judged or not being fully understood (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012;Wilson, 2009).

While I am an Indigenous youth studying in higher education and was the same age as the knowledge holders, interestingly, when travelling off Country or away from where I was

born and raised, I am also considered an outsider. This is evident on the basis of two factors: 1) the geographical location I reside in; and 2) the Country where my family is from, my Nation. As a proud Wailwan and Gomeroi woman, my family is from Warren, NSW. However, I was born and raised in Sydney. I acknowledge that when I travel to places off my Country and places other than Sydney (the place I was born and raised in), that I am an outsider. Importantly, I am stepping on another nation's Country, who holds its own set values and ontologies. Each Country in Aboriginal traditional culture has its own kinship systems connected strongly to their spirituality and lore systems—rules for how we must live, which is known as the Dreaming (Grieves, 2009). Additionally, as a city woman, I also recognise I am privileged and have access to resources that my Indigenous brothers and sisters living in remote and rural communities do not have access to. Therefore, I understand that each community has its own needs and has its share of social issues which some places may not have so much of. This is evident where in the focus group at the Batchelor Institute, students were speaking about social issues in their community and more specifically the lack of health services. Due to not belonging to the Batchelor community my colleague and I felt like outsiders, whereby we were asking questions about the nature of the community. By practising reflexivity and by recognising my social position as both an insider and outsider researcher, I am acknowledging that my own thoughts and personal experiences as an Indigenous youth can shape and inform this research (Breen, 2007).

Study 1: Systematic Review of First Nations Youth Voice and Agency

Purpose

The purpose of Study 1 was to identify, synthesise, and critically analyse the findings from extant international research that capitalises on Indigenous youth voice and agency, to investigate Indigenous higher education youth wellbeing (see Chapter 4).

Research Design

Systematic review firstly involves formulating and framing the research questions to be addressed (Hennessy & Johnson, 2019). This step is paramount as it sets up the scope of the systematic review and provides the foundation of what the review will be investigating (see previous discussion). In Study 1 the overarching research question posed was: What is the nature and scope of international research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing? What has international research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous higher education youth identified as the drivers and barriers to wellbeing? (also see Chapter 4). The next step involved designing the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This process identified keywords (e.g., Indigenous, wellbeing, voice, agency, success, and barriers) that are essential in identifying relevant literature in the databases and, equally the keywords to be excluded (e.g., early intervention, teenagers, nursing, and disease; see Appendix B). Next, a keyword search strategy was undertaken to identify the critical search terms (see Appendix B) and the search was limited to literature from 2000-2020 that focused on Indigenous higher education youth and their wellbeing.

Once the research question, keywords, and search strategy were finalised, two methods were employed to search for relevant literature: Forward reference searching and backward reference searching. Forward reference searching involves locating articles of interest through databases (Hinde & Spackman, 2014). A variety of databases (e.g., ProQuest, ERIC,

EBSCOhost, Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, and Informit Complete) were searched to identify relevant literature. Backward referencing was undertaken by firstly selecting an article of interest and then looking at the article's reference list to identify further useful articles relating to Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing (Hinde & Spackman, 2014).

Relevant publications were identified and stored into EndNote, and the Endnote file was imported into Covidence. Covidence is a web-based software that enables researchers to find systematic reviews that reflect their topic of interest through the process of abstract screening (Babineau, 2014). Four coders undertook abstract screening in Covidence. Conflicts were resolved as they developed by me as the lead researcher. Next, the full text of selected articles was scrutinised by two coders. Any conflicts that arose were resolved by the coders. This resulted in a final set of articles for analysis to address the overarching research question posed.

Data Analysis

Once relevant literature was identified through searches on multiple databases, abstract screening, and full text analysis utilising Covidence, each journal article was evaluated and analysed on the basis of the specific research questions posed (see Chapter 4).

Study 2: Identifying Indigenous Higher Education Youth's Broad Perceptions of Wellbeing

Purpose

The purpose of Study 2 was to capitalise on Indigenous youth's broad perceptions of their wellbeing.

Participants

Participants were a total of ($N = 30$) higher education Indigenous students. Students attended four institutions—three Australian universities and one higher education institute. These included: The University of Sydney in New South Wales, The University of Queensland [Brisbane] in Queensland, Charles Darwin University, and The Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

Participant Sample for Studies 2, 3, and 4

University	Geographical Location	Age	Gender
The University of Sydney	Urban x 6	20 x 3	F x 3
	Rural x 1	21 x 3	M x 5
	Remote x 1	24 x 1	
		25 x 1	

The University of Queensland	Urban x 2 Rural x 2 Remote x 1	19 x 2 20 x 2 22 x 1	F x 3 M x 2
Batchelor Institute	Urban x 7 Rural x 4 Remote x 5	18 x 1 19 x 4 20 x 4 21 x 4 22 x3	F x 11 M x 5
Charles Darwin University	Urban x 1	24	F
Total	30 students		

 At the University of Sydney there was a total of eight students (5 male and 3 female) in the focus group. At the University of Queensland Brisbane campus there was a total of five students (3 female students and 2 male students) in the focus group. At Charles Darwin University there was one female student. Due to only one student participating, the setting was more of an interview style rather than a focus group. This change of dynamic (yarning session) enabled us to gather rich detailed data. At the Batchelor Institute we had a total

sample of 16 students (11 female students and 5 male students) who participated in the focus group. This group of students was studying in an away-from-base mode, undertaking an Aboriginal health practitioner course in which they studied and boarded at Batchelor Institute campus during a two-week session, intensively.

Procedures

All participants involved in this research investigation were granted the right to choose whether or not they wanted to participate in Study 2 and Study 3. Ethical clearance was granted by ACU Ethics Committee (Ethics Number: 2018-189HI). All participants ($N = 30$) consented either via a paper consent form or through an online consent survey via Qualtrics [approved by ACU Ethics Committee]. In Study 1, all Indigenous youth received an email via their higher education institution inviting them to express their interest. This included an online information letter. Students who joined the focus group last minute on the day had a printed paper copy of the information letter and consent letter to read and sign.

Although this study was not deemed harmful to Indigenous youth participating, as confirmed by ACU Ethics Committee, the topic of wellbeing is diverse and subjective in nature such that some topics or concepts discussed could lead to emotional distress. To prevent this from arising in the focus groups in Study 2, an accredited psychologist and Indigenous researcher attended the majority of the focus groups. In addition, all students after participating in Study 2 focus groups were emailed contacts for psychological services if they needed to converse with a professional psychologist or counsellor.

Indigenous youth were firstly invited to participate in the study through personal contact and an email via their respective university Indigenous Student Unit, explaining the research and

calling for expressions of interest. All students applying to participate were accepted. However, in most cases on the day of the focus groups in Study 2, many participants did not show up, which led to new students being recruited through word-of-mouth and through participants' friendship circles, and consent forms to be signed on the day. Participation involved a 3-4 hour focus group with either one or two Indigenous researchers (one female, and one male) who served as focus group facilitators. Each student received a $100 Prezzee Gift voucher for their time participating in the focus group as an honorarium to account for travel costs and their expertise and knowledge. Focus groups were filmed, recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

Firstly, youth were shown a wellbeing definition from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: "Wellbeing is 'the psychological, cognitive, social and physical qualities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life'" (OECD, 2017, p. 19). Next, youth were shown western and Indigenous models of wellbeing (Dudgeon et al., 2017 (see Figure 5.1); Marsh et al., 2019; see Chapter 3) and asked whether each model's elements applied to them.

Figure 5.1*: Model of Social and Emotional Wellbeing*

© Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly, 2013

Figure 5.2*: Multidimensional Model of Student Wellbeing*
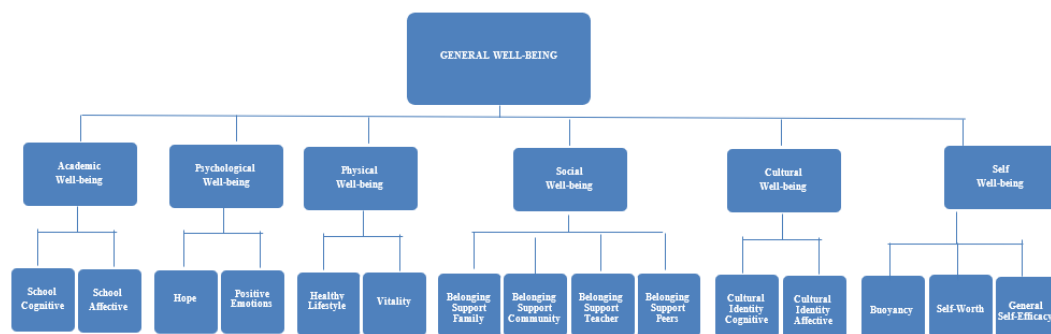
After the initial session 1- hour, a break was held which allowed for lunch, a toilet break, and yarning. The afternoon session allowed for Indigenous youth to discuss and conceptualise strategies and recommendations for new research directions (see Appendix D for the focus group's schedule).

Data Analysis

All focus group data were transcribed. After the transcription process, the transcripts were loaded into the computer qualitative data analysis software NVIVO (Elliott, 2018) for the coding and thematic analysis process.

Thematic analysis was undertaken to analyse, interpret, and transform the data into themes. Themes are patterns of concepts that are repeated in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hence, when a theme emerges in the data frequently, it indicates to the researcher that it is an important concept, is meaningful to the participants and therefore will contribute to answering the research questions (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a six-phase process: "1. Familiarising yourself with the data. 2. Generating initial codes. 3. Searching for themes. 4. Reviewing themes. 5. Defining and naming themes. 6. Producing the report" (p. 87). This six-phase process was utilised to analyse the data in this investigation.

Phase 1. This phase in the data analysis process required getting familiar with the data. This included the transcription process, reading the data frequently, and writing down any initial ideas that emerged.

Phase 2. The initial coding process involved highlighting any codes that seemed to respond to the research question.

Phase 3. The third phase involved reviewing the codes and identifying any potential themes that were frequently discussed by Indigenous youth. Importantly, it involved gathering all the codes highlighted and merging them into the appropriate themes.

Phase 4. The fourth phase was ensuring the themes created represented the codes appropriately and accurately. This was a crucial step as the themes needed to represent the voices of Indigenous youth accurately. To ensure this step was conducted correctly, Studies 1 and 3 included the reporting back process to Indigenous youth, granting Indigenous youth the right to determine how themes and ultimately the research, represent their worldviews and perspectives.

Phase 5. The fifth phase proposes the importance and necessary practice of ongoing analysis and defining and naming the themes and data. This is imperative as the themes firstly answer the research questions and secondly put the story together, creating a narrative to the thesis. The theme names must also represent the perspectives of youth.

Phase 6. The last recommended phase of Braun and Clarke (2006) is producing a scholarly report on the analysis. In this case, the data were analysed to produce this PhD thesis and publications that aim to capitalise on Indigenous youth voice and agency to enhance Indigenous youth wellbeing research.

Importantly, the thematic analysis process is influenced by the researcher's intention of what to code a priori, in order to yield concepts and themes to answer the research questions (Stuckey, 2015). Ultimately, previous research and theoretical perspectives of Indigenous wellbeing models also influenced what concepts and codes to search for, such as themes like cultural identity, family, and kinship (Dudgeon et al., 2017). In addition to the a priori, emergent grounded coding (Blair, 2015) was employed. Both coding techniques are defined by Stemler (2001). Stemler (2001) discusses two approaches to the coding of data: a priori

coding, where codes are created beforehand and applied to the text, and emergent coding, where codes are drawn from the text. The emergent coding approach was undertaken where codes were identified from the transcript.

To ensure the data analysis process was rigorous and reliable, there were two coders. The first coder was a PhD student and Indigenous insider researcher member and the second coder was a non-Indigenous research staff member. The second coder brought a fresh perspective and new set of lenses to the data analysis process. The second coder used the first coder's code book as a guide to the coding process. Having a second coder enabled the data to be analysed and coded twice. Importantly, this enabled the second coder to identify any important codes or themes that were not identified by the first coder. Inter-rater reliability checks were undertaken to assess the reliability of the coding (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Roberts et al., 2019). Three themes were randomly selected to calculate the inter-rater reliability scores: Cultural Identity (0.23), Sense of Self (0.66) and Spirituality (0.37). According to McHugh (2012), the themes' Cohen's Kappa scored between fair (0.41-0.60) to substantial levels (0.61-0.80) of agreement.

This also ensured the data were analysed at their full capacity. This ensured the data analysis process afforded creditability (Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility is vital and, according to Tobin and Begley (2004), "Credibility addresses the 'fit' between respondents' views and the researcher's representation of them" (p. 3). Hence, the data analysis and coding processes within this investigation were rigorous and reflected the voices of Indigenous youth accurately and appropriately.

Study 3: In-depth analysis of Indigenous Higher Education Youth's Perceptions of the Significance, Nature, and Drivers of, and Barriers to Wellbeing

Purpose

The purpose of Study 3 was to capitalise on in-depth perspectives from Indigenous higher education youth about their perceptions on the significance, nature, and enablers of and barriers to their wellbeing.

Participants

The participants for Study 3 were the same as those from Study 2 (see Table 1). However, out of 30 students ($N = 7$) participated in the semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

Procedures

Semi-structured individual interviews were employed in Study 3 for the purpose of gaining in-depth responses from Indigenous youth. Semi-structured interviews employed decolonising methodology to ensure Indigenous youth voice and agency was given primacy in Study 3. Firstly, youth undertook social yarning with the researcher to establish rapport. Secondly, youth were engaged in a series of semi-structured interview questions that addressed the key research questions (Chapter 4). Finally, youth were asked to share their perceptions of the preliminary results emanating from Study 2, to serve as expert checkers of the findings. This enabled youth to confirm if the themes that emerged from the data truly represent their voice, perspectives, and worldviews appropriately and meaningfully.

Prior to the semi-structured individual interviews in Studies 3 and 4, all students ($N = 30$) who participated in Study 2 received an email to their student email address inviting them to participate in the next stage of the research (Study 3 & Study 4). Study 3 and Study 4 involved myself, the Indigenous insider researcher, conducting online one-one Microsoft Teams interviews or phone interviews with Indigenous youth. The online or phone interviews took approximately one hour and all students were provided a schedule with time slots, which enabled them to choose their preferred time for the interview. Prior to the scheduled phone/Teams interview, students received a summary of the results from Study 2. Participants were compensated for their time and received an online $50 Prezzee gift voucher.

Data Analyses

The semi-structured individual interviews were transcribed by a transcribing company. Once the transcripts were completed, they were coded by myself and another First Nations researcher through the word frequency count process. This included myself and the other researcher counting and reporting how many times a theme was mentioned by the ($N = 7$) participants, and finding major themes that emerged from the data in response to each of the specific Study 3 and 4 research questions (see Chapter 4). The inter-rater reliability score was calculated to be 1.00 (McHugh, 2012).

Study 4: Indigenous Higher Education Youth's Perceptions of Potential Strategies to Cultivate their Wellbeing

Purpose

The purpose of Study 4 was to see what important strategies and policies Indigenous youth think are paramount in cultivating their wellbeing (through the use of individual semi-structured interviews).

Participants

The participants in Study 4 were the same as for Study 2 (see Table 1 above).

Procedures

The procedures undertaken for Study 4 were the same as Study 3, in that both studies were conducted at the same time through the research method of semi-structured interviews with the same ($N = 7$) Indigenous higher education youth from Study 2. However, Study 4 gave Indigenous youth the chance to identify potential strategies and policies they deemed important in cultivating their wellbeing.

Data Analyses

The data analyses employed were the same as for Study 3 in that the data emerged from the semi-structured interviews.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the methodological approaches that underpinned this research investigation. Among a variety of western research methods, qualitative research methods, focus groups and semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate methods for the present investigation. Indigenous research methodologies such as yarning methodology and decolonising methodology were discussed, to reflect the

purpose of leveraging Indigenous youth voice and developing trustful relationships in research. For each of the four critical studies was discussed in detail the research design and procedures. Data analysis and coding procedures were explained step by step. In sum, the methodological approaches were presented in this chapter to justify the employing the selected perspectives and practices that served to amplify Indigenous youth's voice and agency.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION STUDY 1: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION YOUTH'S WELLBEING, VOICE AND AGENCY

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of Study 1, which is a systematic review. The purpose of Study 1 was to identify, synthesise, and analyse international, qualitative research that focused on Indigenous students' wellbeing and voice and agency in higher education. First, the results of research question (RQ) 1.1.1 investigating the nature and scope of international research on Indigenous youth's wellbeing are presented. Second, results pertaining to RQ 1.2.2, elucidating the drivers of Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing are discussed. Third, findings of RQ 1.3.3 identifying the barriers to Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing are presented. Each section concludes with a summative discussion to highlight the significance of the research findings.

Overview RQ 1.1.1

RQ 1.1.1 asked: What is the nature and scope of international qualitative research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions to explore Indigenous wellbeing?

Results RQ 1.1.1: Nature and Scope of International Research on Indigenous Youth Wellbeing and Voice and Agency

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Qualitative Studies Checklist Findings

A total of 28 primary studies that met the selection criteria (see Appendix B) were identified. Utilising the CASP qualitative studies checklist (CASP, 2021; also see Appendix B) the nature and scope of the 28 papers engaging with Indigenous higher education youth's voice and agency is outlined in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1

Analysis of Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Studies

Checklist

CASP Qualitative Checklist Questions	Findings from 28 Studies (%)
1. Was there a clear statement of the Aims?	All 28 (100%) included studies showed a clear statement of aims.
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	All 28 (100%) included studies that used qualitative methodology.
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	26 (89%) studies justified and discussed their research design and use of methods.
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	24 (85%) studies explained the recruitment strategy process.
5. Were the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	24 (85%) studies explained and justified how methods and data were collected.

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	21 (75%) studies highlighted the relationship between the researchers and participants.
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	26 (89%) studies outlined ethical considerations.
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	24 (85%) studies presented details of the data analysis process.
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	All 28 (100%) studies presented a clear statement of findings.

Results: Frequency count of themes

Utilising the SEWB and MSWM models (see Figure 6.1) a frequency count was undertaken of key themes representing Indigenous students' construal of wellbeing. The most frequently represented themes were: Social determinants ($n = 272$), which included social environmental conditions that affected Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing, including: Racism, discrimination, and socio-economic status. The second highest scoring theme was Psychological determinants *($n = 211$)* such as a student's reference to their mental health or connection to mind and emotions. The third highest scoring theme was Cultural wellbeing ($n = 178$) which entailed both Cultural Affective—students' connection to culture, and Cultural Cognitive—students mentioning their level of cultural knowledge. Following was Social wellbeing ($n = 177$) which referred to Indigenous students mentioning their experience of receiving peer support, teacher support, or community support. Next, Connection to Community ($n = 131$) pertained to students' connection to their Indigenous community. Following this were Family and Kinship ($n = 92$). Other themes included: Self-wellbeing ($n = 73$); and Political determinants ($n = 62$). Other themes less frequently counted were: Connection to Body ($n = 11$); Connection to

Country ($n = 7$); Physical wellbeing ($n = 5$); and Academic wellbeing ($n = 5$). In addition, aspects such as students' connection to culture, family, and kinship were indeed frequently addressed, but only approximately half as much as were the social components. Research that focused on Indigenous students' academic and physical wellbeing was rare.
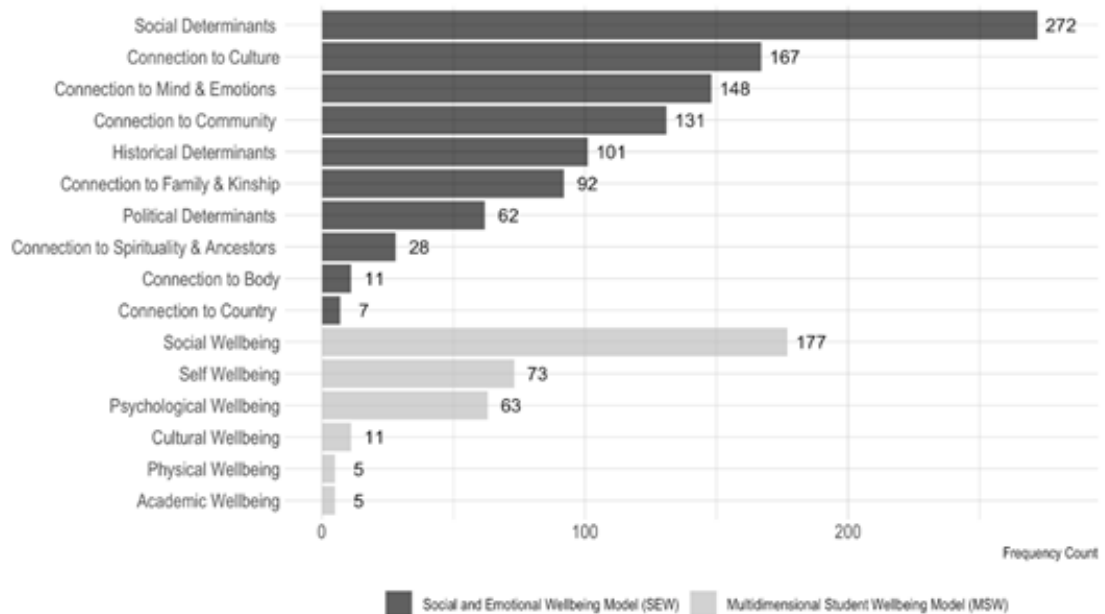
Figure 6.1. **Theme frequency count**

Note: Cultural wellbeing=Cultural Cognitive and Cultural Affective. Cultural cognitive=youth voicing whether they understand and hold knowledge of their culture. Cultural affective=youth expressing if whether they feel a sense of belonging and connection to their culture within the higher education environment (Marsh et al., 2019). Social wellbeing=family, peer, community, and teacher support. For this investigation, teacher support came from academic staff within higher education institutions.

