

Article

## Social Exclusion/Inclusion and Australian First Nations LGBTIQ+ Young People's Wellbeing

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### Abstract

There is little known about the social, cultural and emotional wellbeing (SCEWB) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ young people in Australia. What research exists does not disaggregate young people's experiences from those of their adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ peers. The research that forms the basis for this article is one of the first conducted in Australia on this topic. The article uses information from in-depth interviews to inform concepts of social inclusion and exclusion for this population group. The interviews demonstrate the different ways in which social inclusion/exclusion practices, patterns and process within First Nations communities and non-Indigenous LGBTIQ+ communities impact on the SCEWB of these young people. The research demonstrates the importance of acceptance and support from families in particular the centrality of mothers to young people feeling accepted, safe and able to successfully overcome challenges to SCEWB. Non-Indigenous urban LGBTIQ+ communities are at times seen as a "second family" for young people, however, structural racism within these communities is also seen as a problem for young people's inclusion. This article contributes significant new evidence on the impact of inclusion/exclusion on the SCEWB of Australian First Nations LGBTIQ+ youth.

### Keywords

Aboriginal; Australia; First Nations; LGBTIQ+; social inclusion; social exclusion; Torres Strait Islander; young people; wellbeing

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

There is very little known about the social, cultural and emotional wellbeing (SCEWB) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer/Questioning) young peoples in Australia. A recent scoping review, for example, found only one published report that included young First Nations

LGBTIQ+ participants in Australia (Soldatic, Briskman, Trewlynn, Leha, & Spurway, in press). In Australia, publications on the mental health of LGBTIQ+ youth do have small Indigenous samples but do not explore the responses of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants separately from non-Indigenous ones (Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden, & Davies, 2014; Smith et al., 2014). There has been no academic investigation of

their SCEWB, mental health and associated risk factors that could provide an understanding of culturally appropriate protective and/or responsive mechanisms, supports and services. This gap in research has been recognised in recent reports, which acknowledge that Indigenous LGBTIQ+ people continue to be unrepresented in research and LGBTIQ+ service provision, and that there are specific and distinct barriers that are faced by this population (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015; Dudgeon, Bonson, Cox, Georgatos, & Rouhani, 2015; National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2016; Northern Territory Mental Health Coalition, 2017). These documents state that the needs of this unique population are unlikely to be met within existing services that target the LGBTIQ+ community, or those specifically for Indigenous people's mental health and wellbeing. Indeed, the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing* refers to the need to, "develop strategies to support the mental health and SEWB [social and emotional wellbeing] of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people" (Australian Government, 2017, p. 25). This article, and the larger research project of which it is part, aim to fill some of these knowledge gaps with a view to present the lived experiences and needs of young participants, ultimately to improve service design and delivery for this group.

There is a small body of literature on the SCEWB of First Nations LGBTIQ+ young people worldwide (see Balsam, Huang, Fieland, Simoni, & Walters, 2004; Dudgeon et al., 2015; Elm, Lewis, Walters, & Self, 2016; Jackson, & Jim, 2015; Lehavot, Walters, & Simoni, 2009; James, Passante, 2012; Ristock, Zoccole, & Passante, 2010, 2011; Scheim et al., 2013; Yuan, Duran, Walters, Pearson, & Evans-Campbell, 2014). This body of research includes young First Nations LGBTIQ+ participants, however, many studies do not disaggregate young peoples' data from that of their adult First Nations LGBTIQ+ peers. First Nations LGBTIQ+ young peoples do share common histories, cultures and communities with other First Nations Peoples, however, it cannot be assumed that their lived experiences, perspectives and needs are necessarily the same. For both adult and young First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples, settler-colonial state policies and practices targeted their collective Indigenities, cultures, communities and spiritualities, as well as attempting to control, shape or eliminate First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples' sexuality and gender diversity (Balsam et al., 2004; Dudgeon et al., 2015; Elm et al., 2016; Lehavot et al., 2009; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010; Scheim et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2014). For First Nations peoples in British colonies such as Australia, the imposition of Christian heteronormative, heteropatriarchal and cis-gendered values played a key role in the attempted erasure of First Nations cultures (Balsam et al., 2004; Dudgeon et al., 2015; Scheim et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2014). Research from the US and Canada in particular highlights the ways in which First Nations' gender

and sexuality diversity were targeted for erasure during colonial expansions into their territory as they were perceived as a threat to settler-colonial Christian values (Scheim et al., 2013).