Discussion RQ 1.1.1

The objective of RQ 1.1.1 was to identify the nature and scope of international literature which engaged with the voices and agency of Indigenous higher education students and their wellbeing. Analysis of the findings from the 28 studies showed that the international research capitalising on the voices and agency of Indigenous youth and their wellbeing was limited in nature and scope. Indeed, many of the 28 studies had limited student and youth perspectives. Studies displayed a higher volume of perspectives from university staff members and community stakeholders. In addition, many of the selected studies lacked a student wellbeing focus, and wellbeing was often assumed or inferred, rather than being a direct research focus. Only 24 out of the 28 papers provided a justification of the choice of research methods and an explanation as to how the data were collected. The latter seems surprising, given that it is important for researchers to justify their methodological approaches and data collection process to provide the reader with adequate information to understand, be able to replicate, and critique the research. The justification of methods could involve researchers revealing whether there were Indigenous researchers conducting the research, whether community consultations had taken place, and if Indigenous methodology was used to inform the research theory and practice.

Similarly, only 21 out of the 28 papers considered acknowledging how the participant and researcher relationship was established and developed. This is problematic as historically, research has been used as a tool to weaponise rather than empower and benefit Indigenous peoples and communities. Often, the outcome of research has resulted in little positive change for Indigenous communities, with their voices and agency being silenced. Therefore, it is critical for researchers to be transparent about how they develop respectful and culturally safe relationships with Indigenous participants and communities. The latter

enables researchers to be accountable for their actions; to reflect and ensure the motives of the research meet community needs; and consider factors such as reflexivity, power dynamics, and privilege. Future research could benefit from revised procedures for the appraisal of research with Indigenous populations that are inclusive of: Indigenous researchers, Indigenous methodology, Indigenous theory, and Indigenous communities' voices and agency.

Analysis of the frequency of themes also revealed that Indigenous higher education students voiced social determinants and cultural determinants as being integral to their wellbeing. For instance, connection to culture and family and kinship were reported in the findings as the most frequently mentioned themes, in comparison to themes such as physical and academic wellbeing, which were less-often voiced by youth. To some extent this was expected, considering previous research with First Nations higher education youth in Australia, which found the importance of culture and social determinants for youth's wellbeing (Durmush et al., 2021; Powell, 2017). Consistently with other research (Bourke, 2018; Dockery, 2010; Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021; Wexler, 2009), the systematic review identified that culture for Indigenous peoples is strongly associated with wellbeing. Cultural connection and engagement have been shown to enhance the overall wellbeing of Indigenous peoples (Dudgeon et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2018; Salmon et al., 2019), providing individuals with "a sense of belonging, purpose, social support and self-worth" (Shepherd et al., 2017, p. 1). Other social determinants and environmental factors, such as cultural safety and racism, are also proven determinants of Indigenous wellbeing (Bin-Sallik, 2003; Macedo et al., 2019; Priest et al., 2011; Shepherd et al., 2017). For instance, First Nations health advocate and leader Dr Pat Anderson AO has explained how racism is the leading cause of ill-health and an influence upon inequitable access to resources such

as education, employment, and housing: *"On an individual level, exposure to racism is associated with psychological distress, depression, poor quality of life, and substance misuse, all of which contribute significantly to the overall ill-health experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people"* (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, 2013). Therefore, racism has a detrimental impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of an individual. This implies that higher education institutions could benefit from future research which capitalises on Indigenous youth voices and agency, to guide and implement cultural safety and wellbeing practices.

Results RQ 1.2.2: The Drivers of Indigenous Youth Wellbeing in Higher Education

Overview

RQ 1.2.2 asked: What has international qualitative research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth identified as the drivers of wellbeing?
The following findings highlighted that some themes can be both drivers of and barriers to Indigenous youth's wellbeing.

Results

Indigenous support units and centres. Students advocated that having a set place and space such as an Indigenous centre where Indigenous students and staff can meet, is fundamental to wellbeing and developing a sense of belonging. For example, an Australian First Nations student reported that: "Tjabal provides that place for interaction, for community development and through having events, we celebrate together, we mourn together. Not feeling alone on our journeys is so helpful" (Powell, 2017, p. 38). Another First Nations student from Australia shared the importance of centres providing access to peer support: "The biggest one is that sense of community and we are like a melting pot of Indigenous peoples from around the country. I think the peer support is really beneficial

and if you didn't have Tjabal there wouldn't be that meeting place for them" (Powell 2017, p. 62). A Māori student also explained, "It did help to see another Māori face in the room . . . you kind of feel like, 'Oh, I'm not just biting off more than what I can chew here" (Chittick et al., 2019, p. 18).

A student also reflected on the importance of Elders and community members being present within the higher education space.

> There were no Elders or community around when I first started in Education and it was a really wobbly journey for me. But things changed and all of a sudden we had an Elder in residence and wise old people walking around helping to guide us. Some days I went up to uni just to talk to them about how to cope with walking in two worlds, how to manage feeling black but learning white (Trimmer et al., 2018, p. 64).

Hence students advocated having Elders and community members as role models and leaders in higher education spaces as a powerful and an important cultural support in guiding Indigenous students throughout higher education.

Connection to peer support. In many of the included studies youth identified the role of their peer community in supporting and motivating them to continue and complete their studies. In particular, Indigenous youth expressed that having peer support positively affected their wellbeing, whereas not being able to access peer support affected their mental health, overall wellbeing, and commitment to their studies. A First Nations student from Australia stated "Having a supportive community definitely affects my wellbeing. If I don't have the support of people around me then I think it would be very difficult to be

able to focus on my studies and be healthy mentally" (Powell, 2017, p. 37). Another First Nations student from Australia emphasised, "I developed my own little network of about three or four of us who were all studying about the same time and supporting each other. They weren't necessarily in the same field as me. It was just a way of having a bit of a rant about how hard research is or [laughs] 'Oh, my supervisor wants this [laughs], that sort of thing' (Barney, 2018a, p. 18). These comments suggest that peer support during higher education courses enables wellbeing via moral support, rapport, and humour. Hence, connection to Indigenous peer support is identified by youth as a driver to their wellbeing, and therefore the suggested implication for universities is to ensure Indigenous students are provided with the opportunity to connect with their Indigenous peers.

Family and kinship. Studying, for many students, required sacrificing time with family. One Australian First Nations student expressed the reality of study and the challenges it brings with regard to negotiating one's study, personal life, and overall wellbeing: "It takes that sort of sacrifice; it takes that sort of negotiating with your family" (Barney, 2018a, p. 19). Studying away from home can be a challenge especially if a student is the first person in their family to study at a higher education level. For instance, "With my family it's been a little bit difficult because as I said, I'm the first person to go to university, some of my family members kind of think that I'm almost making myself be better than them and trying to one up them in one sense" (Powell, 2017, p 36). The latter refers to lateral violence, which refers to shaming, excluding or bullying a person from the same culture and community. Underprivileged groups are susceptible to lateral violence, where members deflect the intergenerational and oppressive violence from colonisation onto community members from the same cultural group (Clark, 2017). For many students, there is a duty to support, and a moral obligation to serve family and community whilst

trying to pursue a higher education at the same time. For example, "I always have to make sure that my assignments are done as soon as I get them, when that phone rings and it's family calling, I know I am in the car and driving back to community, that's just how it is" (Toombs & Gordon, 2010, p. 15). Similarly, a Māori student noted as a key barrier: "The interruptions of whānau/hapū/iwi [extended family/subtribes/tribes] who need support in life generally. There is a pull when family calls for help and the studies go on the back burner while decisions and help are put into place" (Theodore et al., 2017, p. 126). Therefore, higher education can cause many students to juggle responsibilities and roles, and thus can be a challenge to their relationships with family and thus wellbeing. Hence, family and kinship were identified as important drivers to Indigenous wellbeing.

Resilience. Notably, in the studies reviewed youth addressed what kept them motivated to continue their tertiary studies. For instance, for one student it was maintaining stress levels: "I just go about my own business, keep my stress down, come to uni every day and if I can, maintain my stress level" (Toombs, 2011, p. 3), whilst for other Indigenous students it was proving people wrong, such as teachers who questioned their ability to complete their studies, that motivated them to keep studying. For example, "It was teachers telling me I couldn't [make it] which made me just push harder" (Mayeda et al., 2014, p. 175). For others it was proving the negative racist stereotypes wrong and being a successful positive role model for the next generation of Indigenous people that motivated studying. For instance:

I think that for me success is overcoming that like, "You're Indigenous, you don't go to uni", sort of stereotype. For me, I think that's success and I think telling other people, like other kids because where I'm from, I'm from

119

Cherbourg, it's like this little Aboriginal mission that no one really gets out of, and for me that's just like, so big, so I think for me it's just like telling other kids and my cousins and everyone at home that they can do it too. That for me is success (Lydster & Murray, 2018, p. 113).

The underrepresentation and lack of Indigenous people studying higher education provided some Indigenous students with the resilience and drive to continue studying: "From a Māori perspective, because of all the negativity and the lack of brown faces. Absolutely—that was my number one drive . . . was that it can be done" (Chittick et al., 2019, p. 17). Hence, resilience is a critical driver to Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing, enabling students to overcome the challenges studying brings.

Discussion RQ 1.2.2

Analysis of the enablers of wellbeing voiced by Indigenous higher education youth are significant for informing the shaping of future policy and improved educational outcomes for higher education. The findings revealed the importance of Indigenous student centres and units in providing a culturally safe place of belonging for Indigenous students, as well as peer support and family and kinship, which motivated youth to continue to pursue higher education despite having to juggle family obligations and study commitments. These results add to the growing body of research which has identified the benefits of Indigenous support centres, student peer role models, and family and kinship support (Benton et al., 2021; Brady, 2012; Trudgett, 2009). These results also imply the need for higher education institutions to employ Elders and community members to provide cultural understanding and support to Indigenous students. The results also imply the usefulness of providing Indigenous students with peer mentors to enable support and role modelling. Notably, resilience and having strength to remain strong during challenging times at

university were key to youth's wellbeing. Future research could further explore the relationship between resilience and wellbeing for Indigenous higher education youth in order to support Indigenous students' resilience and overall wellbeing.

Results RQ 1.3.3: **The Barriers of Indigenous Youth Wellbeing in Higher Education**

Overview

RQ 1.3.3 asked: What has international qualitative research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth attending higher education identified as the barriers to wellbeing?

Results

    Lack of cultural safety. Some students reported that the higher education environment was not culturally appropriate. Western styles of teaching are often based on requiring students to learn individually, which can be a barrier for some Indigenous students who may learn better collectively, as Indigenous culture and teachings and ways of knowing, being, and doing depend on collectivity, rather than individual means (Kovach, 2009; Mayeda et al., 2014; Wexler, 2009). As voiced by a First Nations student from Australia:

> A lot of Indigenous people are comfortable talking in small groups, and not large groups. In some lectures you may have up to 150 students in the one room and that's a scary factor when you don't have enough confidence in yourself to publicly speak or to publicly ask questions. So therefore a lot of students will internally close themselves in and say I don't understand and walk away from it (Kippen et al., 2006, p. 7).

A Māori student advocated: "I think the university should push for that kind of collective learning rather than individual learning. Because I think that's how we flourish, and I think that's how our ancestors have worked, and the way our culture is structured" (Mayeda et al., 2014, p. 174).

The different Western teaching styles and under-representation of Indigenous academics and Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum were also identified by students to be a continuous issue, leading many students to navigate two worlds (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and sacrifice their cultural identity. For example, a Māori student describes: "University is very much a Pākehā institution. . . . Māori students feel like they leave their identity, leave their culture, at the door" (Amundsen, 2019, p. 418).

Indigenous students also reported being embarrassed about being treated as 'black experts': "The lecturer said this week we're focusing on Indigenous women, I kind of almost cringe at the time, because everyone looks at me and thinks I know everything about it" (Barney, 2016, p. 6). Some students emphasised that the higher education environment was racist, noting that:

> I was subjected to sitting through one class where the lecturer advocated for the 2007 [Northern Territory] Intervention by stating most Indigenous men were drunks, was shown images of deceased Indigenous people in a video about the Stolen Generation in class without warning (and was told I lost class participation marks when I went outside because I was upset), and was questioned by a class why my grandfather didn't just sue the government for being part of the Stolen Generation (Schwartz, 2018, p. 12).

Another student reported that lecturers also questioned their identity: Well, I had one lecturer, and in a group of other white people said, "Oh, you're the Indigenous student, aren't you", and I said, "Yeah", and he said, "Oh, how are you, Koori. You don't look … ". I sort of just shrank. He was probably thinking he was being really open and oh, no, it was so embarrassing" (Kippen et al., 2006, p. 6).

Similarly, a Māori student identified that racist assumptions and stereotypes within their university were common and impacted on their wellbeing, "A lot of people just say, 'Oh they only got into med school because they're Māori or Pacific.' But not no they worked their butt off to get in there! You have to have a really good GPA to get into med school whatever race you are. So I guess there is racism in that sense of competitiveness at university" (Mayeda et al., 2014, p. 175). A Mixtec Mexican Indigenous college student advocated that college classes should embrace students' cultural identity, and foster activities that enable students to share their cultural identity and thus feel culturally safe and comfortable:

> So, I believe it's important to have classes or workshops or at least identify each student with their own culture, with their identity and value that child, respect that child and not make fun of him because […] making fun of a child because of his identity, certain identity… to be from a culture, it closes the door for that child. It's like they feel embarrassed and next time they aren't going to say they're Mixtec [Ñuu Savi] because someone made fun of him or her (Sánchez, 2020, p. 38).

The presence of successful Indigenous peers in higher education was perceived by Indigenous students as motivating. A Pacific Islander student from Tonga emphasised:

"When we see other Pacific Islanders doing it, we tend to follow the same pathway …
Seeing somebody else who has done it, that's a pretty big thing. It's helped, coming to uni,
first year, seeing other Tongans who have succeeded in the same field. It's just given you
that extra push, to work that little bit harder" (Mayeda et al., 2014, p. 172).

Lack of culturally appropriate wellbeing services. In the included studies,
Indigenous students advocated for more inclusive social and emotional wellbeing services.
A First Nations student from Australia advocated for a more inclusive wellbeing service: "I
think the promotion or addition of LGBTQI services or mentors to Nura Gili programs
would be extremely beneficial" (Schwartz, 2018, p. 19). Another Australian First Nations
student, reflecting on their experience with the Student Disability Unit, said, "I had a really
hard time talking with [Student Disability Unit] just to get special consideration for exams
and I felt like I didn't get enough help"(Schwartz, 2018, p. 19). Students felt that it was the
university's responsibility and duty to provide accessible and culturally safe wellbeing
programs and services that connect better with Indigenous students' social and emotional
wellbeing needs.

> I feel like they should be a bit more responsible for our mental health. A lot of
> the courses put us under a lot of pressure and they do run a mental health week
> but sometimes I feel like it doesn't necessarily apply- it isn't appropriate for
> Indigenous people, it's a little bit hard to connect with it as well. So I don't
> necessarily engage in those activities, it seems a little bit distant from us and
> what we need (Powell, 2017, p. 56).

Home sickness. Many Indigenous students who lived far away from higher
education institutions were required to move away from home and leave loved ones behind
in order to pursue a higher education pathway. Indigenous higher education students living

in regional, rural, and remote areas reported that there were many challenges whilst navigating living out of home. Much of these challenges burdened their social and emotional wellbeing. For example, a First Nations student from Australia explained the difficulty of living away from family whilst managing living costs, and acknowledged it as an issue for all students studying away from home.

> Transport issues are huge, finances are huge, living away from families are huge, and you know, family's family, it doesn't matter where you are, but it is not the same as your own mum and dad, and brothers and sisters. So I guess people can get homesick, I mean I've lived away too, and I've hated it. And that's just not you know in Indigenous communities, that is in the broader population as well, so we are not alone as far as that sort of stuff goes (Kippen et al., 2006, p. 5).

Another student from Australia also voiced the importance of family in providing a support network and motivation to keep studying. "I always keep in touch with my family regularly. It makes me miss them but also helps me to keep going and knowing that I can call them and they've got time to listen and be there for me even though it's a bit extended, it's a long way" (Powell, 2017, p. 36).

Financial stress and need for financial support. An Australian First Nations student reflected on the impact of their personal commitments and finances in affecting their mental health and studies, "For me, the times I struggled the most ... more generally was when my personal life wasn't going too well — e.g., good accommodation, work, financially and family matters back home" (Schwartz, 2018, p. 18). Similarly, a Māori student reported: "Having to give up full-time work to study meant I could not afford food for myself and my daughter most weeks" (Theodore et al., 2017, p. 126). These insights

highlight the importance of universities supporting students' social, cultural, and financial wellbeing which go beyond the responsibility of just education and learning. outside of higher education. A First Nations student from Australia emphasised that a key problem was: "A lot of juggling of finances. A lot of people get into debt. I couldn't find scholarships" (Barney, 2016, p. 6). Mature age students found this especially difficult in regard to added responsibilities, "A lot of the Indigenous HDR students might be mature age, might have a family or have other competing pressures, and the standard scholarships just don't cut it, for it can create an enormous pressure that, ultimately, is too much" (Barney, 2018a, p. 17). Further, students advocated receiving more support from their university in alerting them to the availability of scholarships and helping them apply for them. For example, a Māori student voiced that: "There are scholarships, but we are not told how to apply ..So, if someone could help with the scholarships and explain how to apply for them, that might help a little bit as well" (Chittick et al., 2019, p. 17).

Financial support such as assisting with accommodation and living cost scholarships, promoting more employment and career opportunities, and being more flexible to enable students to visit family and cultural responsibilities such as being back on Country was suggested by First Nations youth. Notably, it is important to emphasise that these results imply that Indigenous wellbeing is holistic. Therefore, if one's financial wellbeing is affected, so is their ability to support family and have good mental health. Further, whilst scholarships are critical to assist students' financial wellbeing, students reported that there is a limited availability of scholarships for all students, including the scholarship fund not being financially sufficient to support high living costs, particularly in big cities and for Indigenous students with children to support. Hence offering larger scholarships could help alleviate financial stressors for Indigenous students.

Discussion RQ 1.3.3

Whilst the objective of this research was to focus on Indigenous higher education youth's enablers of wellbeing, it is also critical to understand the roadblocks to youth's wellbeing so that higher education institutions can implement strategies and change for youth to flourish and thrive in higher education. The above findings add to the growing body of research which argues the importance of addressing: culturally unsafe university environments, institutional racism and discrimination, home sickness, culturally unsafe mental health and wellbeing services, financial stress, and the need for more scholarship support as significant impacts on Indigenous students' wellbeing. Overall, these significant findings provide suggestions for higher education institutions and implications for future theory, research, and practice.

Implications of Study 1 Findings for Theory, Research, and Practice

Taken together, the results for all research questions considered in this chapter offer support for extending SDT theory (see Chapter 3) to Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions. The importance of the need for autonomy was reflected clearly in students' voices and suggestions about self-determining their futures, which also reflects IST (see Chapter 3). The need for relatedness was reflected strongly in youth's suggestions about the importance of family, community, Elders, role models, and peer support. These results also offer support for the MSWM (see Chapter 3) conceptualisation of multidimensional factors. Further, they offer support for the SEWB model (see Chapter 3) in reflecting the importance of cultural wellbeing factors such as Connection to: Country, family and kinship, culture, spirit, spirituality, and ancestors, community, mind and emotions, body, social, political, and historical determinants for Indigenous youth attending universities.