A key feature of colonial state strategies of ethnocide and assimilation, a form of enforced inclusion through erasure, was the forced removal of children from their families and communities. The removal of First Nations children from their families and communities in the US, Canada and Australia is well-documented, leading to collective inter-generational trauma. Christian churches and missions played a key role in the removal of First Nations children (Balsam et al., 2004; Dudgeon et al., 2015; Lehavot et al., 2009; Passante, 2012; Scheim et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2014). Children were taken and incarcerated on reserves, boarding schools and missions, trained to work as unpaid labour for settler households, farms and businesses. In the US and Canada, settler-colonial institutions such as Boarding Schools embodied this policy of targeting First Peoples' languages, spirituality, cultures and gender and sexuality diversity (Lehavot et al., 2009; Scheim et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2014). In a similar way, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their families and communities by successive Australian governments, welfare agencies and churches (Dudgeon et al., 2015; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 1997). Once removed from family and community, all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lives were controlled including the kinds of intimate personal relationships they were allowed to have (HREOC, 1997). Even though this policy does not directly apply to the participants of this research, the inter-generational effects of this policy, as the research participants discuss later, are felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to this day.

### *1.1. Inclusion/Exclusion and First Nations LGBTIQ+ Wellbeing*

A 2016 thematic edition of the journal *Social Inclusion* provided a forum for discussions around the meaning of social inclusion and exclusion for First Nations Peoples. Some of the articles provided an excellent discussion of the literature on social inclusion and exclusion from First Nations' perspectives (see Habibis, Taylor, Walter, & Elder, 2016; Pidgeon, 2016; Walter, 2016). As noted by leading Indigenous scholar Maggie Walter, "social exclusion, as a concept, is culturally, socially and economically not the same for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as it is for non-Indigenous populations, in Australia or elsewhere" (Walter, 2016, p. 74). Good definitions of inclusion/exclusion recognise the "social aspects of poverty" and "power relationship dimensions" where one group's exclusion props up the entitlement and privilege of other groups (Walter, 2016, p. 69). These mainstream understandings of social inclusion/exclusion lack the necessary contextual understanding of the patterns and processes that lead to exclusion as well as

the complex specificities of what social inclusion means for First Nations Peoples living in modern settler-colonial states (Walter, 2016).

A growing body of Indigenous led research argues that First Nations Peoples' circumstances, life experiences and value systems are so disparate from non-Indigenous ones, it is meaningless to use the same metrics to measure inclusion or exclusion (Hunter & Jordan, 2010). Many of the indicators used to measure inclusion and exclusion are not relevant to Australian First Nations peoples' values or lived experiences. Indicators framed on "Aboriginal failure" (Hunter & Jordan, 2010, p. 75) do not include the complexities of Indigenous understandings, knowledges or perspectives on issues such as well-being. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not have the same conceptualisation of what a "good life" means (Walter, 2016, p. 75). Walter goes on to argue that, there is a need for "Indigenous interpretations of a decent life" that include connections to community, culture and country as "core functioning for Indigenous people" (Walter, 2016, p. 75). The term SEWB, for example, tends to focus more attention on the individual, whereas Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander conceptualisations focus more on collective wellbeing and the importance of connections to country, community and culture (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). This is the reason in this article we have added culture to the acronym to create SCEWB emphasising the importance of culture in the settler state context.

For First Nations peoples to become part of the colonial state, they were expected to abandon country, culture, languages and community (HREOC, 1997). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were too 'black' or too culturally embedded to be 'saved,' faced the full force of the Australian settler state's racially-motivated policies of attempted genocide and ethnocide. All done in the vain hope that First Nations Peoples would eventually be eliminated, assimilated or disappear. This policy was actively pursued through the forced removal of First Nations Peoples from lands and waters and their displacement by settler-colonial migrant populations, cultures, institutions and values (Veracini, 2010).