The results also offer support for self-concept theory. Students often mentioned that in the teeth of multiple types of adverse challenges they needed to stay strong, resilient, and hold high expectations of themselves to succeed. This offers new support for the salience of self-concept as an important construct in and of itself for Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions and as a key driver of important psychological and educational outcomes, including persistence in the face of challenges and resilience to challenges.

The results also offer support for IST (see Chapter 3). Indigenous standpoints were reflected in 28 primary studies. However, the majority of primary studies focused on adult community and higher education staff perspectives rather than focusing on youth perspectives. These findings add further support to calls from researchers (e.g., Amundsen, 2019; Craven et al., 2016; Durmush et al., 2020) to prioritise the voice and agency of Indigenous youth.

The results also support the conceptualisation of Indigenous wellbeing as multidimensional and interrelated, thus supporting both the SEWB diagram and MSWM theoretical conceptualisations of the multidimensionality of Indigenous wellbeing. These results also employ the multi-dimensionality of Indigenous wellbeing needs, which is to be accounted for in Indigenous wellbeing research. However, the results also highlight some limitations of the existing theories. For instance, the SEWB diagram lacks an educational perspective, and does not acknowledge the contribution and role education has in being a positive driver of Indigenous youth's wellbeing. The SEWB diagram also does not recognise that family may be a barrier for some youth, where family disconnection may be a prevalent issue. The MSWM model also is limited in providing an in-depth cultural perspective which lacks an explanation of the nature of cultural wellbeing. The results also have implications for future research. Overall, the systematic review revealed a paucity of

research capitalising on the voice and agency of Indigenous youth attending higher education. These results suggest that much more research needs to be undertaken that puts Indigenous youth voices at the epicentre of research that affects them. The results based upon the CASP qualitative checklist (CASP, 2021) also imply that future Indigenous qualitative research could benefit from the development of an appraisal checklist specifically for use with Indigenous populations. The design of such a checklist could benefit from the incorporation of assessments of the quality of: Indigenous voice and agency, community partnership, Indigenous theory, and Indigenous methodological approaches.

The findings also have implications for higher education policy and practice. Students suggested that higher education institutions need to create more culturally safe wellbeing and mental health services that are culturally aware and safe. Further, they suggested employing more Indigenous academics, community members, and Elders to provide cultural understanding and mentorship. They also suggested supporting financial wellbeing, which higher education institutions could provide through more scholarships to assist with living costs.

Chapter Summary

The significance of Chapter 6 was to present the findings and discussion of Study 1's systematic review of international literature pertaining to Indigenous youth's higher education wellbeing. Firstly, the nature and scope of international research capitalising on Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing perspectives and knowledge was explored. Secondly, the drivers of Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing were identified. Following, the barriers of Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing were discussed.

For each RQ, a discussion section was included to provide a precise overview of the implications for higher education institutions and future research, theory, and practice. Finally, the implications of the findings for Study 1 for theory, research, and practice were discussed. The next chapter (Chapter 7) provides an insight into the results of Study 2, which investigates higher education youth's broad perceptions of wellbeing resulting from focus groups with ($N = 30$) Australian First Nations youth across four higher education institutions.

CHAPTER 7: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION STUDY 2: IDENTIFYING THE BROAD CONCEPTIONS OF WELLBEING OF INDIGENOUS YOUTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Introduction

The purpose of Study 2 was to conduct an initial broad exploration of Indigenous views of wellbeing (see Chapter 4). This chapter highlights the results that emerged from Study 2, with Indigenous youth participants who are higher education students. The chapter first outlines Indigenous and non-Indigenous definitions of models of wellbeing. Second, it examines Indigenous youth's perspectives on each wellbeing model and definitions of wellbeing. Third, the recommendations proposed by Indigenous youth for an Indigenous youth wellbeing model are discussed. Fourth, the major themes of Study 2 and its results are discussed in detail. Moreover, an analysis of the response to each RQ is detailed. Finally, a summary of Study 2 findings is presented.

The findings of this Study 2 have been published as a journal paper (Appendix C): Durmush, G., Craven, R. G., Brockman, R., Yeung, A. S., Mooney, J., Turner, K., & Guenther, J. (2021). Empowering the voices and agency of Indigenous Australian youth and their wellbeing in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Research, 109*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101798

Results RQ 2.1.1: Broad Significance, Nature, and Structure of Indigenous Youth Wellbeing

Overview

RQ 2.1.1 asked: How do Indigenous *youth attending* higher education institutions broadly conceptualise the significance, nature, and structure of their wellbeing?

Results

      OECD definition of wellbeing. In our first meeting we showed participating Indigenous youth the OECD (2017) wellbeing definition for students: Wellbeing is "the psychological, cognitive, social and physical qualities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life" (OECD, 2017, p. 19; see Chapter 5). The majority of Indigenous youth strongly dismissed the definition and pointed out that the OECD wellbeing definition was individualised in its focus, lacked holistic worldviews, and excluded cultural wellbeing factors. One student from The University of Sydney emphasised that the term social in the definition implied socialising and ignored Indigenous culture, "Yes when I think of social, I think of culture. It's not socialising". Another student, from the University of Queensland said the definition was very individualistic, lacking the interconnectedness of Indigenous worldviews: "Straight away, it doesn't really involve other people kinda it's just for yourself… in Indigenous culture, it's connected". Another student also from the University of Queensland spoke about the term cognitive and how it would be difficult for many people who are not studying psychology to understand its meaning. The student said, "It took me 2 years of psychology to understand what cognitive meant". The same student also went on to say that family and community also come under social: "Like family is a social aspect and so is community but they're two different things". However, one student

from Charles Darwin University believed the definition was good and summarised all the aspects of their wellbeing well. They said, "I think it is, it covers all the good aspects of it".

For the majority of Indigenous youth participants, wellbeing was defined as a holistic and interconnected concept that featured community and culture at the centre of their wellbeing. Notably, the Western OECD definition for the majority of students expressing views in focus groups did not represent Indigenous youth's wellbeing appropriately. However, there was one student who felt that the OECD definition was thorough and applicable. It is worth noting though that a select number of students seemed to dominate the conversation, so shyer students may have felt uncomfortable offering a contrary view. It was also interesting to note that students participating in the focus group who expressed views, compared to the individual students interviewed in Study 3 (see chapter 8) had diametrically opposed views. Given these contrasting views, and the different data collection settings, this initial exploration of Indigenous youth construals of wellbeing definitions seemed to require more in-depth consideration and more nuanced research procedures. Hence, the latter was addressed in the procedures and approach employed in the Study 3 interviews (see Chapter 4).

   Multidimensional model of student wellbeing. Additionally, we showed Indigenous youth a pictorial representation of the structure of a new multidimensional wellbeing model developed by non-Indigenous and Indigenous academics to reflect a more holistic Indigenous worldview of wellbeing constructs of direct relevance to schooling (see Marsh et al., 2019) for an analysis of statistical structural properties to ascertain their perspectives of the salience of this model (see Chapter 5). Similarly to the OECD definition of wellbeing, the majority of Indigenous youth viewed the pictorial

representation of this model as lacking interconnectivity of important concepts in relation to wellbeing. In addition, some students seemed to indicate that the model lacked emotiveness and was not presented in a way that looks inviting to Indigenous youth. One student from the University of Queensland said, "It's not even emotive either. It strips all the words. This somehow is, don't know else how to explain this it feels it just strips". Another student also reported, "That whole ticking the box thing again. Like what I've got no self-advocacy, so I got no self-wellbeing?". However, an Indigenous student from Charles Darwin University liked the structure of the model. For example, "Yeah I like it, I like that it's just going into detail like straight to the point, it's set out in a way that you can see it. It's really good". Hence, similarly to the OECD definition, there was only one student who felt that pictorial structural model was thorough and applicable, and the majority in the focus group felt it reduced key aspects of wellbeing to just keywords. Given these contrasting views, this initial exploration of Indigenous youth construals of wellbeing models seemed to require more in-depth consideration of a nuanced presentation of definitions and models and the research procedures employed.

Model of social and emotional wellbeing. A pictorial representation of the Dudgeon et al. (2017) Indigenous 'Model of Social and Emotional Wellbeing' (Figure 5.1) was also shown to Indigenous youth. The majority of Indigenous youth participating in focus groups agreed that the Dudgeon et al. (2017) Indigenous model of wellbeing pictorially represented the domains of their wellbeing. Participants in the focus groups endorsed the domains displayed in this model as either important, of salience to them, or not, depending on their personal stories and upbringing. For example, connection to Country was a theme that resulted in mixed responses. Some youth felt connection to Country was vital to their wellbeing, whilst others felt it was not an enabler to their wellbeing.

Indigenous youth suggestions for informing the development of wellbeing models and initiatives. We also investigated Indigenous youth's suggestions for informing the development of an Indigenous youth wellbeing model (see Chapter 5). Students across the four higher education institutes suggested it would be useful to develop guidelines and/or suggested strategies for practical ways they, as Indigenous youth, could enhance social and emotional wellbeing. A student from the University of Queensland proposed: "Like Aunty Pat's one [Pat Dudgeon, from (Dudgeon et al., 2017)] just give examples like if you can't access culture here's how you can connect with culture, or here's an example of what this may look like". Another student said, "It goes beyond of here what it is, to here's how to achieve it. It takes one step there". These comments suggest that youth are interested in the salience and application of theoretical models for intervention strategies that could be of interest and beneficial to them. It also suggests that research needs to underpin practical evidence-derived intervention.

Students from the Batchelor Institute also agreed about the importance of adding strategies to direct Indigenous youth, using the model, to achieve the wellbeing factors. One student expressed, "How do you maintain all of that? It is hard to maintain. Slowly, slowly this culture is dying out. Like yeah we can keep everything connected and stuff but how? How do you maintain that for the future?"

Goal setting. An Indigenous youth from the University of Sydney added a concept regarding goal setting in relation to offering practical strategies. They said, "I don't know how to say it but towards a goal. Sometimes I feel happy you know you can achieve something working hard to get there and that can make you happy". Another student disagreed and said that goal setting doesn't enhance or shape their wellbeing. The student

expressed, "I disagree I don't think goal setting is a part of wellbeing for myself, I need wellbeing to achieve those things. Like what I do, is not who I am. Who I am is my sense of self". Here the student drew attention to self-determination theory (SDT) concepts of autonomy and competence (see Chapter 5), thereby highlighting the importance of self-concept and its importance to wellbeing.

Resilience. Resilience was also an important concept Indigenous youth mentioned that they felt should be added to a proposed Indigenous youth wellbeing model. A student from the University of Queensland recommended, "Any mistake you know is fine, you grow learn and move on. Resilience". A student also emphasised the importance of including the barriers to Indigenous youth wellbeing and insisted that they needed to be expressed in the model also. For instance, "but there's a lot of barriers to get to these moments… you can have connections to family and kinship but if you have family violence and alcoholism in your home then you don't really have that family support… like the barriers alcohol, drugs, violence, neglect". Therefore, there is a need for socio-cultural contexts to be considered.

Indigenous youth also offered suggestions for the structural configuration of the Indigenous youth wellbeing model. For example, a student at the University of Sydney suggested in relation to the Social and Emotional Wellbeing model (Dudgeon et al., 2017) that: "I might change the circle. I have same things I would have self with body mind and spirt and each of those going off into sections… yeah so like connection to Country come as spirit and mind. Culture body and soul". The student also stated, "Well I think wellbeing it should be something like a graph the normal peaks of ups and down states of anxiety, stats of depression going through it but staying in that realm of wellbeing. But for me I'm

up here then I'm down here, I'm back up then I'm back down". As a result, Indigenous youth proposed important suggestions to consider in developing Indigenous youth wellbeing models, as well as the importance of suggestions for practical intervention strategies to be established to support future Indigenous youth to thrive and flourish.

Results RQ 2.2.2 Broad Drivers of Higher Education Success and Wellbeing and 2.3.3 Broad Barriers to Higher Education Success and Wellbeing

Overview

The following section identifies central factors of Indigenous youth wellbeing. The Indigenous youth participating in this study identified six key themes as crucial to enabling their wellbeing. The themes include: Identity—having a sense of self; family and kinship; connection to Country; spirituality; cultural identity; and having Indigenous leaders and support networks within the university space to support their educational wellbeing.

RQ 2.2.2 asked: What do Indigenous youth in higher education institutions broadly perceive as the drivers of their educational wellbeing and success? RQ 2.3.3 asked: What do Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions broadly perceive as barriers to their wellbeing and success?

Results

     Identity—Having a sense of 'Self'. Indigenous youth spoke about the importance of having a strong sense of individual 'self', independent of and separate to their identity as Indigenous youth, as critical to their wellbeing. For example, a student from The University of Queensland said, "I feel like that comes in your sense of self. Might not know who your mob is but you got your own identity too". Indigenous youth also

advocated the need to have agency over one's life and self. For instance, "Having agency to choose your environment, feel confidence in yourself, to cut people out of your life... As you get older you get confident with who you are as a person.". These results are consistent with the universal psychological need for competence as expounded in the Self-determination Theory (SDT) of Ryan and Deci (2017), and with the centrality of the self-concept construct, being important in and of itself, and vital for wellbeing (Craven et al., 2016) as well as a driver of educational outcomes.

Family and kinship. Many Indigenous youth agreed on the importance of having a supportive family in enhancing wellbeing. One participant said, "The only thing that brings me back to Darwin is family. If I didn't have family, I wouldn't be there." Another youth spoke about the experience of attending a family reunion: "A couple of years ago we had a family reunion when everyone came all together, went on Country where Nan grew up in Warren and that was quite emotional and was just great to see everyone".

Youth suggested that family support and kinship are vital to their wellbeing. These results reflect the importance of relatedness, as proposed by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) for Indigenous students. For some participants, family support and connections were not accessible or available for various reasons, such as family separation, family violence, and drug and alcohol related violence resulting in social disconnection and lack of support from family. These issues have been highlighted by previous research to have a detrimental impact on one's wellbeing (Craven et al., 2013). In addition, youth identified that family violence was also a major issue in some families and communities and should be recognised as a contributing factor adversely impacting youth wellbeing. As one participant explained, "Well you can have connections to family and kinship but if you have family violence and alcoholism in your home then you don't really have that family

support". Hence, whilst family and kinship were important to Indigenous youth, enduring family violence issues continued to have adverse effects on Indigenous youth wellbeing. Hence it was suggested that having access to university accommodation away from family, was vital for some Indigenous youth's wellbeing. Previous research studies (Cairney et al., 2017; Carey, 2013; Dockery, 2010; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Krieg, 2016; Muller, 2014; Salmon et al., 2019; Wexler, 2009; Wilson et al., 2018) have highlighted the importance of connection to family and kinship as being central to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous youth thriving.

Connection to Country. Connection to Country continues to remain vital for some youth. However, as discussed in the results below there are some Indigenous youth that acknowledge that connection to Country is not important to their wellbeing. According to Salmon et al. (2019), Connection to Country is defined thus:

> Connection to Country links an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person to their land or island and community in a deeply cultural and spiritual way. Culturally Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people describe themselves as being "of Country" with identity, cultural practices, systems of authority and social rules, traditions and spirituality all tied to Country (p. 5).

Connection to Country has been argued by many Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers as being vital and essential to Indigenous wellbeing (Dew et al., 2019; Dockery, 2010; Dudgeon et al., 2017; 2012; Ganesharajah, 2009). The results below highlight that connection to Country for Indigenous youth means different things for each individual. Our results suggest that connection to Country is a subjective concept and can be practised in many different ways to enhance wellbeing, as voiced below by Indigenous youth.

> You sit at uni in a lecture with 400 people surrounding you and you feel
>
> alone... But as soon as you're actually alone with the universe, standing out by
>
> the river that your mum grew up on, that feeling is just so much more
>
> important, and it fills me. I go home every 2 years... for me that's a part of my
>
> wellbeing.

This comment emphasises the deep, spiritual connection some Indigenous Australian youth

have to Country. The quote also acknowledges the role Country plays in developing

fulfilment for some youth. For some urban youth, connection to Country was important for

their wellbeing, while others suggested it was not something that affected their everyday

wellbeing. The latter group voiced it was their connection to family and Indigenous mob

[members of the Indigenous community] that made them feel connected to their

Indigenous identity and enhanced their wellbeing. As one youth explained, "I can still have

a connection to Country, it doesn't have to necessarily be to Warren where my family grew

up, it can be at uni, going to the Koori Centre [Indigenous unit], seeing everyone and all

the mob [students and staff], participating and keeping those relationships" Similarly,

another youth stated, "Well personally, I'm not connected to Country, I say I'm more

connected to family. I've never been to north Queensland where my tribe is from, ... I've

never done Aboriginal dancing before but with my family I have heard stories so that ties it

all in". These comments could, for some participants, reflect the enduring impact of

historical government policies, like the Stolen Generations, whose families were separated

and removed off traditional Country, leading many Indigenous families to lose connection

to Country (Sherwood, 2013).

Other respondents stated that connection to Country was vital to their wellbeing, and interconnected with everything such as culture, spirituality, ancestral connection, and having a healthy mind and body. For instance, one student explained:

> Like when people ask me what does it mean to be Aboriginal...They think it's just culture, they don't understand that by connection to Country we get spirituality. To be Aboriginal is to embody all those things at once because it's such a part of self. It shapes the way you see yourself interacting with the world and the world interacting with you. It's difficult for me to look at each aspect individually like culture because if I don't have culture then I don't have a connection to Country. My culture is forming that connection to Country which comes from my ancestors, my spirit, I feel it, my spirituality, the way I believe. My body is also another part, your body is just a vessel for your spirit.

Some youth spoke about living in cities and how it is difficult to connect to Country. As one youth said, "I don't feel connected to Darwin that's just because it's urbanised but when you go out bush it's alright. But Darwin itself I don't like being there to be honest". Additionally, some youth felt connected to multiple countries, regardless of whether their family was from that area. Thus, they argued that if a place made them feel culturally safe and they felt a sense of belonging, then that was a place of connection to Country. For example:

> Country might just be a place where you feel safe, at home everywhere you go there's a space where you can go and feel quiet. I had an uncle say to me on a similar topic, you are your Country yourself, as long as you're connected to yourself there's always part of you that's connection to Country.

As this quote shows, connection to Country is a subjective concept. For some Indigenous youth it is having connection with oneself, one's spirituality, connecting to nature, land, and Country. For others it means connecting with family, cultural group (mob), and community. For some it is everything: the Country, land, spirit, community, and culture all in one, connecting together. Further, for some youth, connection to Country is not important to their everyday wellbeing, while for the majority of participants, connection to Country, expressed in diverse ways, is identified as important for their wellbeing and thriving. As a result, more research needs to identify the factors that underpin such views.

Spirituality. Across each focus group, spirituality was recognised as a contributing factor in shaping Indigenous Australian youth's wellbeing. Spirituality was defined as "being connected to yourself" or "understanding one's sense of self". For example, "Spirituality for some people, it's just having sense within yourself, even if it is busy and full on, you will be right, whatever you personally do to feel that sense of you, you'll be right." Youth also noted spirituality was difficult to explain and described it as something that one develops through a process. For instance, "I feel my spirituality is who I am. I'm not a religious person, but I'm more spiritual. It's just all of me".

Cultural identity. Like connection to Country, Connection to culture and cultural identity has been proven to be fundamentally important to Indigenous people's identity and overall health and wellbeing (Cairney et al., 2017; Carey, 2013; Dockery, 2010; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Muller, 2014; Salmon et al., 2019; Wexler, 2009; Wilson et al., 2018). Mayi Kuwayu, the National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing (Salmon et al., 2019, p. 5) identified that cultural knowledge, beliefs, and cultural expression and continuity are crucial to Indigenous wellbeing. Similarly, our results suggest that cultural identity and connecting to culture are identified by some Indigenous youth as significantly important. For example:

For some people who grew up in Sydney you know the history, it's hard to

connect to culture ... for me, being from the Torres Strait Islands, I'm

privileged enough to be grown up in speaking all my languages, practising

cultural practices, performing, and really connecting with deep intrinsic

feelings that come out of culture...But when you leave, you lose a bit of that.

Indigenous youth who were raised in urban cities recognised the difficulty in connecting to

traditional cultural practices due to the significant loss of these practices historically

(Fredericks, 2013). For example, Indigenous youth acknowledged that there has been and

continues to be a significant loss of languages in Indigenous Australia. The Australian

Bureau of Statistics (2016) shows that only 150 Indigenous languages are active in

Australia and many hundreds of languages have been lost, particularly in urban areas. Loss

of language has also been associated with loss of culture, as one participant emphasised:

"In remote areas it wasn't easy to keep language, but they still have a lot of language,

dance, and song. But then the more urban you get, the more white". Likewise, students

identified with connecting to cultural identity through attending cultural and community

events. For instance, "I know when I ...go to the [Koori Centre] or when you see other

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and mob [Indigenous students and staff] at

Career Trackers [internship program] ... That is where I feel a sense of belonging and that

makes me happy". Hence, the results highlight that cultural identity and connection to

culture is a major construal of Indigenous youth wellbeing and thus further research needs

to identify ways universities can better enhance Indigenous youth's cultural identity.

Having Indigenous role models and leaders. Previous research has noted the

pivotal role of Indigenous student and leader role models being present at universities as

models for future Indigenous youth to look up to and have as support networks (Carter et

al., 2018; Milne et al., 2016). Having other Indigenous role models and leaders to look up

to at university was reflected by many of the participants as crucial to their educational wellbeing and community wellbeing. Past research (Powell, 2017) has also identified the very important role of Indigenous units in providing support and a place of belonging and cultural safety for Indigenous university students. Many participants said that the support of their peers and some of the programs led by their Indigenous Units have helped them: stay at university, maintain their educational wellbeing, and develop cultural identity. The importance of Indigenous youth peers as role models was also emphasised:

> Seeing other Indigenous students who were already at uni, seeing that they were absolutely loving it, and them passing their knowledge about the uni… was just I think really useful for us, and it was good because we could just see and picture ourselves in their shoes.

Another student expressed, "That's like our Indigenous Unit, they're all crazy intelligent and strong in culture, you just feel really empowered. Just makes you realise you can do anything you want". These comments reflect the importance of successful Indigenous peers and Indigenous academic staff within the university who serve as strong role models and also help build a sense of community and foster the identity of Indigenous youth.

Discussion

Most of the enablers of Indigenous youth wellbeing that emerged from the data were multidimensional in nature and encompassed diverse wellbeing domains: having a sense of self, family and kinship, connection to Country, spirituality, cultural identity, and having Indigenous student peers and academic staff as role models. RQ 2.2.2 highlighted that Indigenous youths' wellbeing domains are interrelated and that Indigenous wellbeing is by nature holistic, interconnected, and subjective. Indigenous youth emphasised that wellbeing is shaped by many factors that go beyond the individual. Facilitators for

wellbeing identified by RQ 2.2.2 are also connected. For instance, Indigenous students identified the following as important to their cultural wellbeing: strong cultural and 'self' identity, connection to community and culture, spirituality, family and sense of self.

We also found that the overall welfare and wellbeing of Indigenous communities can have direct positive and negative impacts on youth wellbeing. Traditionally, Indigenous culture is shaped by the connections of Country, family, kinship, spirituality, culture, and overall community welfare. SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017, see Chapter 3) identifies relatedness or social connection as a universal human psychological need. The results of this study show that in terms of cultural and social connection relatedness is paramount for Indigenous Australian youth wellbeing. Traditionally, Indigenous Australian culture is collectivist rather than individualistic, and these results support that wellbeing cannot be seen as individually separate factors but rather as something that is shaped by multiple interconnected determinants influencing the domains of wellbeing (Grieves, 2009). This conception of wellbeing reflects the holistic nature of Indigenous worldviews and the interconnectedness of all things.

Results RQ 2.2.2: Broad Barriers to Higher Education Success and Wellbeing

Overview

RQ 2.2.2 asked: What do Indigenous youth attending higher education institutions broadly perceive as barriers to their wellbeing and success? The following sections report on the key themes voiced by Indigenous youth as barriers to their wellbeing. The 6 themes identified by youth included: Cultural insecurity; being 'Not Black Enough'; Community wellbeing (when at risk); the challenges of 'walking in two worlds'; lateral violence; and institutional racism and discrimination.

Results

Cultural insecurity. Cultural safety and security (Bin-Sallik, 2003; Coffin, 2007) was highlighted by all Indigenous youth in this study as significantly important to their wellbeing. In particular, participants described cultural safety as referring to environments such as workplace and educational settings as safe places that embrace and respect Indigenous identity and make Indigenous people feel safe, worthy, and empowered. Many shared their personal experiences of university environments that did not exercise cultural safety, and emphasised racism's negative impacts on Indigenous students in the university. For example, "Yeah the story I was telling earlier about that lecturer. I should be in a space where I can tell her that's not okay and not be attacked by every other student because that's not okay'. Another student voiced, "Yeah it's hard and there's challenges every day... it comes into the workplace, you never really get to leave it, I guess. I mean at home you feel safe because you're with your people". Thus, environments such as workplaces, university campuses and classrooms that do not respect Indigenous cultural identity were noted by the participants as being culturally unsafe spaces, which affect Indigenous youth wellbeing, and are ultimately barriers to educational wellbeing.

Not black enough. Many Indigenous youth mentioned that one of the barriers to wellbeing at university was having to always justify and defend their cultural identity in settings such as classes, social events, and workplace. Participants shared personal experiences of their Indigenous identity being questioned, where they were told by non-Indigenous people that they did not look Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or did not behave in the way 'they as white people' thought an Indigenous person would. As one participant described:

> I get it so much...I don't fit with what they think an Islander person should look
> like and speak like. Even though they've seen my dad is obviously an Islander
> man but you're not real, you kinda are, but you're not.

Having to defend cultural identity was identified to have a detrimental effect on Indigenous youth's wellbeing. Another example highlights that attacks on identity were also common from others in the Indigenous community, as a student explains:

> I think it's just disheartening... because it happens not just in non-Indigenous
> communities, Indigenous people have experienced that for such a long time.
> When it happens from your own community it just makes you feel depressed.
> Like 'Who am I?', type of thing.

Youth expressed their experiences with their identity being questioned and the need to justify their identity to non-Indigenous people and also some members of the Indigenous community. Hence, the discourse of Indigenous identity and other construals of Indigeneity still affect Indigenous youth's wellbeing in their daily lives, including at university.

Community wellbeing. The overall wellbeing of the Indigenous individual is shaped by the overall welfare and wellbeing of their Indigenous communities (Batten & Stanford, 2012; Prout, 2012). Further, in every focus group, Indigenous youth identified the overall wellbeing and welfare of the Indigenous communities' position in Australian society as imperative to their own personal wellbeing. Participants spoke about critical social justice issues, including: high suicide rates in communities; limited health care resources in communities; the lack of initiative for the government to have a treaty with its First Nations peoples; and the need to embed more Indigenous perspectives into our education system and its classrooms. For example, one youth said:

> Well one thing I realised is there is so much negative connotation towards
> black people. I would like that to change. When you hear the word black you
> think incarceration. This is what I've seen on television. Angry Black people
> when they stand up to whites.

What emerged from the focus groups was a sense that the media played a negative role in how the broader community viewed Indigenous Australian people, which affected the wellbeing of Indigenous communities.

Across the four participating institutions, all participants demonstrated their passion, drive, and feelings of having a moral obligation to give back and support their Indigenous communities. They spoke about their responsibility, as well as the government's, to work towards creating a better, more equal society, and a successful future for the next generation of Indigenous people. For example, "It's important not only culturally, I think us and future generations and stuff, it's our responsibility to bridge that gap in remote and western communities. Being educated in both areas is very important". Another youth stated:

> So, it's like I've been provided with certain allowances and comforts in life
> that my father, mother, grandparents didn't have... They weren't allowed to go
> to school... That was something they didn't have the luxury of doing what they
> wanted, so they had to fight every day of their lives to get to where I am. And
> for me to give up... then it don't show for nothing. If I put in that effort, work
> for it, then hopefully my daughter goes through a much easier and a nicer life
> than what I had to go through.

Equally, Indigenous youth reflected on the significance of having a good connection to their Indigenous community, and saw such relationships and connections to be vital to developing cultural identity and wellbeing. As a participant expressed, "And that was similar about identity, when you're around mob you don't feel lost... I think that's the centre of your identity". Students also expressed that being surrounded by other mob at university made them feel empowered and culturally proud, "For me anyways I feel great when I'm down here, especially when I hang out with other mob down here. I use my blackness as like my superpower". Furthermore, youth identified that their cultural wellbeing and identity were shaped and heavily influenced by mob, and community relationships and connections. As these results show, the wellbeing of the wider Indigenous community also affects Indigenous youth's own wellbeing.

Walking in two worlds. One of the challenges Indigenous youth reported facing was living and walking in two worlds: the western world and the Indigenous world (Fredericks, 2013). As more Indigenous youth are studying at university and having access to employment and education, we are witnessing more Indigenous students reclaiming and decolonising institutions. One student spoke of the importance of having a connection and reclaiming spaces within the western world. The student proposed that Indigenous youth should not be separate from the western world but advocated for both worlds to be intertwined together, whereby students felt a sense of belonging in both western and Indigenous contexts. Thus, recognising that Indigenous youth already live and walk in both worlds. For example:

> …I think there needs to be a connection with the other world, like if you're walking in their world and doing everything they're doing if you don't have a connection you're not in their world, you're trespassing essentially. I think for

> my social and emotional wellbeing like I need to have a connection with them
>
> as well ... I belong at this uni, I worked my ass off to be here.

Some of the challenges to wellbeing discussed in relation to going to university were the sacrifices of leaving family, culture, and Country behind in order to pursue education and employment opportunities. For instance, another youth said:

> I care because I can see the future in it [education], but it's more what my
>
> immediate family wants is me to be back home. It's the same as when my
>
> daughter was born, I want to be with her. I have to be away from her to keep
>
> getting this done and keep moving forward. Which is what I find really
>
> difficult.

For some youth, moving away from home to pursue university involves missing out on family events and spending time with loved ones, as well as connecting and practising culture. A youth explains:

> …really missing a lot of stuff from the island right now of my culture. I feel
>
> when I went back lots of old members passed away who were influential in my
>
> life. And I see all these, little kids that are young… they don't know you, you
>
> don't know them that well. And now I don't have that. Come back I'm missing
>
> something. And that's what I feel I'm missing, is being able to pass down
>
> meaningful knowledges, language, and cultural practices.

Hence, the participants made it clear that Indigenous people deserve to be at university and belong in both worlds, but leaving community is a sacrifice for them and their community. Recent literature suggests that Indigenous people share the continual challenge of maintaining their cultural identity and acceptance in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community spaces (Esposito, 2019; Fitzgerald, 2006; Stewart & Warn, 2016). The results

highlight that walking in two worlds remains a continual challenge for Indigenous youth attending university.

Lateral violence. Lateral violence was identified by participants as a key issue. The NSW government's Safe Work website notes that, "Lateral violence is not just an individual's behaviour. It often occurs when a number of people work together to attack or undermine another individual or group" (also see Coffin, 2011). For many Aboriginal people, lateral violence is believed to be a learned behaviour resulting from colonisation. Unlike workplace bullying, lateral violence is different for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in that they abuse their own people in similar ways as to how they themselves have been abused (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011). This violence can come in many forms, such as: physical, social, emotional, psychological, economic, and spiritual violence. Practically, lateral violence can consist of jealousy, gossiping, shaming, social exclusion, and bullying (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011). Participants reported the prevalence of lateral violence in many Indigenous communities where family members were exposed to lateral violence from other family and Indigenous community members.

Youth spoke about challenges such as experiencing lateral violence and being shamed in their own communities, particularly when members of the group are seen to want to better themselves and gain an education. As one youth articulated:

> When people from remote areas come to get an education you know people in the community can put them down. Like 'You think you're better than us,' you know. 'You wanna go and follow the white man's way'. But they don't really have an understanding themselves, of what they are trying to do.

As this remark shows, walking in two worlds remains a challenge for Indigenous youth

wellbeing, in maintaining their cultural identity and relationships in community whilst

obtaining an education. Hence, lateral violence can be a major disruption to Indigenous

youth's educational wellbeing.

   Institutional racism and discrimination. It is not surprising that one of the barriers

Indigenous youth face every day is institutional racism and discrimination. Many

Indigenous youth opened up in the focus groups and discussed their personal experiences

of racism within their university and workplace settings. For instance:

> Yeah well it is dragged into the workplace, like I get racism at the hospital.
>
> And I'm talking like probably the only Aboriginal person working on the ward.
>
> All the rest are Filipinos and Africans. It's hard, it's hard working there.

Due to the nature of focus groups, there were limitations with students sharing their

experiences with racism at a university setting in detail. However, many Indigenous youth

agreed in the focus groups that racism was still an issue and it was important that

Indigenous perspectives were included in lectures and in the university curriculum.

Racism and discrimination are an enduring problem and issue that many Indigenous

Australians are faced with every day and in every social context (Sahdra et al., 2019). Due

to Australia's history, founded upon colonial violence and genocide, such as the removal

of Indigenous people from their land, racism has always been entrenched in Australia's

culture since the time of invasion. Racism continues with the silencing of Indigenous

people, the disruption of sacred cultural sites, high youth suicide rates, and high deaths in

custody. The governments' and institution's lack of listening to and engaging with

Indigenous people on important social justice issues and embracing First Nations culture

remains a continuous battle on Australia's soil (Grant, 2016). Dr Pat Anderson,

Chairperson of the Lowitja Institute framed the issue of racism as a public health

emergency that is killing Indigenous Australians (health and wellbeing). She wrote, "We need to acknowledge that racism is deeply entrenched in Australia and is a public health emergency for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people… That terrible reality is there to be read clearly in the current National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, which identifies racism as a key driver of ill-health" (Australia's National Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research, 2020, p. 12).

Discussion

The results for RQ 2.2.2 have elucidated some of the barriers to Indigenous youth educational wellbeing, including: environments that do not practise cultural safety, navigating between two worlds, racism and discrimination, lateral violence, family violence, moving away from home and leaving Country and family to pursue education. Indigenous youth agreed that these challenges to their wellbeing were linked to historical, social, and political determinants (as presented in the Dudgeon et al. (2017) social and emotional wellbeing framework). The results of RQ 2.3.3 highlight the barriers to Indigenous youth wellbeing, and the importance of universities and higher education institutes providing a safe space: A space that exercises cultural safety, fosters cultural wellbeing, and includes support networks such as Indigenous students' leaders to support, empower, and motivate other Indigenous students to continue their higher education journey. Importantly, Indigenous youth who study in higher education institutions need their wellbeing put first. Hence, these results highlight the dire need for higher education institutes to create a culturally safe environment that values and respects Indigenous youth's cultural identity.

Results RQ 2.3.3: Broad Strategies for Enhancing Indigenous Youth Wellbeing

Overview

RQ 2.3.3 asked: What do Indigenous youth studying in higher education institutions identify as useful broad strategies for enhancing Indigenous wellbeing in educational contexts?

Results

Participants raised the issue of research by non-Indigenous people being used as a negative weapon against Indigenous people. They suggested that having voice and control over research would enable Indigenous youth to take ownership of data and thus represent data in a way that creates meaning and brings more positive social change. As one youth said:

> it's important that Indigenous youth have voice and agency, because what comes to my mind is researchers always use research negatively against us, it's always been used as a weapon and it's easy to distort data and I think it's really important to take ownership of that data so we can actually represent it in a meaningful way in order to produce better outcomes for our mob.

Youth also suggested having more researchers collaborating and including youth's voices and experiences. For instance, "Give more opportunity to give our voice and listen to us". Participants also highlighted that the real issue is that much of the research about Indigenous people neglects youth's voices and experiences and thus does not reflect Indigenous youth's needs. The participants advocated for more research to focus on youth's stories and experiences. Another youth said, "It is good to have Indigenous youth sharing their stories, like we need more data on that, we need more research ... so we can have a bright future for our generation". Participants emphasised the true value of having

insider research members such as other Indigenous youth researchers come and have a 'yarn' (discussion) with them about issues concerning Indigenous youth. As this participant explains,

> I think that's a part of the problem, we aren't in control of our own research. A lot of people who aren't Indigenous going out doing research. It's harder to talk to them, it's harder to relate. We don't have control over that.

Youth noted that having an Indigenous youth researcher (as in this research) made it easy for them to open up in a conversation and share their views comfortably. Notably, cultural safety issues concerning research practice were also addressed. Participants suggested that having a researcher that understands cultural protocols and that Indigenous youth can relate to and connect with, is imperative. For example,

> I think what's important is that term—insider researchers—it's a lot more comfortable to sit down with someone who knows what we're talking about and can direct convo in a way that doesn't take over the conversation, having someone who is mob come talk.

Hence, capitalising on youth voice and agency was seen by the participating youth as a vehicle that would strengthen research outcomes.

Discussion

Indigenous youth highlighted strategies such as the need to have more research that capitalised on views like their own, to identify what wellbeing meant to them at university, and how best to support it. Youth also advocated some useful strategies for informing research designs and procedures. These included: Employing Indigenous researchers (insider research members), the importance of cultural safety research practices and

protocols, and developing new holistic models of wellbeing that encompass holistic Indigenous worldviews. The results that emerged in relation to RQ 2.3.3, acknowledge the importance of engaging and partnering with, and capitalising on Indigenous youth voice and agency. Importantly, youth valued being engaged in research that capitalises on their voice and agency. In addition, they valued having the opportunity to use their voice to shape future research that affects them and their communities' wellbeing and social position.

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarised the results for Study 2, which aimed to investigate Indigenous youth's perceptions of voice and agency in relation to the enablers and drivers of youth's wellbeing. Study 2 also explored youth's perspectives for their recommendations on future research directions: they believe researchers can undertake to better amplify and include Indigenous youth voice and agency in future research. In this chapter each RQ was addressed by analysing Indigenous youth's narratives and voice on important educational and social justice issues. Discussion was presented for each RQ, to summarise and interpret the findings. Ultimately the critical importance of Indigenous youth's perspectives of their wellbeing and voice and agency was highlighted. Chapter 8 following presents the results of Study 3.

CHAPTER 8: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION STUDY 3: IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION YOUTH'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE, NATURE AND ENABLERS OF, AND BARRIERS TO WELLBEING

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of Study 3. Study 3 involved in-depth interviews with ($N = 7$) First Nations students attending a higher education institution, and aimed to understand: The significance of wellbeing for First Nations higher education youth; how First Nations higher education youth conceptualise the nature and structure of wellbeing; and the drivers, and barriers of youth's wellbeing (see Chapter 4). First, the chapter presents and discusses the results pertaining to RQ 3.1.1: What is the significance of wellbeing for enabling Indigenous youth to thrive and flourish in higher education? Second, the results are presented and discussed pertaining to RQ 3.2.2: How do Indigenous youth conceptualise their wellbeing? Third, the results are presented and discussed in relation to RQ 3.3.3: What do Indigenous youth attending higher education perceive in-depth as the enablers of their wellbeing? Fourth, results are presented and discussed in relation to RQ 3.4.4: What do Indigenous youth attending higher education perceive in-depth as the barriers to their wellbeing and success? Finally, drawing from youth's voices and recommendations, the final section of the chapter highlights the implications of the findings for theory, research, and practice. Each of the participants has been allocated a pseudonym—Francine, Jasmin, Bryson, Daniel, Jackson, Christina, and Monique—in order to de-identify them.

Results RQ 3.1.1: Significance of Wellbeing for Indigenous Higher Education Youth

Francine

Francine is a female First Nation's youth who was in the final year of a Bachelor of Laws.

 Mental health. Francine voiced the significance of wellbeing as being largely related to and shaped by the state of her mental health. As Francine voiced: "Knowing that you're in the right headspace to do tasks, to do your study, and to attend university and stuff like that".

 Francine also identified the relationship between mental health and wellbeing, and shared how the experience of not being happy at a certain university impacted her mental health and thus wellbeing. For instance, "Yeah, definitely. I remember when—my first year of uni, when I felt like my wellbeing wasn't very good, I wasn't happy at the uni I was at and I think that really affected my mental health. Also, me being at uni, it impacted my marks and all of it. It was all interconnected". Therefore, Francine's wellbeing was significant in supporting and improving mental health and overall educational thriving and wellbeing.

 Goals. Another significant contributing factor to Francine's overall wellbeing was the ability to set personal and career goals, and work towards achieving personal aspirations: "Yes, I believe that wellbeing is really important because I think that a positive wellbeing is going to impact your goals and whether or not you can achieve the goals. It impacts mental health. It impacts just everyday life, happiness, whether or not you're happy about—whether I'm happy about what I'm doing. Whether I'm enjoying what I do. Then that impacts everyone around me as well as myself". Hence, Francine voiced that positive wellbeing includes the ability to set goals, have positive mental health, and impact upon her overall happiness.

 Feeling good holistically. Francine spoke about the significance of wellbeing and emphasised the need to feel good holistically on a social, emotional, mental, physical,

spiritual, and cultural level. She expressed, "I just think for me to study, I need to feel comfortable in all aspects of my life. So socially, physically, mentally. If I'm on top of all those, I'm usually at a high and I can go about my day and feel happy. But yeah, if I'm not on top of all those things, sometimes I can—I feel a bit down or whatever". Overall, Francine expressed that wellbeing was significant to her, and that her multidimensional being was composed of many components in life.

Jasmin

Jasmin is a female First Nations student who was in the final year of a Bachelor of Behavioural Science degree.

    Goals. Jasmin deemed goals as integral to her wellbeing, and in particular the ability to have direction in life. As voiced by Jasmin, "Yeah, and not even just goals, like a general direction; something to work towards and then feel the gratification of having achieved is really important for maintaining constant wellbeing. Because wellbeing can be kind of like, whooo, but you feel like constantly achieving different things all the time".

    She defined and conceptualised wellbeing as holistic, in which wellbeing is important to feeling comfortable and safe. For example, she said:

You've got your basic, am I eating right? Am I sleeping right? Am—do I feel safe in my home? Do I feel safe on my university campus? Do I feel safe at work? All the things that attribute to me feeling okay, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, socially, all these things—and physically to be able to tackle my everyday problems that come around as myself, as a First Nations person as well. Yeah, for me, wellbeing is a lot about that feeling of safety, feeling of support, feeling of—kind of—comfort is not

the right word because you're allowed to get out of your comfort zone. But feeling comfortable to get out of your comfort zone, if that makes sense, as well.

As a result, Jasmin emphasised the importance of feeling safe, comfortable, and feeling well when she conceptualised the significance of wellbeing.

Bryson

Bryson is a male First Nations student who was in the final year of a Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) Degree.

Goals, career, and relationships. Bryson defined personal goals, career, relationships, and financial goals. These consisted of short-term and long-term goals which helped support his wellbeing; he thus reinforced that wellbeing is significant. As Bryson voiced:

> … goals that I aim to achieve, personal goals, career goals, relationship goals, financial goals -it could be anything. My goal might be for the next two weeks, go out for a walk every morning—not every morning but every second morning and if I achieve that, I feel really like, yep, that's what I wanted to do and I can be like I told myself I'd do that and I did that and I feel empowered. Or it might be to spend so much time a week on an assignment, those sorts of things. They're not even like goals I sit down and write, they're just something I have in my head, like I want to do this and I want to do that. Little things to work … .

Hence, Bryson voiced the importance of having positive wellbeing by setting achievable and clear goals, and the importance of having a clear direction in life.

Relationships and support. Higher education institutions and their Indigenous units and centres were deemed important by Bryson in providing many forms of support such as social and financial support:

> I feel like it's particularly eminent now, after all the Corona, what supports are good and what's available at uni. I found having really understanding course coordinators has helped; that's one part of it. It's like academic support and just having a good community, a good base of friends, and a support network. I feel like if I didn't have friends and the staff at uni and at the ATSIS unit, it would be so hard, because you have no-one to lean on.

He emphasised that with COVID-19 currently impacting students' access to in-person learning and imposing stressors on students' wellbeing, receiving support from staff is more than ever vital for First Nations higher education youth to maintain good wellbeing and thriving in higher education.

Bryson spoke about the importance of having good relationships and support networks within the university, which can provide support with studying and personal counselling. He said, "Yeah I believe it is because people need to be able to check on each other in how they're going with their study, and if they're having any family issues or issues with teachers or lecturers or other students and so on. It's important that everybody is able to manage in a safe environment and they're coping well with university and stuff". Hence, Bryson identified the importance of receiving support and having good relationships with higher education staff as significant to maintaining wellbeing.

Daniel

Daniel is a male First Nations student who was in the final year of a Bachelor of Architecture and Environments degree.

Happiness. Daniel expressed the significance of wellbeing as a desire to feel a sense of happiness and satisfaction with life. As Daniel explains, "It's also part of growing up. Like it's just you continue to shape your view and wellbeing suddenly becomes important or more self-evident, because the more you are responsible for yourself and responsible potentially for others as well, then you have to start thinking about what does wellbeing mean, what does it mean, what does happiness mean, then looking at into different, I guess, religious philosophies around being content". Daniel expressed how wellbeing is challenging in that it asks a person to understand what makes them happy. For instance, "What is happiness, what are goals and what are you happy to be content with and where do you find wellbeing in the midst of all that, like it's healthy mind, body, and spirit". Therefore, for this student, wellbeing was associated with having clarity over one's goals, purpose, and direction in life; and having a healthy mind, body, and spirit. Overall, Daniel recognised that wellbeing was significant in order to live a happy and fulfilled life.

Discussion

On the basis of the findings from the data analysis from the interviews conducted with First Nations higher education youth ($N = 7$), it is evident that wellbeing is indeed significant. This supports previous research, which has identified the importance of Indigenous wellbeing (Bourke et al., 2018; Colquhoun & Dockery 2012; Dockery 2010; Dudgeon et al., 2014; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Durmush et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2018; Salmon et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2018). Study 2 (see Chapter 7) included focus groups conducted with the same cohort of First Nations higher education youth, who deemed on a broader level that wellbeing is critical for them to thrive in higher education and in life more generally. The merit of this study is that the interviews enabled youth to voice in-depth

responses for the reasons as to why wellbeing is significant. Notably, the interview process enabled youth to draw valuable inferences from their individual experiences and perceptions.

Wellbeing was considered a contributing factor to the impact of Indigenous youth's overall happiness and ability in maintaining a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment of life. Similarly, the ability to set goals and work towards achieving them was referenced by youth as an important factor which was significant to maintaining wellbeing. Another important factor was feeling good socially, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and culturally as critical to a fulfilling life and thus wellbeing. Overall, the findings add to a growing body of research which supports that wellbeing is significant, and essential to enabling Indigenous youth to thrive and flourish in higher education.

Results RQ 3.2.2: Nature of Wellbeing for Indigenous Higher Education Youth

The social and emotional wellbeing model (see Chapter 3) was presented to First Nations higher education youth to gather their perceptions and conceptions of the nature of their wellbeing.

Francine

In response to the SEWB diagram (see chapter 3), Francine provided a recommendation for the model and expressed the need to include financial goals, as she reinforced the importance of both western and Indigenous values and wellbeing determinants to be critical to her wellbeing. As voiced:

> Whilst as a culture we're very—we're not as individualised because we are living in a capitalist society. We're still walking in two worlds a lot of us and so we do have goals which might not fit into the traditional notion of what it means to be Indigenous but we still have goals, financial goals or whatever. I think because traditionally

economic goals or things like that, they come from individualised ways of doing things which are more or considered more westernised practices. I think this model doesn't really take into account the fact that we are having to live in two worlds and it's all connected. So I mean maybe if there was a model where you had this and then it connects up to another model, which is the Western or whatever next to it or something. They're interconnected but you just don't see that in this model, yeah.

    Family and kinship. Francine also suggested that the SEWB model lacked acknowledging that not every First Nations youth has a strong connection and relationship to their family and kinship systems. For instance, "I think connection to family and kinship has been really important, but I think it doesn't take into account that not everyone might have that and that there might be fallouts with people or things—the impact of Stolen Generation on communities can prevent people having connections to family". Hence, Francine suggested future wellbeing models should consider acknowledging that family and kinship can be both a driver and barrier to Indigenous youth's wellbeing.

Hence, on the basis of Francine's quotes, the nature of her wellbeing was evident in that her recommendation emphasised the need for the SEWB model and future wellbeing models to recognise First Nations youth and people in general having financial goals, thus highlighting that financial goals are interconnected with other domains of the SEWB model. Thus, she makes point that despite financial goals being a traditional western wellbeing need, they are critical to the thriving of First Nations peoples in contemporary society as they navigate between the two worlds: western and Indigenous. Francine also recognised family and kinship to be a barrier for many youth's wellbeing, and suggested the SEWB model lacked reflection on the complex nature of wellbeing and family and kinship.

Jasmin

Multidimensional and interconnected nature of wellbeing. Jasmin identified wellbeing as being a holistic and interconnected concept. For example, she highlighted the relational impact her physical health had on her success in studies and in personal relationships with family. As expressed by Jasmin, "Just by something as little as—and in—bringing back that, if I don't sleep well that night then my pain's—like it's all connected. There's no way that you can look at one aspect of someone's life—you can't look at work or university or someone's family and not think that everything else is included as well". Hence, for Jasmin, her wellbeing was conceptualised as relational and holistic, with all components including physical health, study, and relationships being intertwined.

Bryson

Wellbeing is about balance. Bryson suggested that when he was having too much of a social life, his studies, going to the gym, and his physical wellbeing were adversely affected. Bryson states: "I guess because it's all about balance, really. So if I'm having too much of a social life, usually my mental health would drop and I'll fall behind in study or I won't go to the gym or I won't—you know what I mean? Like if I'm going out too much. I don't know, it's just all got to be balanced and achieving that balance can sometimes be hard but when I get it, I'm feeling good. Yeah, I can do everything". Hence, wellbeing was alluded to as being influenced by a multitude of interconnected factors all weaved in together.

Daniel

Relationships. When shown the SEWB diagram, it was relationships and connections with family that were important to Daniel's wellbeing. Notably, for Daniel

having family connections enabled pure happiness and positive wellbeing. For instance, *"*Yeah, so it's, wellbeing personally, well particularly it's family and those connections, it's the people that I care about most and having a good relationship with them, having contact with them and being able to spend time with them. I'm never more content, more happy than when I'm spending time with my daughter. That's something that no matter what I achieve in life, as long as I'm a father, I know that I'll be very happy". Further, Daniel explains the interconnectedness relationship between family and wellbeing:

It's also really interesting because it changed my world view at a very young age and it kind of changed the things that I enjoyed. I want to provide for her wellbeing, but I also want to see her happy and her happiness provides me with happiness. Watching her learn and watching her grow, that gives me a sense of fulfilment as a person. Then there's also the relationships I have with those people that helped me, my own parents, my cousins, they're role models that I had growing up and seeing how they go through life and how things change in shape for them and making sure I am always in contact and always around those people. I feel like it resets me, it gives me a sense of purpose.

Physical health. When Daniel was describing physical health as an important driver to his wellbeing, he conceptualised it as affecting not just his own personal health outcomes, but the future health of his family members such as his children and future grandchildren. For instance, "Then there's the physical side, like there's always things that will set you back and we're very adaptable as people, we're very adaptable to things that go on that physical health is really important. You see how it changes and it shapes the decisions that you make now will affect you later in life, but not just you, but your own children and grandchildren". As voiced by Daniel:

It's just looking at how to stay healthy and how that health affects your mind. Then healthy wellbeing in terms of your mind, like how you think about things, how you process, what's important to you, positivity and dealing with adversity. As Indigenous people, we're constantly faced with new burdens and new systems of oppression that will have negative impacts upon us and continue to have negative impacts on us and our generation. We suffer with intergenerational trauma as well. So there are some things that we're starting the race a few metres behind everyone else in the outset and having to deal and learn with coping mechanisms to still achieve in that space is really important.

Historical, political, and social determinants. Daniel also shared his experience of caring for his father while studying, and particularly the direct historical impacts of colonisation on the contemporary experience of First Nations peoples' health and low life expectancy. For instance, Daniel revealed:

At the moment I'm currently caring for my father who is a diabetic, he has dementia and Alzheimer's, he has multiple heart issues. There's a long list of medical conditions that he is suffering from. He's had clinical anxiety and depression for the past 20 years. Watching how he, as a person, has suffered because of those debilitating illnesses, it encourages me to strive for better. Part of it is part of that gap in terms of Indigenous and non-Indigenous health, but it's also education in not knowing how to take care of himself. Science and nutrition was very different 20, 30 years ago, 40 years ago.

Overall, through Daniel's quotes it is evident that wellbeing is conceptualised as being holistic, interconnected, multidimensional, and relational due to the ongoing impacts of the historical, political, and social determinants which continue to shape and affect his father's health and wellbeing.

Jackson

Jackson is a male First Nations student who is in the final year of a Bachelor of Communications degree.

  Historical, political, and social determinants. Similarly to Daniel, Jackson also identified that a determinant of his wellbeing was historical determinants and government policies. In particular, government policies such as the assimilation policy were the key reason for his Grandmother's disconnection to language and hence his Aunty's and his own personal participation in language revitalisation. This interconnection of historical and political determinants and culture has impacted Jackson's personal relationship and experience of connection to culture. Therefore, the following intersecting themes of wellbeing are described by Jackson as holistic in nature. For instance,

> Definitely, l think, historical determinants, especially in regards to things like language. I know my Grandma growing up on missions and stuff in the Riverina region, she would be around her parents and her uncles and aunties speaking language, but the children weren't allowed to speak language. So, she would hear it and she would listen to it, but she never was able to speak it. Then obviously that's resulted in a language loss where that hasn't been passed down. But then there's things like language revitalisation, like my Aunty's just finished a course where she's learned Wiradjuri.

Family and kinship. Equally, Jackson also found connections to family and kinship critical to his wellbeing, and viewed family and kinship as intertwined to his identity and spirituality. As Jackson voiced:

I feel like it definitely does, because it captures lots of different aspects, like connection to family and kinship, that's probably the most important one to me, because I feel like my whole Aboriginal identity and spirituality definitely comes from my Grandma. That's where I draw all my spirituality from listening to her and her knowledge. So, I feel like that aspect of my emotional wellbeing is definitely related to connection to family.

Physical wellbeing. Jackson voiced wellbeing as a holistic approach through the example of physical exercise having a positive effect on his mental health and mindset. For instance, "Yeah, it's definitely all a holistic approach, where everything is connected to one another. Even just being able to exercise, it gives you a time to just think to yourself while you're doing it and just clear your mind. So, I think they're all connected. I've definitely seen an improvement in terms of my mental health as I've become more health conscious". As a result, Jackson conceptualised wellbeing as a holistic concept which interacts and varies across all wellbeing indicators: social and emotional, mental, physical, cultural, and spiritual.

Christina

Christina is a female student in her second year studying a Bachelor of Primary Education.

Connection to culture. When asked about the SEWB diagram, Christina emphasised the importance of connection to culture and the positive impact work and study environments potentially could have if they embraced Indigenous culture. She said, "Yeah it can be. You

want our culture to be embraced wherever you go, with your work or your study and stuff like that. Learning the language and the traditions and what the culture is about and stuff, yeah I think it's important to know and to think about". As emphasised by Christina, having First Nations culture respected and embraced within the higher education space is critical to wellbeing and is holistic, in that cultural connection shapes study experience, sense of belonging to the university space, and thus academic wellbeing.

Historical, political, and social determinants. Similarly to other youth, Christina emphasised her personal wellbeing experiences and needs were shaped by historical policies and laws of colonisation such as the Stolen Generations. She voiced, "Yeah. Well I definitely agree that the government does control you and it does affect me being on the government system and Centrelink and stuff. My nan was a part of the Stolen Generation. It can affect people I know with having that trauma and getting—sometimes the trauma can be passed on to others". Therefore, for many of the youth, historical, political, and social determinants affected their wellbeing. As a result, Christina indirectly voiced her wellbeing being holistic and relational, as the above themes she mentioned highlight that her wellbeing is shaped by many factors.

Monique

Monique is in the final year of a Bachelor of Secondary Education.

Connection to nature. Monique revealed that connecting to nature was essential to her wellbeing. For example:

> Yeah. It's not even as if it's as deep as connecting to Country but just being outside in the sun and not in such a restricted environment where all your negative energy is. I'm sure when you—sometimes when you study, you get all stressed and every time you look at studying, it's like, no, thank you. It's like that's not for me; it's a really—

to go and dedicate time for being outside and just relaxing and the community support. Not just academic. I feel like if it was just academic, it wouldn't be as good. It's good to have support from family, mob and then just friends, as well.

In the above quote, Monique reveals the positive impact that connecting to nature had on her mental health, as well as the importance of receiving support from and connecting with her family and friends.

Wellbeing is holistic. As clearly stated in Monique's quote below, wellbeing was conceptualised as multifaceted, and was perceived as an in-depth concept. She said: "Yeah. It's very multifaceted, isn't it, because it's literally like what you eat and whether you exercise and who you spend time with. There's a lot—you're right; wellbeing is just so much".

Relationships. On a final note, Monique spoke about relationships being the most prominent shaper of her wellbeing. For example, "I think—I don't know, I don't think anything else—I think my biggest one would be the relationships between people. Because I feel like if you're eating well and exercising, all of that contributes to your wellbeing but for me, it's definitely mostly about the people I surround myself with". Hence, Monique voiced her wellbeing as being holistic.

Discussion

On the basis of youth's conceptions of wellbeing, the findings from RQ 3.2.2 indicate that wellbeing is conceptualised holistically. Specifically, when youth were discussing what was significant to their wellbeing, nature was described as interconnected, multi-faceted, and relational, with all themes and aspects of wellbeing weaved together. This is in contrast to western conceptions of wellbeing, where themes are considered acting alone and in isolation

(Dudgeon et al., 2017; Durmush et al; 2021; Marsh et al., 2019; Sutherland & Adams, 2019). Moreover, youth's conceptions regarding the social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) diagram showed that a multitude of cultural wellbeing factors that were significant to youth's wellbeing were strongly interconnected and relational.

The themes highlighted by youth included relationships, physical health, family and kinship, historical determinants, connection to culture, and connection to nature. However, youth also identified factors which were not recognised in the model and that were equally important influences on their wellbeing, such as family violence and financial wellbeing. Overall, the ($N = 7$) First Nations higher education youth found that the majority of SEWB models strongly represented their conceptualisation of cultural wellbeing. This is no surprise, given much literature has increasingly recognised culture has an important influence on Indigenous peoples' health and wellbeing (Bourke et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2018). However, youth also suggested that models of wellbeing could benefit from being expanded to reflect the multiple components of wellbeing that are associated with western conceptualisations, such as financial goals, given the reality that First Nations youth walk in two worlds and are living and studying in a western higher education institution. Notably, the findings also revealed that the nature of wellbeing is indeed holistic, interconnected, subjective, and multidimensional.

Results RQ 3.3.3: Drivers of Wellbeing for Indigenous Higher Education Youth

Francine

  Sense of self (identity). According to Francine, a driver to her wellbeing was having a strong sense of self. Sense of self was described by Francine as having a clear understanding, awareness, and confidence of who she is, and having a strong identity.

Notably, Francine emphasised that a sense of self is multifaceted, and is shaped and influenced by a multitude of factors, such as one's cultural, social, kinship lines, and sexuality. As Francine described: "Yeah, I think having a sense of self is really important. Choosing where you want to be, who you want to be around, being confident and knowing who you are is really important. That comes back to knowing where you're from and culture and kinship and having strong connections with family. Connection to Country is for me, I haven't had the opportunity to do it as much, so not at the top of the list, but I wish that it was".

Peer role models. Another driver Francine voiced was having other peer role models to look up to. She voiced, "Then the other one was having role models and leaders is definitely very important to—so that there's—as a community—as an individual we're told that we can achieve what we want to achieve if we want to, and we can actually have high expectations if we want to. We don't have to have low expectation". Hence, Francine highlighted that peer role models are influential in creating a sense of belonging and community within the higher education institution.

Jasmin

Goals. For Jasmin, a driver to her wellbeing was maintaining and achieving goals. She suggested goals should be included in the SEWB diagram, to recognise youth's aspirations and drive to succeed in education and in life more broadly. She said: "Yes, I'd say definitely goals. Goals I would say should go in there because I think regardless of who you are as a person, everyone has goals, personal goals or goals in a group setting. Financial." Jasmin also spoke about goals being a universal driver of wellbeing for all peoples, despite the cultural differences of Indigenous and western cultural systems. For instance, "Career. I think everyone has their individual goals because they're human and then the community

might have goals as the community, but then within a community, people have different ideas of what it should look like or everyone might not all want the same thing because we're all different. So yeah I would add those ones". Hence, goals were a critical driver to Jasmin's wellbeing.

Indigenous units and centres. Much research has recognised the important contribution and support that Indigenous units and support staff provide in social, academic, and cultural mentorship (Chittick et al., 2019; Powell, 2017; Trimmer et al., 2018). Jasmin shared her positive experiences with the unit in providing a sense of belonging and community. For example:

> The fact that I can interact with that unit, yeah, no matter the colour of my skin, no matter nothing. I can go up to that unit and I can be supported by [de-identified] and the other people in the unit. That is—that's that sense of community within the university. I can interact with other mob who are from different degrees and different situations and everything. It's like I can be myself. So that for me is such a driver to my—it's the reason I didn't quit uni was because I met [de-identified].

Indigenous staff in senior leadership positions. Another driver of Jasmin's wellbeing was seeing a senior Indigenous academic staffer working in a senior leadership position. For Jasmin, it was empowering to see a Black woman in a powerful senior level position within the higher education institution that she could look up to. As voiced by Jasmin:

> It's like—even when we were allowed to go back to uni and what not, we've got [de-identified] as our director of [ABTS]—she was the director of the unit for a little bit but she's—that was only ever going to be a temporary position.

Seeing such a deadly woman in a place of power is just like, oh, auntie. She's the sweetest person. It was just so—and being able to go to—especially that university and be able to see—see deadly black people walking around and being like, yeah. They can—if they can deal with the shit that comes with being here then, of course—we can too because we've got them to lean on. We've got them to go to. We've got them to have yarns with. Honestly, yeah, I can say pretty confidently, it's those yarns that I have with the aunties and uncles that—whenever but talking about the university at the moment, it's like those are the most educational [laughs] that I'll—I'll maybe go to a class and what not and come back from a class and be like, oh auntie, I was talking about this in class. Then she'll tell me what her perspective is on whatever we were talking about. It's just like, yes. Yes.

As expressed by Jasmin, having Indigenous women in senior influential positions is an enabler to wellbeing, as seeing a Indigenous woman working in a senior academic position increases representation and role modelling, having a positive impact on wellbeing.

Bryson

Sense of self (identity). Similarly to Francine, Bryson also identified a strong sense of self being a driver to his wellbeing. In particular, Bryson's having a positive self-positioning provided him reassurance in moments of self-doubt. For example, "Yeah, I just think it's important because I know if you're ever doubting yourself or if other people are doubting you, if you have a good sense of self, you sort of always go back and say no, I'm fine. I'm okay. I'm going to get through this, whatever it is". Moreover, a strong identity and sense of self enabled Bryson to be resilient and confident in moments of self-doubt.

Student peer role models. Bryson also spoke about his positive experience with having other First Nations students as role models to look up to and drive him to continue studying and support him socially. For instance, "Yeah, so I think—so I did Uni Games last year. Indigenous Uni Games and some of the older kids in the team have sort of become role models for me and kind of keeping connected with them socially and seeing what they're getting up to drives me to keep doing well. Yeah, I'm actually going out for dinner with them on Wednesday which will be nice". Therefore, the drivers to Bryson's wellbeing were having a strong sense of self, such as having a strong identity and having student peer role models to provide support and relationships.

Daniel

Connection to family and kinship. Another driver to Daniel's wellbeing was connection to and support from family and kinship. For Daniel, it was his grandfather who was integral to developing his cultural identity and education. For example, "It's these people that I grew up with, that are close. These are my father's siblings, my grandmother—one of my greatest teachers in life—all passed away when I'm still young and I still need their learning and their education, I still want them in my life". For many First Nations students, family is a major driver and motivator to continuing studying higher education. Daniel continues:

> There's nothing that you can do as an individual to help or ease that suffering.
> You feel quite helpless, but you're right there along with them, and you're
> feeling it every step of the way. You still have to go to university and you still
> have to study and you still have to achieve. For me, personally, the biggest
> thing for my university degree has been the fact that I have a four-year-old
> daughter—her mother took her to a different state, and I have to deal with that

distance every day. I have to deal with trying to maintain contact and trying to be a father to her through this period.

Peer and community support. Daniel also voiced that a key driver to his wellbeing was receiving social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing support from role models and leaders within the higher education system and from the broader local community. For instance, "Yeah. We're nothing without our support networks. We have role models, and we have identity, and we have culture and we have spirituality, it doesn't allow us to still thrive and overcome adversity. Because what happens when our path diverts from our role model? What happens when the things that we strived for are totally unachievable and things change? We need support networks that allow us to continue to grow". Hence, for Daniel, the drivers to his wellbeing were connection to family and kinship and peer and community support.

Jackson

Sense of self (identity). Jackson also emphasised that his identity and sense of self go beyond his cultural heritage, and that his identity is in fact intersectional. For example, "I feel like I've explained that in terms of having a confidence in being someone whose identities can be categorised in many different ways. It's like that sense of intersectionality. I'm more than just one identity". As a result, Jackson reiterates that identity is an intersectional concept which goes beyond cultural identity and is shaped by a multitude of factors.

Connection to culture and cultural identity. Cultural identity and cultural connection were identified by Jackson as a strong enabler of his wellbeing. This is no surprise, considering the amount of research which has proven culture is integral to First Nations peoples' wellbeing and flourishing (Bourke et al., 2018; Cairney et al., 2017;

Colquhoun & Dockery 2012; Durmush et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2020; Sutherland & Adams, 2019; Wilson et al., 2018). Specifically, Jackson identified the importance of learning the knowledge of his family history and hearing the oral histories from his grandmother, enabling him to have a strong cultural understanding and grounding in confidence and identity. For instance, "For me, spirituality relates to knowing histories and knowing knowledge. I feel really lucky that I've been able to sit down with my grandma and family and just talk about stories. I feel like, for me, that is spirituality, where I can carry with me knowledges and know that that's mine and I have a responsibility to pass that on and make sure that that's not lost, yeah".

Further, Jackson voiced how cultural knowledge enabled him to feel confident in times when his identity was being questioned:

> Yeah. I feel like it's also—it's like a security blanket, being able to know those things. Because often, I guess, being a white-passing Aboriginal person, you are often questioned about your identity. But if you have a connection to spirituality in the sense of knowing sacred stories, or knowing aspects of your family history is like a shield against those things, because you can turn around and say, well, you can't challenge me on this, because I know who I am, I know where I come from. I know who my people are and this is me and that can't be taken away from me. So, I feel like spirituality, it's not just about knowing who you are, but it can be used as a way to boost your own sense of self-esteem and confidence in your identity.

In addition, Jackson suggested that as a fair skinned First Nations youth, he felt insecure in seeking support from the Indigenous Career Centre. For example:

Yeah. I feel like, for me, those come into cultural identity, because I feel like

acceptance by the community and educational support, they're very closely

linked to cultural identity. I know, for me, I haven't gone to places like the

Careers Centre, because I've felt a little bit of insecurity, in terms of being a

white-passing Aboriginal person. So, I think those types of things play very

much into confidence in cultural identity, yeah.

Family role models. Also, for Jackson, having a sibling or family member who has

previously studied was a driver to influencing him to enrol and complete his higher education

degree. In this case, Jackson's sister and uncles acted as role models and paved the way for

him and other family members to want to study at university:

Well, as I mentioned, for me, it was my sisters and my uncle, because they all

went to [. . .]. They all had different experiences, obviously, but I felt like

going to [ ] is like following in their footsteps. But there was also a program I

went to in Year 10. I can't remember the full name of it, but it was run by […].

I remember going to that and that was, for me, the turning point. I was like,

yep, I'm definitely coming to [ ], because I can see these people who've gone to

[ ] as Blackfellers and have done really well. For me, that just solidified the

choice of uni for me and the choice of that path of going to uni as a viable

option.

Therefore, family and kinship circles were a clear driver to Jackson's wellbeing and set a

clear pathway to enable him to flourish in higher education.

Christina

Goals. Christina identified that goals and career aspirations were important to her wellbeing. She voiced, "Yeah, what your future looks like and what your goals and achievements and aspirations are and stuff like that". Christina further speaks about the importance of having career goals, as it enables a person to learn who they are and know their place within the community. As expressed by Christina, "Yeah and also knowing who you want to be and what you want to do in the future is important. Yeah and knowing your place in the community and in this world".

Tutor support and mentoring. Another driver for Christina was having academic tutors and mentors to assist in academic support and mentoring: "Yeah that would be good and maybe mentors and tutors. Because they can support you and know what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong. They can mentor you in your course and help you progress—yeah". As a result, the drivers of wellbeing for Christina were career goals and aspirations, and tutor support and mentoring.

Monique

Goals and direction. Monique identified that not just having goals to work towards but in general having a direction in life was an important enabler of her wellbeing. For example:

> Also having goals and things to work towards for your wellbeing but without
> the pressure. Yeah, and not even just goals, like a general direction; something
> to work towards and then feel the gratification of having achieved is really
> important for maintaining the constant wellbeing. Because wellbeing can be

kind of like, whooo, but you feel like constantly achieving different things all the time, I find that I'm mostly like, whooo, this is great [laughs]. [Inaudible] it could be anything. My goal might be for the next two weeks, go out for a walk every morning—not every morning but every second morning and if I achieve that, I feel really like, yep, that's what I wanted to do and I can be like I told myself I'd do that and I did that and I feel empowered. Or it might be spend so much time a week on an assignment, those sorts of things. They're not even like goals I sit down and write, they're just something I have in my head, like I want to do this and I want to do that. Little things to work towards.

As voiced by Monique, having a sense of direction and goals is important to her wellbeing. Notably, goals varied from career to physical health goals that enhanced motivation and a sense of purpose in life. Thus, the nature of goals consisted of short-term and long-term goals to support all levels of wellbeing holistically.

Family and friends. Monique also voiced family and friends as a driver to her wellbeing. For instance, "My dad's Indigenous; he really highly values family and supporting family in any way possible. So, money or—he's not very good at speaking but he's always there and I think—it's like family is really important for me in that aspect and then treating my friends like family and supporting them that way and then having them support me back in return".

Relationships. Similarly as for other youth, relationships were a key enabler of wellbeing. As reiterated by Monique, "I think—I don't know, I don't think anything else—I think my biggest one would be the relationships between people. Because I feel like if you're eating well and exercising, all of that contributes to your wellbeing but for me, it's definitely mostly about the people I surround myself with". As a result, having goals and direction,

eating healthily and exercising, connecting with family and friends, and ensuring relationships are maintained were drivers of Monique's wellbeing.

Discussion

RQ 3.3.3 findings revealed the following themes as drivers and enablers of First Nations higher education youth wellbeing: Sense of self (identity), goals, tutor support and mentoring, relationships, connection to culture and cultural identity, connection to family and kinship, family role models, student peer role models, and peer and community support. Overall, youth emphasised the importance of having a strong sense of self and identity, which goes beyond their cultural heritage. Notably, identity was conceptualised as intersectional and holistic, and included sexual orientation and other factors which shape identity and youth's wellbeing. It was revealed also that having a clear direction and setting goals enabled youth to have a purpose and direction in life which supported their overall wellbeing. Relationships, social support and connections with student peer role models and community support were consistently voiced by youth as a major driver to enhance a sense of belonging, community spirit, and cultural safety. Academic wellbeing and success were enabled through receiving academic support such as tutoring and mentoring. Lastly, connection to culture and cultural identity was identified as a driver to youth's wellbeing, as it was considered fundamental to youth's development of cultural identity.

Results RQ 3.4.4: Barriers to Wellbeing for Indigenous Higher Education Youth

Francine

      Lack of community acceptance. A major barrier to Francine's wellbeing was the lack of community acceptance by other members within the First Nations community. Francine identified that this impacted her wellbeing and overall sense of belonging within the higher education institution. More specifically, Francine expressed her concern of not appearing Indigenous enough, and voiced her fear of not being accepted by the broader First Nations community. Francine also spoke about issues of lateral violence taking place on social media between other First Nations community members. Lateral violence refers to members of the same cultural group attacking, undermining, and excluding another member of their group. Francine voiced:

> I think being accepted is such a huge issue. If I don't feel accepted, I don't feel like I'm Indigenous enough because of how I look then that can have a negative impact. Sometimes I see on social media a lot of disagreement in the community and a lot of bullying and lateral violence on social media. That can make me quite upset even if it's not targeting me, if it's just targeting someone else. Often if it's targeting someone else, then I think about reasons why someone might want to attack my cultural identity or if they're attacking someone else, there might be something that I have similar to that person being attacked that I would feel quite upset about.

Therefore, the fear of not being accepted by other First Nations community members is an identified barrier to Francine's wellbeing.

      Walking in two worlds. The final quote from Francine encompasses a multitude of barriers to her wellbeing. The quote below highlights some of the many issues First Nations

higher education youth experience, particularly around cultural identity and studying in western educational institutions which uphold western values, ethnocentric beliefs, and knowledge, which can cause First Nations students to internally project fear, shame, and insecurity onto other First Nations students. As voiced by Francine:

> Yeah, I agree with all of them. I think you have the racism, the lateral violence is the worst, but with that, a lot of it's happening on social media now as well as in person. Walking two worlds is hard. Cultural insecurity, yes. Then other barriers would just be mental health and not having goals or not being supported to achieve them or judgment from community maybe because I can think of family members who I feel judge because you don't do things—I don't do things the same way as them or identity issues, maybe identity issues.

Hence, Francine voiced how walking in two worlds can bring multiple challenges to her wellbeing and overall mental health. Thus, the barriers to her wellbeing included lack of community acceptance and walking in two worlds.

Jasmin

Champion the mob who need it the most. Jasmin strongly voiced and advocated the need for higher education institutions to prioritise First Nations peoples who are more in need over First Nations students who may not experience everyday racism due to the colour of their skin or may be in a more privileged, financially stable position. For example:

> the whole not black enough thing right now needs to take a step back and we need to be preferencing those who are—how do I say this? Championing the people who might not be white-passing like myself because there is—those

185

people who do experience the outright racism and the outright disrespectful cops—they're not able to interact with the university like I am. They're not—I am 100 per cent able to go up and be like, miss, what you just said right then was racist and I don't like, because I have this safety whiteness. That has been brought to my attention recently. So I have been doing a lot of thinking about this sort of stuff because I have been—I've been one to have been a little hurt before about—I'd be like, why do I have to look like this? I don't want to be like this. Why am I like this? But that's where—bringing back to what I was talking about before, that's where I've had to accept, yeah, I'm Aboriginal but I'm Scottish and Irish as well. These are all parts of who I am so I've got to be me. I can't just be focusing on one side of me. But the people who are in situations where they are able—where they are—able to—where they're not able to interact with maybe the colonised side of them and they are more wholesomely interacting with themselves as being an Aboriginal person. It's like, all right, we've got to champion these mob.

Therefore, for some youth, there is an awareness of difference, pertaining to racism, injustice, and privilege. For Jasmin, it wasn't so much a barrier to her wellbeing, but an awareness that her experiences are different to other First Nations mob who are dark skinned, and accepting it is not her fault for being a light skinned Aboriginal person. Thus, there is a need to ensure all First Nations youth voices and rights are leveraged and prioritised.

COVID-19. Due to the current global pandemic of COVID-19, Jasmin emphasised that mental health and particularly wellbeing was an important, timely topic. Jasmin also expressed her concerns about the overall health of First Nations community members and Elders. For instance:

In thinking of the current situations with coronavirus, I remember when this first was happening and it was like, I'm not worried about myself. I'm not worried about how I'm going to go with this. I'm so much more worried about our old people. What's going to happen if they get sick? What's going to happen if it gets into the communities? That was giving me a lot of anxiety actually. That—I had to work with and I had to try and sit within my brain and be like, all right, yes, anxiety is there and whatnot. But that process took time of me just being like—whenever I hear more cases, I'll be like, oh no. It's like, I hope it's not any mob. I hope it hasn't gotten to anyone.

Therefore, the barriers to Jasmin's wellbeing included COVID-19, and her recommendation was to champion the voices and opportunities for First Nations mob who need it the most.

Bryson

Racism. Although he is resilient, a common challenge to Bryson's wellbeing was experiencing racist remarks from students at his higher education institution. As voiced:

But yeah, it's definitely annoying and it's when you're trying to just get about your day, do your work and whatever and you're getting that—it can make you feel uncomfortable if you're in already in a bad spot. If you're stressed from uni and you get that, it's just like—I don't know, it's just annoying. But yeah, I know I'm a pretty strong person with that sort of thing. I'm able to block it out or pull them up if they're saying something inappropriate. But yeah, no, it's definitely an issue.

As identified by Bryson, racism adds further stress and is detrimental to his health and wellbeing despite his being resilient.

Daniel

   Lateral violence. When asked about the findings of Study 2 (see Chapter 7), particularly on barriers to wellbeing, Daniel also referenced lateral violence as a complicated concept, which he believed was a topic associated with the complicated nature of wellbeing. For example, "It is a really interesting and difficult road to navigate because you can talk about lateral violence, you can talk about tall poppy syndrome, but at the same time, some people—that is a topic that I think is a bit too complicated to even delve into".

   Historical, political, and social determinants. This theme was identified by Daniel as a barrier to his wellbeing regarding intergenerational and health and wellbeing implications that communities and families face today as a result of the past policies and laws of colonisation. For instance:

> I think it is a barrier, but I don't think that people understand what that really
>
> means. What it means to be a statistic, to have a shorter life expectancy, to be
>
> predisposed to a number of debilitating diseases and illnesses, to have the
>
> highest youth suicide rates in the world. What does that mean to be a part of
>
> that community? It means that you're fearful for your nieces and your nephews.
>
> You're fearful for your family members because they go through phases of
>
> attempts at self-harm and they attempt to.

Daniel also spoke about the struggle of walking in two worlds, the western and Indigenous. Both worlds hold different value systems, and for Daniel it is a challenge to maintain cultural identity and connection, whilst pursuing a higher education. important to his wellbeing. However, the western world requires a person to have a career and income, to afford the cost of living in order to survive in a capitalist society, and education is crucial. For example:

I think it is definitely always a case-by-case basis. In terms of me, myself, I have a number of barriers that have got in the way of my education and a number of personal, I would say, limitations that I impose on myself. Like with the walking in two worlds. The time that I spent at university, I've always wondered, what if I spent that time—or the time that I spent at school—what if I'd been able to spend that time with my grandmother? What if I'd been able to spend that time with my aunt? Or more time with my uncle? I know that I would be fulfilled, and I know that I would be happy, and I know that I would have learned meaningful life lessons, lessons that I can pass onto my own children. But I was at university learning something different. I think that's a personal frustration. I think it's also very common. But those barriers are all linked. If the [variable] health of our people was better and these systems were not in place that detract from it, then I wouldn't have to deal with those issues. I would be able to finish university and hopefully still have my aunts and uncles and grandparents in my life until I'm always through my life. If I look at statistics, I'm 25 years old and it's a miracle that I've made it this far. In all likelihood, personally in my family—my grandfather died before he was 50. My own father had a heart attack at 30 and had to be revived. My uncle, before he did die of a heart attack last year, had a life-threatening heart attack a few years earlier. My auntie died when she was in her 30s. If I look at my immediate family members, there's a high possibility that I'm already halfway through my life. So, that learning journey has to be condensed. But how do you condense it when there are so many different things that are going on and occurring in the background and have to deal with?

Lack of cultural safety. First Nations higher education youth voiced a lack of cultural safety experiences as a barrier to their wellbeing. Youth's responses varied from experiences inside and outside of studying in higher education institutions. For Daniel, it was an experience of racism at his gym which has left an impact on his mental health and wellbeing. For example:

> It definitely is. Sometimes it comes from the most unexpected, frustrating places. Last week, I was at the gym, training as normal, and a guy, just an acquaintance, someone who would come and say hello every now and then, he came up and asked me what I was planning to do on the weekend. I said, I was going to go on a surf trip down the south coast. He asked me what beach? I said the name of the beach. His response was, aren't there a lot of Abos down there? I was just completely shocked for probably a whole day that someone could just come out and say something so almost, to me, vulgar, and say it directly to my face. I was completely shocked. Because I don't go to the gym to talk to people, I don't go to the gym to socialise. I come here to train, and I come here for my own personal reasons. Whereas if something like that happened in a classroom or at university in general, it is a huge barrier to your mental wellbeing. Particularly because a training session—I can go home, I can reset, I can do it again tomorrow. It's not really a big deal. But if I miss a lecture or I can't focus on a test or an exam because of something that has just happened, completely off the cuff—and it goes to resilience, sure. But I shouldn't have to deal with that, and I shouldn't have to have that be a part of my daily experience. I shouldn't have to have found ways to overcome that because most of the other people that are in these environments don't. Most of

the other people in these environments do not have to deal with that. It is a

huge frustration.

Hence, the health and wellbeing implications of colonisation remain a prevalent issue for many First Nations peoples and communities including First Nations higher education youth in this study. These implications continue to have an impact on students' wellbeing, and remain an evident barrier, as voiced by Daniel.

Jackson

Racism. Jackson also spoke about his experience of racism during a tutorial. For instance:

Just sitting there listening to that, being an Aboriginal student, who at the time

was paying my uni frees up front, out of pocket, it was really frustrating,

because it's just absurd to say that Aboriginal students get a free ride through

uni. It's not the case at all. Then, too, what he was saying, which was factually

wrong, because to receive an Aboriginal-identified scholarship, there are those

measures I was talking about, like stat decs and identity papers from the Land

Council that you need before you can access that kind of support. It was just

really uncomfortable hearing this tutor create this narrative about black

students getting a handout, or Aboriginality being used as a tool to get a free

ride through uni. It made me feel so uncomfortable that I didn't want to—I felt

embarrassed even putting my hand up to say, oh, I'm an Aboriginal person,

what you're saying is wrong. So, I just was quiet and didn't say anything. I felt

even insecure identifying myself with the people who had been in that

classroom outside of the classroom, because I didn't want them to cast

assumptions on me, based on what they may have thought or been influenced to think by the tutor.

It is evident that racism remains a prevailing problem within and outside the higher education institution. It is also clear that higher education institutions need to educate and train their staff in cultural competency and cultural awareness to ensure staff are aware of their unconscious biases and hence cultural safety, more notably also to protect the wellbeing of First Nations students and staff.

Christina

Drugs, alcohol, domestic and family violence. Christina voiced that the major barrier to youth's wellbeing was community experience of drugs and alcohol, and domestic and family violence. For example, "Yeah, I think like sometimes some barriers can be drugs and alcohol, domestic violence or family violence and abuse and stuff like that sometimes".

Monique

Non-Indigenous academics speaking on behalf of Indigenous peoples. The final youth I yarned with, Monique, identified that a common experience that was a barrier to her wellbeing was sitting in tutorials and hearing non-Indigenous academics who have little cultural understanding and no lived experience of being an First Nations person, speak on Indigenous issues. As voiced below by Monique:

> I've definitely felt it at uni before but I probably couldn't tell you when—I
> think it's just—it's curious when you have non-Indigenous people speak on
> behalf of Indigenous issues. That always does set me off a bit. Especially my
> education courses. We do a lot of diversity stuff and there will be someone
> there talking about the generational perspective on children's development and

they'll talk about the Stolen Generation and how that affects Indigenous

people. That always puts me a little bit on edge.

Monique's comments below highlight that when non-Indigenous academics who have little cultural understanding speak on Indigenous issues, it can cause harm to her wellbeing and educational experience. For instance, "Yeah. Or it just leaves you—maybe not anxious but it leaves you cranky leaving. I definitely left a few tutorials cranky, or just irritated because I felt like who are you to speak on that". Highly a systemic issue, and deeply entrenched within the higher education system, higher education institutions are responsible for perpetuating white saviour complex attitudes and ethnocentrism. As clearly voiced by Monique below:

Or there's a lot of white saviour [unclear] where they—we did a tutoring thing;

it was called the ARTIE Program where you had to go and tutor an Indigenous

kid in a subject for a few weeks. I understand the premise of it was—it meant

well but it was very much based on a deficit perspective, but you can't not do it

because it's part of your uni requirements. It all just felt very white saviour, all

of us going in to help these [unclear]. It was a bit odd.

Walking in two worlds. As voiced by other youth, the challenge of living in two worlds that hold different knowledge systems and values, Indigenous and western, can be a challenge and can add further stress to youths' wellbeing. Monique emphasises: "Without the support or at least the connection to other Indigenous people, I find it's very difficult to walk in both, especially when you're white-passing then you can easily just seamlessly slip into the other. Then that makes you feel like I'm not ignoring it, I'm not trying to distance myself. Then it leads into the whole, like, am I? I think I am, but am I? Which is so bad for your wellbeing, because that leaves you all freaked out and confused." As a result, for

Monique, the challenge of walking in two worlds forces her to constantly question her identity.

Tokenism. The final theme which was voiced as a barrier to Monique's wellbeing was the higher education institution's response to and behaviours related to the increasing diversity within the institution. However, the effort of the institution can sometimes be seen as tokenistic as identified by Monique, leading many First Nations people to feel uncomfortable and stressed. She said: "If anything, I've been used more as a token for events, which is just as gross, but never discriminated against. More like, this is like a palatable Indigenous person, let's put her there rather than …" Monique continues, "Yeah. It's only a current thing, or it—or when it is valuable, it's not valuable, sincerely valuable to fill a quota or to—as a tokenistic approach. Work only wants to do Indigenous things when you've got an assessment and rating coming up, like someone coming in to rate and assess the service and it's like well so now you want to do all these things but it feels less like sincere engagement in culture and more like you're just doing it for the sake of doing it". Hence, higher education institutions clearly need to do more to support First Nations students' wellbeing, as many of the barriers voiced by Monique are directly caused by the higher education institution's policies and practices.

Discussion

On the basis of the findings of RQ 3.4.4, the barriers for First Nations higher education youth highlight that all themes are strongly connected and are related to cultural wellbeing factors such as lack of cultural safety, tokenism, walking in two worlds, historical and social determinants, and lack of community acceptance. This supports the findings of a wealth of research which engages with Indigenous peoples and communities and that

suggests the importance of connection to culture and its positive effects on wellbeing and health outcomes (Bourke et al., 2018; Cairney et al., 2017; Colquhoun & Dockery, 2012; Durmush et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2018). The identified barriers to youth wellbeing in higher education confirm that environments which ignore, silence, and discourage Indigenous culture and ways of knowing are detrimental to youth wellbeing. Hence, these findings suggest that higher education institutions need to provide cultural training to educate and inform, and raise awareness on issues like racism and unconscious bias, which exist within the ivory towers of the higher education institution.

Research Implications

Implications for Theory

Social and Emotional Wellbeing Model (SEWB)

Drawing from the findings of Study 3, the implications for theory strongly mirror the domains in the social and emotional wellbeing model (Chapter 3). Youth identified the significance of wellbeing as being critical to maintaining strong relationships, positive mental health, and feeling good holistically on social, emotional, physical, cultural, and financial levels. These themes echo SEWB's domains of wellbeing, which highlight the critical importance of connection to: community, family and kinship, and mind and emotions. Likewise, the results from RQ 3.2.2, which explored the nature of youth's wellbeing, indicate that wellbeing is conceptualised by youth as holistic, interconnected, relational, multidimensional, and subjective. These findings also align with the SEWB wellbeing diagram, which identifies wellbeing as a holistic and multidimensional concept, with all themes intertwined together, unlike biomedical and western notions of wellbeing which suggest wellbeing indicators act in isolation (Dudgeon et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2018).

The RQ 3.3.3 findings were very similar to the above-mentioned themes, which reflect SEWB'S domains of wellbeing, and thus indicate that youth's wellbeing is strongly associated with cultural and social wellbeing indicators. RQ 3.4.4 findings revealed that many youths voiced the impact of historical, political, and social determinants on their wellbeing and relationship to culture. Government policies preventing First Nations peoples from participating in and connecting to culture, have led some youth to feel disconnected from culture. In addition, youth also suggested the SEWB model acknowledge youth walking in two worlds: First Nations and western worlds. This should include both academic wellbeing and financial wellbeing (such as having financial goals), as well as recognising the complex nature of family and kinship being both a driver and barrier. Therefore, the findings indicate that SEWB's model aligns with some of youth's wellbeing needs and values, however could be improved to recognise youth's experiences of walking in two worlds, and values which are socially, emotionally, culturally, physically, and academically related wellbeing components.

Self-determination Theory (SDT)

SDT has identified three innate psychological needs which are argued to be critical for individuals' wellbeing: relatedness, autonomy, and competence. The overall findings of Study 3, across all four research questions, are heavily associated with SDT's universal psychological need for relatedness. Relatedness recognises individuals' innate need to feel socially connected with other humans. This concept is reflected across Study 3's findings, where youth acknowledged the need to have strong relationships with peer role models, family and kinship, and the presence of First Nations academics to connect with and look up to. Youth identified the need to feel a sense of belonging and feel culturally safe. The

barriers to youth wellbeing were largely associated with factors pertaining to feeling culturally unsafe, which was related to higher education institutions' structural and systemic issue of lacking representation and inclusion of Indigenous culture, members of the Indigenous community, and Indigenous knowledge being visible and taught across various spaces within the university.

Youth voices regarding the significance of wellbeing, including the need to maintain and set goals, demonstrate that mastering goals to meet competence and satisfaction is integral to youth's wellbeing. Further, the voices of youth emphasised the importance of the need for autonomy as a First Nations person, so that their cultural identity and self-determination were respected. Therefore, SDT strongly mirrors youth's conceptions of wellbeing.

Implications for Research

Drawing from the findings of Study 3, the implications for research are guided solely by youth's voices, experiences, and recommendations. These implications provide a new research agenda that has the potential to guide a new, future research focus and policy. On the basis of the findings, future research could benefit from engaging and partnering with First Nations youth, as youth represent half of the Indigenous Australian population, therefore it is vital for researchers to engage with youth as equal partners in research. Future wellbeing and research models could benefit by embedding youth voice, knowledge, and agency to develop interventions of salience to First Nations youth. In addition, it is evident that youth's cultural wellbeing is an important driver of wellbeing, and therefore further research could explore in more depth how higher education institutions respond to cultural safety issues such as racism, tokenism, and lack of Indigenous perspectives in the

curriculum. Further research could also investigate ways universities are supporting and promoting Indigenous students' wellbeing, by assessing whether universities have implemented a First Nations wellbeing strategy, and whether from a student voice and agency perspective there are clear measures and evidence for wellbeing to be shown as supported and uplifted.

Implications for Practice

Youth's voice and knowledge as researched within this study have provided a set of implications to inform higher education policy and practice. According to youth, strong peer support and role models are clear drivers of their wellbeing. Therefore, Indigenous students and alumni serve as crucial role models to students who are enrolled or look to enrol into a higher education institution. Potential peer mentoring programs could be effective in developing strong relationships and fostering a sense of belonging, cultural safety, and community for First Nations youth and students. Drawing from the findings of Study 3, it is evident that youth's culture and cultural identity is important. Higher education institutions should enhance students' cultural wellbeing by connecting First Nations students to their culture. Such practices could include: Elders in residences to provide cultural mentorship, on Country excursions, or online or in-person cultural workshops. In particular, having a culturally safe higher education institution was profoundly important for youth. Some of youth's experiences of racism and lack of cultural safety indicate education institutions need to do more to educate and guide staff, and hold them accountable for practising cultural safety. Future practices related to promoting awareness and holding staff and students accountable for their actions are crucial to supporting and enhancing First Nations higher education's youth's wellbeing. Overall, First Nations youth voices are powerful in delivering

positive change for the next and future generations of First Nations higher education students.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of Study 3, which aimed to elucidate the significance of wellbeing, identify how First Nations higher education youth conceptualise the nature of their wellbeing, explicate what First Nations higher education youth perceive as the drivers of their wellbeing, and examine what First Nations higher education youth perceive as the barriers of their wellbeing. The overall findings indicate that wellbeing is very significant to youth for several reasons, including mental health, relationships and support, happiness, goals, and feeling good holistically. Further, the nature of wellbeing was conceptualised by youth as an holistic, relational, interconnected and multidimensional concept. Drivers of wellbeing included: sense of self, goals, connection to culture and cultural identity, connection to family and kinship, and peer and community support. Barriers identified were: lack of community acceptance, COVID-19, historical, political and social determinants, and lack of cultural safety. This chapter also reviewed the significance of the findings and provided the implications for theory, research, and practice. The next chapter presents the findings from Study 4, which explores First Nations higher education youth's perceptions of some recommended strategies and policies they perceive higher education institutions can implement to enhance student wellbeing.

CHAPTER 9: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION STUDY 4: INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION YOUTH'S PERCEPTIONS OF POTENTIAL STRATEGIES TO CULTIVATE THEIR WELLBEING

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of Study 4. Study 4 aimed to analyse First Nations higher education youth's voices and perspectives on, and knowledge of potential strategies, policies, and recommendations they perceived as important for higher education institutions to implement in order to support and empower their wellbeing. In-depth interviews and yarning methodology were undertaken with the same seven participants from Studies 3 (see Chapter 5 for a situational context of each). Each of the participants has been allocated a pseudonym: Francine, Jasmin, Bryson, Daniel, Jackson, Christina, and Monique, in order to de-identify the participants.

First, the findings from each of the seven interviews with youth are presented. The findings for each of the participants are detailed under the heading of each participant, and show a diversity in what they think institutions might implement to assist in building Indigenous wellbeing. Second, the key themes are synthesised. Finally the implications for theory, research, and practice are discussed.

Results

Francine

Inclusive and supportive Indigenous units. Francine voiced the need for educational institutions to create more of a welcoming supportive environment, to fostered a community that is more inclusive: "I feel like better support and a community that's a bit more welcoming. I know for myself at Sydney Uni, that I know other people have said that they don't come to the group because they feel judged and people are cliquey".

Indigenous units need to be in contact with students. Francine suggested that it would be useful for Indigenous units to be in contact with students on a more regular basis. She said:

> I think just contacting students more, making sure that there's a space that
> everyone feels comfortable about going to because there is the space there, but
> making sure—maybe the people, the staff that could come to the Koori Centre
> and sit in there a bit more and include other people to introduce other people to
> each other so they feel supported. Students don't feel like they have to go on
> their own and talk to people when they might be nervous about it.

Francine also advocated that the role of Indigenous support staff be influential in creating a socially inclusive environment. She also emphasised that because of their influential role, staff can also inflict harm and create a toxic environment for students, if they participate in student cliques and politics. She thought that staff may exclude some students and emphasised that it was important that "staff aren't part of making it a bad culture. That they're actually including students instead of becoming part of the clique and then excluding people".

Indigenous units to target wellbeing. Francine also suggested there was a need for institutions to develop wellbeing policies. For example, "Well, they could have an Indigenous wellbeing policy which looks at all of these different things and strategies they can do to improve wellbeing. Then that in turn will impact successful completion rates and things like that".

Increase scholarships and financial support. Financial support such as scholarships was noted by Francine as a vital area for higher education institutions to focus on in supporting youth's wellbeing. Francine shared her positive experience of having a scholarship and paid internship to support her financially. She revealed:

> I was supported for my scholarship, which was amazing and without that, I'd have to work and that's been amazing for me. Then also CareerTrackers has been amazing, being able to do the internships and that community and CareerTrackers has been incredible. I've made lifelong friends and so that's just been really helpful for my wellbeing and opportunities to achieve. Support has just been amazing.

Hence, according to Francine, higher education institutions could benefit from continuing to support the financial wellbeing of Indigenous students via paid internships and paid employment opportunities. Notably, the need for financial support and accessible scholarships does not apply to Indigenous students but to all students from low-SES backgrounds.

Jasmin

Including First Nations perspectives and culture within the institution. For Jasmin, it was matters concerning cultural safety that she perceived as important for higher education institutions to implement, to support and empower youth's wellbeing. She was

concerned about non-Indigenous academics teaching Indigenous perspectives within the classroom, which she considered detrimental to her wellbeing. For instance she exclaimed, "... how do you expect to be able to include Indigenous perspectives into your curriculum? You're not going to be able to because you're going to be picking up perspectives from a textbook, again. That's not what we want. We're not about textbooks. We're about those connections. We're about those relationships". She also mentioned the need to acknowledge and connect with First Nations culture beyond events such as NAIDOC. As Jasmin voiced: "I think trying to champion our culture whenever they can and not just during NAIDOC week".

Employing more First Nations academics. Jasmin suggested that institutional change was important. For instance, institutions could employ more First Nations academics to Indigenise and decolonise the academy. She emphasised the importance of higher education institutions having Indigenous academics to provide more cultural understanding, knowledge, and community connection: "Again, it's as simple as doing an acknowledgement of Country properly, bringing in more black academics when you're doing any sort of thing. At the moment I'm in discussions with the School of Psychology at UQ and being like, you have no connection to the community".

Jasmin emphasised the importance of Indigenous academics teaching Indigenous content as she felt some non-Indigenous staff lacked cultural understanding, held unconscious bias, and spoke from a privileged position: "They just kind of showed the stats but they didn't really talk about what was there. I was kind of like, oi, hold up. I'm a bit uncomfortable with that. Why do we have to learn about their attitudes about us if we're not actually going to learn about their attitudes, we're just going to look at it and be like, oh yeah, they still think we get a free house".

Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP). Jasmin also emphasised the importance of every higher education institution having a RAP plan to provide direction and employ strategies to support Indigenous wellbeing, retention, and completion of higher education. For instance, "That's what I think that universities should definitely be focusing on. They've got RAP plans. I think that every university in Australia has to have a RAP plan now. It's like, all right, go do it. Go implement that. Go talk to community… for psychology, go talk to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists".

Hence, the strategies to cultivate youth wellbeing according to Jasmin include embedding First Nations perspectives within the curriculum, employing more First Nations academics, and implementing RAP plans.

Bryson

Indigenous student role models. Bryson recommended that institutions create opportunities and a platform for Indigenous students to yarn and connect. He suggested that a university student portal or Facebook page could be effective. For example:

> Yeah, I guess with the thing you said about role models, it'll be—it would be good to know more about what the Indigenous youth at university are doing. So it's hard to have a role model if you don't know what any of them are doing. So if there's a really successful Indigenous student who's achieving all this, I wouldn't even know about it. If you know what I mean? It would be—I don't know, maybe if there was some sort of portal or—I know they have a Facebook page that they post things like that on but I don't know. Maybe some sort of university portal where you could see this.

Indigenous culture and knowledge taught across all faculty disciplines. Bryson's final recommendation was for universities to teach Indigenous culture and ways of being, knowing, and doing across all faculties and disciplines. For instance:

> I guess maybe a bit more—because I know some degrees study Indigenous culture quite a bit but often—like I do engineering, I don't really see it at all. I don't know, maybe you could somehow have—I don't know, some more Indigenous exposure in STEM degrees somehow. ... For engineering, you could probably have something like there's a town that needs to have this amount of houses in it, this is an Indigenous town and there's these rules or whatever. I don't know, have some sort of—do you know what I mean? Like a problem they need to solve drawing on Indigenous culture, so it can—so people can see that more, I guess. Just to remind them.

Hence, for Bryson, the solutions and strategies to enhancing student wellbeing were having a presence of Indigenous peer roles for current and future students, facilitated by a platform such as a student portal or Facebook page to showcase Indigenous student excellence. Thus, Indigenous culture being taught across multiple disciplines can enhance cultural safety and student belonging.

Daniel

Reviewing higher education institutions' policies. Daniel's major concern was the higher education system's role in shaping First Nations peoples in becoming westernised versions of themselves. Daniel's trepidation was that a westernised education could result in First Nations students leaving behind their cultural identity and Indigenous values. As Daniel strongly emphasised:

It's also quite frustrating because the change that needs to occur really is an entire revamp of what is currently done. People have found a way to circumvent and I guess profit from the system at hand currently. It doesn't adequately serve the needs of our people because it's not set up to. It's set up to create westernised versions of Indigenous people that forgo their ways of really knowing and doing in order for white collar success and white appreciation. It's not about them maintaining their identity and it's certainly not looking to target those who are quite comfortable in their identity or aware.

Revising higher education institutions' response to Aboriginality. Daniel suggested that higher education institutions' enrolment policies were problematic in that they target all students who identify as First Nations, which may not include students who have the lived experience of a First Nations person. For instance:

The focus seems to just be accepting of anyone and everyone, which kind of limits, like I was saying before. It is noble and you don't want to start to practise exclusion or limiting the opportunities of others because of factors that are outside of their control. But there's no awareness because the systems aren't accountable to the people that they service. There's no awareness of who it is that they're targeting and who they should be targeting. They don't understand how to do that because a lot of it comes from the university itself, the people that they employ and the people that they look to.

Daniel stressed that this issue is systemic and is of particular concern for the wider Indigenous community and their wellbeing. As Daniel voiced, "The problem is systemic, and universities have created a breeding ground for these new blacks that may identify, but

they don't identify with the struggle". He also suggested that universities are providing a cultural landscape for First Nations peoples who have either recently identified or found out their Indigenous heritage later in life. As expressed by Daniel:

> If you've only found out about your heritage recently, the university is not the way for you to go about that personal, cultural journey. You need to go back to community and find out for yourself. If you're ready to go to university, then in most regards, you're an adult now and you should be taking it upon yourself to learn and engage. Not to make excuses and not to know. Because it's not good enough. You, by doing that—what systems of oppression have you had to overcome to get to where you are, if you didn't know that you were Indigenous? If you didn't know that you had this heritage? If you didn't know that there are reasons why people that look or sound like you are murdered, killed, raped?

Clearly Daniel had concerns about the institution's systemic problem of enrolling First Nations students who have never lived as an Indigenous person, nor with trauma and hardship, and therefore do not understand community issues and needs. Interestingly, for Daniel this was a barrier to his wellbeing.

Jackson

Mandatory cultural competency training for staff and students. Jackson voiced cultural competency training as a strategy to educate and promote cultural safety and education across universities: "So, things like cultural competency, like I know [de-identified] said she does a lot of workshops at the uni with educators. They develop a kinship module that they do. But I feel like more could be done when you have interactions with tutors who obviously haven't received that kind of cultural training".

In relation to what higher education institutions can do to support First Nations students, Jackson shared an experience and story showing student support to be very disjointed. He said:

> I feel like [de-identified] Uni's probably—it's the most disjointed in terms of support. I know even with CareerTrackers, [de-identified] Uni is not a feeder uni. I found out about CareerTrackers from someone who wasn't connected to the uni at all, yeah. Even my CareerTrackers mentor, [de-identified], had a lot of trouble having a discussion course with the Aboriginal support services, in terms of connecting with the students on campus who were interning. She found it very difficult to get through to the right people at the uni. So, I feel like it's quite disjointed.

Putting faces to names (student support). Jackson also spoke about student support and higher education institutions' staff needing to build more of a relationship with their students, such as having more face-to-face interaction. For example, "I feel like it could definitely be improved and definitely in terms of putting faces to names. So, I've had a couple of phone calls with people from the Careers Centre, they just call up and check in. But it probably would be good to have more face-to-face stuff, just to feel like you're connected to someone who's looking out for you".

Therefore, mandatory cultural competency training and personalised student support were highlighted by Jackson as critical strategies higher education institutions can adopt to enhance First Nations youth wellbeing.

Christina

A space for Indigenous mentors. Christina identified having mentors as a potential strategy to support youth wellbeing. Further, she suggested that tutoring to support the academic wellbeing of students was useful. For example, "So having mentors and more tutoring and being able to do that for classes every day, like face-to-face instead of online and having your own safe space. A place just for Indigenous people mainly, yeah".

Support services (counsellors). Christina also mentioned the need to create more opportunities for Indigenous students, in particular support and services such as counsellors. For instance, "Just having more opportunities for Indigenous people and knowing what support is out there and more services and just having that—like the…Yeah just having counsellors and people that check upon you from time-to-time, making sure that you're going okay. Seeing how you're progressing and making sure that the work that is given like assignments and stuff embraces the culture and people's learning".

Hence, a space for Indigenous students to develop mentors and gain support from services such as counsellors was identified by Christina as a strategy to enhance youth wellbeing.

Monique

Employ more Indigenous staff. Monique advocated that there was a need for more Indigenous staff to be employed within the university as a solution to enabling cultural safety and creating a sense of belonging and role modelling for Indigenous youth. As emphasised by Monique:

I think probably by employing more Indigenous staff in positions of—I'm not—not power but like what I was saying before. The only people that would be speaking on the behalf of Indigenous people or First Nations people are First Nations people. Yeah, I think that and, in that sense, you'd have a lot more representation and that would increase your self-efficacy, if you can see someone that looks like you, succeeding and thriving. I think that would really help.

Sense of belonging and safety across the institution. Monique also spoke about the positive experience of feeling supported by and being safe in the Indigenous unit at their university. Further, they suggested that there was also a need for the whole institution to provide a sense of belonging, safety, and inclusiveness:

I think it's all about just embedding it more deeply and consistently and maybe that could look like—I'm not—I don't know, how can I phrase that? It's like—I don't know for uni—you know the university design for learning, how there's the—you design things to be accessible for everyone. I feel like if the uni could take that approach specifically with Indigenous people in mind. They should be designing things so they're accessible to everyone but accessible to First Nations people that don't have that step up. I don't mean that in the sense of money but when—I feel like the ATSIS unit does it pretty well, when Indigenous students come in to welcome them and make them feel supported and safe. That does happen just through the ATSIS unit; it would be nice if there was—I don't know. I don't quite know how to phrase that. [Inaudible] change the uni vibe as a whole, because the ATSIS unit itself is so welcoming and so nice, so how do you extrapolate that sense of belonging and safety into a whole institution.

Employ First Nations staff. The final recommendation identified by Monique was the same strategy previous youth voiced, which was to employ more First Nations staff. For instance, "I guess maybe—like when you were saying employ more First Nations lecturers and academics, maybe that sharing—what you're saying, like within the unit, if you have more First Nations lecturers and tutors then you'll have that in the classroom". Therefore, for Monique the strategy to support student wellbeing and enable a place of belonging for First Nations students was largely related to the issue of not having enough Indigenous staff and lack of visibility of leaders providing cultural leadership and mentorship.

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

Youth's knowledge, voices, and experiences of wellbeing whilst studying in higher education inform theory, research, and practice. This discussion section presents a cross-case analysis and synthesises of the seven youth interviews.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing Model

Youth's proposed strategies to enhance Indigenous youth wellbeing and experience in higher education correlate with the SEWB's (Dudgeon et al., 2014, see Chapter 3) domains of wellbeing. Youth's responses indicate that culture is a major determinant of their wellbeing. Youth highlighted the overall importance of their cultural heritage being embraced and embedded within the academy, such as having Indigenous perspectives and knowledge taught and included in the curriculum across all faculties and disciplines. A common recommendation across the voices of youth was employing more First Nations academics to provide cultural understanding and bring Indigenous knowledge, and ways of knowing, being, and doing to the forefront of the academy. The employment of First Nations academics was recommended by youth to ensure an Indigenous person was teaching cultural

content and topics that are especially sensitive in nature as they require cultural understanding and lived experience of Indigeneity.

The importance of the connection to community in SEWB was echoed in youth's interview responses as a core value of Indigenous youth's wellbeing. The findings highlighted the need for higher education institutions to build relationships, trust, connections, and rapport with Indigenous students, to create a place of belonging. For instance, students advocated that Indigenous units could: contact students regularly, include all students in social events, and avoid participating and engaging in student politics and cliques which exclude students. Youth also revealed the positive academic and social outcomes of implementing social spaces, platforms, and opportunities to enable youth to make friends, identify role models and mentors and thus foster a sense of community. Youth also spoke about the impact of social, historical, and political determinants (e.g., past and present government policies) being a detriment to their wellbeing: In particular, their relationships to cultural connection, such as language revitalisation and how higher education institutions respond to Aboriginality. As a result, youth's responses reflect the cultural, community, social, historical, and political components of the SEWB diagram. Hence, Indigenous wellbeing is conceptualised as holistic, multidimensional and interrelated.

Self-Determination Theory

SDT (Delci & Ryan, 2016, see Chapter 3) emphasises the universal psychological need of relatedness, in that all humans are social beings and have a need and motivation to feel a sense of connectedness with other humans. Relatedness encompasses the notion that all humans need to feel a sense of belonging and connection to people and the culture of their environments (see Chapter 3). As revealed in the interviews, a sense of belonging and feeling

socially connected with peers and community was voiced by youth as integral to their wellbeing. Implications for practice to enhance relatedness include higher education institutions to embed RAP plans and wellbeing policies to enhance youth wellbeing and foster a sense of community and belonging. The psychological need of competence in SDT pertains to individuals feeling they have mastered new skills and their own environment. Competence was echoed through youth's suggestions relating to mastering the higher education environment and academic requirements, including feeling good about themselves and their abilities. SDT's final principle, Autonomy recognises the importance for an individual to feel in control of their behaviour. Autonomy is reflected in youth's recommendations pertaining to their desire to have a voice and agency on important systemic issues, such as cultural safety and universities' responses to Aboriginality. Therefore, the overall findings based on youth's responses indicate that the psychological need for relatedness is an important determinant of youth wellbeing, and the relevance of SDT for Indigenous Australian youth.

Implications for Future Research

On the basis of findings from youth's voices, the key implication for research is that further research could focus on higher education institutions' responses in supporting Indigenous youth wellbeing. For example, future research could explore case studies of higher education institutions' enaction of changes to deliver cultural safety and wellbeing. More specifically, research could review the measures and strategies that education institutions are implementing to support Indigenous youth wellbeing and outcomes in higher education, and the effectiveness of such strategies. Further research could explore the relationship of connection with culture on and off campus and its impact on student wellbeing and higher education success, to elucidate more fully the impacts of connecting with culture on

academic success and overall wellbeing. The findings also imply that research which explicates the impacts of mentoring programs on Indigenous students' wellbeing could also be useful. Further research could also explore the effectiveness of mandatory cultural competency training and the wellbeing impacts on Indigenous students and staff. Hence, youth's suggestions in this investigation have offered new insights and research directions.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present Study 4's findings from seven interviews with youth, pertaining to their perspectives about strategies, recommendations, and solutions to enhancing and supporting First Nations students' wellbeing. Youth's recommendations were mainly associated with cultural safety issues, social wellbeing components, and strategies relating to systematic change at a policy level through embedding RAP plans and wellbeing strategies. The implications of the findings for theory, research, and practice were also outlined. The next chapter will provide a summary of the thesis results, the significance of this thesis research, and the overall implications of the findings for theory, research, and practice.

CHAPTER 10: GENERAL DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the discussion and conclusion of the findings from this thesis research, which comprised four studies. Importantly, this chapter highlights the significance of the thesis research and its findings, and the notable contributions to future theory, research, and practice. Firstly, a summary of the thesis is presented. Secondly, a discussion is presented of the four research aims and overall findings, and contributions to theory, research, and practice. Thirdly, the discussion includes the strengths, limitations, and significance of the thesis research. Lastly, the conclusion provides an overview summary of the chapter. Hence, this chapter outlines the valuable contribution this thesis makes to future knowledge production on Indigenous youth wellbeing research in higher education.

Thesis Summary

This thesis investigation aimed to: (1) Elucidate the nature and scope of research engaging with Indigenous higher education youth's wellbeing, and identify factors supporting and hindering First Nations youth's wellbeing. (2) Identify how Indigenous Australian youth who are higher education students broadly conceptualise the significance, nature and structure, drivers, and barriers of their wellbeing to identify key construals of salience to Indigenous youth. (3) Explicate in depth what they perceive as the significance, nature and drivers of, and barriers to their educational wellbeing. (4) Elucidate in depth what they perceive as useful strategies for enhancing Indigenous youth wellbeing in higher education.

With these aims in mind, this thesis research comprised 10 chapters. Chapter 1 was an introduction which provided the background and significance of the thesis research. Chapter 2 provided an overview of the literature and research synthesis of research pertaining to First Nations youth, wellbeing, and higher education. Chapter 3 presented the theoretical perspectives which underpinned this thesis investigation. The theories were carefully selected to ensure First Nations knowledge, worldviews, and perspectives were guiding and informing this research. Western theories that promoted agency and valued stories, narrative, and experiences, were also selected for the reason of leveraging First Nations youth voices and wellbeing experiences. Chapter 4 provided an overview of the aims, research questions and rationale for the research questions in each of the four studies. Chapter 5 presented the Indigenous and western methodological approaches which guided the research practice. Chapter 6 reported the findings from Study 1's systematic review, which explored international research engaging with Indigenous higher education youth's conceptions of wellbeing and their voice and agency. Chapter 7 presented the findings of Study 2 on the broad conceptions of First Nations youth's wellbeing in higher education. Chapter 8 reported Study 3's in-depth findings on the significance, nature, and drivers of, and barriers to, First Nations youth's wellbeing in higher education. Chapter 9 provided the findings on youth's perceptions of potential strategies and recommendations that could enhance wellbeing. This Chapter 10 presents a summary of the entire thesis and reflects on the significant contribution this thesis makes to the development of theory, research, and practice. Notably, the ultimate purpose is to contribute to the future wellbeing of First Nations youth studying in higher education.

Discussion

The first aim of the thesis was achieved through Study 1's systematic review, which identified and evaluated the nature and scope of international research capitalising on the voices and agency of Indigenous youth studying in higher education. The findings indicated that there was a paucity of research, with only (N = *28*) papers engaged with higher education youth wellbeing. In addition, research was limited in nature and scope. Notably, there was a limited number of quotes from youth, compared to the dominance of university staff members and community stakeholder perspectives. Essentially, the voices of youth were not being heard. The literature also lacked a direct wellbeing focus, with findings often being inferred or assumed. Study 1 also partly achieved the aim of identifying the drivers of and barriers to Indigenous youth's wellbeing. The drivers were found to be: Indigenous support units and centres, connection to peer support, family and kinship, and resilience. The barriers were: lack of cultural safety, lack of culturally appropriate wellbeing services, home sickness, financial stress and being in need of financial support. These findings confirmed the accuracy of existing theories in that wellbeing is largely associated with cultural and social indicators and factors.

Study 2 aimed to identify First Nations youth's broad conceptions of wellbeing in higher education. Focus groups were conducted with (*N* = 30) First Nations youth between the ages of 18-24 years, across four higher education institutions. Specifically, the purpose of Study 2 was to: construe more broadly how First Nations youth construct the significance, nature, and structure of their wellbeing; explicate more broadly what First Nations youth perceive as the drivers and barriers to their wellbeing, and elucidate the potential strategies and solutions youth may provide to enhance future First Nations higher education youth wellbeing. The findings revealed that youth conceptualised the structure and nature of wellbeing as holistic, multidimensional, and interconnected. The drivers to youth's

wellbeing more broadly included: cultural identity, family and kinship, connection to Country, spirituality, having a sense of self (identity), Indigenous student role models, and Indigenous support staff. Barriers included: racism and discrimination, lateral violence, non-culturally safe university spaces, family violence, walking in two worlds, and Indigenous community wellbeing at risk. The findings of Study 2 also highlight that wellbeing is indeed holistic, multidimensional, and interconnected.

The aims of Study 3 were to yarn back with the same First Nations youth in Study 2, to understand in more depth the significance of youth's wellbeing, the nature of their wellbeing, and the drivers and barriers to wellbeing. Out of the ($N = 30$) original youth a total of ($N = 7$) semi-structured interviews were conducted over the phone and Zoom. Adding to the results of Study 2, the significance of youth's wellbeing was highlighted by the following themes: goals, feeling good holistically, mental health, relationships, career, and happiness. The nature of wellbeing was aligned with the SEWB model's wellbeing domains: connection to culture and nature, relationships, physical health, historical, political, and social determinants. Hence, further supporting the findings in Study 2, wellbeing is holistic, interconnected and multidimensional. The drivers to youth's wellbeing from an individual in-depth perspective included: Having a strong sense of self (identity), goals, peer role models, Indigenous units and centres, Indigenous staff in senior positions, connection to family and kinship, peer and community support, connection to culture and cultural identity, family role models, relationships, and tutor support and mentoring. The barriers identified were: lack of community acceptance, walking in two worlds, racism, lateral violence, lack of cultural safety, drugs, alcohol, and domestic violence, non-Indigenous academics speaking on behalf of Indigenous peoples, and tokenism.

Study 4 aimed to identify strategies perceived by First Nations youth that were important to cultivate their wellbeing. The findings revealed the following effective strategies as critical solutions to enhancing youth wellbeing: having inclusive and supportive Indigenous units, Indigenous units being in contact with students, Indigenous units targeting wellbeing, increasing scholarships and financial support, including First Nations perspectives and culture within the institution, employing more First Nations academics, Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP), Indigenous student role models, Indigenous culture and knowledge being taught across all faculty disciplines, reviewing higher education institutions' policies, revising higher education institutions' responses to Aboriginality, mandatory cultural competency training for staff and students, putting faces to names (student support), a space for Indigenous mentors, support services (counsellors), and sense of belonging and safety across the institution.

The findings from across all the four studies indicate that First Nations youth wellbeing in higher education is a significant and timely topic that higher education institutions should prioritise, turning to youth voice and agency for guidance, direction, and solution. The findings from this thesis have made significant contributions to the development of theory. This thesis research is unique in that it brings a First Nations Australian youth voice and perspective to the knowledge production of wellbeing and higher education research. The findings emphasise the significant impact that connection to culture and cultural identity has on First Nations higher education youth wellbeing. Thus, the fundamental role higher education institutions have is to facilitate youth's connection to culture and cultural safety, including embedding First Nations knowledge, perspectives, and academic leadership within the higher education space. In addition to recognising youth's profound role in being future

change agents for their communities, it is essential to enable youth to have a voice and agency.

Findings from this thesis research have advanced our knowledge and understanding of what supports and hinders First Nations youth wellbeing in higher education. It also adds to a growing body of research which presents the drivers and solutions to enhancing Indigenous student's academic success and thriving in higher education and beyond. This thesis has added to a body of research that advocates for higher education institutions responding to cultural safety issues, to Indigenise and decolonise higher education spaces to ensure they are places that leverage and celebrate First Nations youth's knowledge, voices, and worldviews; in the academy and the community. Notably, the solution is creating a place of belonging for all First Nations students. The findings from the thesis research offer new research directions and focus, by encouraging higher education research to prioritise supporting and enhancing the wellbeing of First Nation higher education youth. Hence, youth's recommendations across the studies promise a significant long-term impact on the future practices of educational practitioners and policymakers, as youth's suggestions within the findings offer new insights and directions.

Strengths and Potential Limitations of the Thesis Research

A notable strength of the thesis investigation is that myself being an insider-researcher enabled relationships and connections to be built easily with participants, as being a youth and First Nations person myself, I shared similar experiences to the participants. This made me relatable to the youth and fostered connections and trust. However, it was obvious at times that I was an outsider in that, being the researcher, naturally there was a clear power dynamic, thus potentially causing youth to perform their responses rather than allowing

responses to emerge naturally. A clear strength of the research is the primacy of Indigenous youth voices on conceptualisation of youth wellbeing, with the dearth of literature this makes the thesis research highly unique and significant. Another core strength of the research was that it was underpinned by Indigenous theoretical and methodological knowledge and approaches, which enabled the practice of the research to be culturally safe and guided by the richness of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Some potential limitations of this thesis research include the small population of youth represented across the thesis research. Across the four studies, there were ($N = 30$) First Nations knowledge holders located across Sydney, Brisbane, Darwin, and Batchelor. Hence, there were no youth voices nor representation from the following states: Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia. Importantly, the youth who participated do not represent all the diverse voices and experiences of youth across the 250+ nation groups. This thesis research also recognises that youth living in remote and rural areas have different wellbeing needs, experiences, and values compared to youth living in urban and regional areas, and that each First Nations community is not homogeneous but rather diverse. In addition, this thesis research was only interested in higher education students who were youths between the ages of 18-25 years, and therefore First Nations mature-aged students were not included in this study. Hence, the wellbeing of First Nations youth who were not enrolled into higher education was also excluded from this research, as this study was interested in First Nations youth who were studying in higher education, and ways that wellbeing could be better supported by higher education institutions.

Significance and Vision of Thesis Research

This thesis research is significant as it sought to enhance youth voice and agency in research. There is a paucity of research giving primacy to higher education youth voice and agency, which makes this thesis therefore unique. It puts youths' voices, experiences, and knowledges at the forefront and epicentre of the research's theory and practice, and encourages future researchers and policy makers to do the same. It deemed youth to be the rightful experts and knowledge holders of their wellbeing, by enabling youth to define the significance, nature, drivers of and barriers to wellbeing, and provided strategies and solutions to enhancing their own, wellbeing needs and values and that of future First Nations higher education youth. This thesis research is very timely and addresses an important social justice issue of our time: youth wellbeing in higher education. With more First Nations young people enrolling into higher education institutions, it is critical that their wellbeing be cared for and supported, that they feel culturally safe and feel a sense of belonging in higher education environments that not so long ago excluded First Nations peoples from participating.

The vision of this thesis is to guide and inform future higher education institutions, education practitioners, and policy makers to think about wellbeing from a holistic First Nations youth lens and worldview, and to embed practices that reduce further harm and prevent trauma from recurring. As a First Nations female youth myself, I hope this thesis research encourages other researchers and policy makers to connect and partner with First Nations youths voice and enhance their agency by ensuring such policies and practices are driven and led by Indigenous youth and are beneficial to youth's wellbeing and the overall success of Indigenous communities. I also envision that my research will have a long-term and large-scale impact on future generations of Indigenous youth studying in higher education, as it

will add to a growing body of research which will guide future theory, research, and practice. I most importantly envision that youth's higher education experiences and wellbeing will improve to become culturally safe, where youth feel higher education is a place where First Nations peoples belong and can thrive and flourish socially, emotionally, spiritually, culturally, physically, and academically.

Conclusion

To conclude, the overarching aim of this thesis research was to understand how First Nations youth studying in higher education conceptualise their wellbeing, and to leverage the voices and agency of First Nations higher education youth in education and wellbeing research. The aim of this thesis research was to advance theory, research, and practice and importantly make a positive impact on the wellbeing of First Nations youth studying in higher education, and to bring youth's wellbeing needs, knowledge, and voices to the epicentre. On a final note, this thesis research contributes to supporting First Nations youth wellbeing holistically, thus seeing more First Nations youth and their communities thriving and flourishing.

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