The impact of settler-colonialism is also reflected in the current literature on the SCEWB of First Nations LGBTIQ+ youth. Racism, discrimination, marginalisation, poverty, homelessness, loss of community, LGBTIQ+-phobia, food insecurity, discrimination, unemployment, incarceration and out of home placement of children have been found to be significant factors affecting First Nations LGBTIQ+ adult and youth wellbeing. At the individual level, this played out in terms of higher reported levels of inter-personal violence, childhood physical abuse, childhood sexual abuse, micro-aggressions, intimate partner violence and victimisation (Balsam et al., 2004; Barney, 2003; 2003; Dudgeon et al., 2015; James et al., 2015; Lehavot et al., 2009; Scheim et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2014). Much of the violence, mal-

treatment and abuse reported by First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples took place when they were young, when in the care of adults in boarding schools, missions or family households who targeted them for being different (Balsam et al., 2004; James et al., 2015; Lehavot et al., 2009; Scheim et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2014).

The literature highlights the exclusionary practices that have negatively impacted on this group in both First Nations communities and non-Indigenous LGBTIQ+ communities. Once their gender diversity and/or sexual preferences becomes known in community, some First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples experienced psychological distress from micro-aggressions, discrimination and acts of outright violence (Balsam et al., 2004; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010, 2011; Scheim et al., 2013). If First Nations LGBTIQ+ young people experienced discrimination in their home communities, they often moved to larger urban areas and capital cities (Balsam et al., 2004; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010, 2011). However, this can lead to loss of connection to culture and community and exposes young people to racism and discrimination from non-Indigenous mainstream and LGBTIQ+ communities (Balsam et al., 2004; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010). Issues related to discrimination and racism impacting on young First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples include high levels of unemployment, homelessness, food insecurity, high rates of incarceration, low incomes and poverty (Dudgeon et al., 2015; James et al., 2015; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010; Scheim et al., 2013).

International research shows that outcomes for First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples are mixed. They depend not only on individual success in overcoming negative life experiences but more importantly on the degree and kind of collective support, respect and acceptance found within both First Nations and non-Indigenous LGBTIQ+ communities. If First Nations LGBTIQ+ young people experienced racism, disadvantage and discrimination without mitigating collective support and acceptance this frequently led to negative SCEWB outcomes. SCEWB outcomes in the literature included post-traumatic reactions, depression, suicidality, alcohol abuse, substance use and psychological distress (Balsam et al., 2004; Dudgeon et al., 2015; James et al., 2015; Lehavot et al., 2009; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010, 2011; Scheim et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2014). The literature also makes a connection with alcohol and illicit drug use, with young Indigenous LGBTIQ+ peoples reporting drinking at a younger age and drinking to alter emotional states (Balsam et al., 2004; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010; Yuan et al., 2014).

The literature also highlights the importance of connection, culture and community as buffers against the long standing inter-generational effects of colonisation. The research noted that there were some communities with strong connections with pre-invasion cultures that valued gender and sexuality diversity. While this does not appear to be consistent across all existing

communities, there is some evidence that where gender and sexuality diversity was accepted prior to invasion, the continuity of these values afforded participants feelings of belonging and mutual respect (Elm et al., 2016; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010, 2011; Yuan et al., 2014). In some communities in the US and Canada, for example, First Nations LGBTIQ+ youth continue to be respected members, have integral roles and responsibilities and actively participate in and lead community and cultural activities (Balsam et al., 2004; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010, 2011; Scheim et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2014). The evidence base is less robust in Australia, however, where research on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ communities is much less well developed (Bayliss, 2015). This highlights the need for research projects such as this one that are co-designed and co-led by First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples. Understanding the lived experiences and needs of young people will help increase understandings of the processes that lead to the inclusion or exclusion of First Nations LGBTIQ+ young people as well as improve service provision to this group. As one of the first research projects on this topic in Australia, this article adds substantial and important insights to the international literature. The article uses a social inclusion/exclusion lens to interrogate key themes emerging from in-depth interviews with First Nations LGBTIQ+ youth living in eastern Australia.

## 2. Methods

This article is the first of a series of papers interrogating the data from a set of interviews with First Nations LGBTIQ+ youth in Australia. These interviews were part of a preliminary phase in a larger project investigating the SCEWB of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ youth. This study was supported by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council under its Targeted Call 2018 Indigenous Social and Emotional Wellbeing funding round. The principal objective of the study was to understand how being First Nations, LGBTIQ+ and young intersected with SCEWB. The project also aimed to assist in the development of supportive programs and services. The project has a three-phase methodology, with each phase informed by preceding phases. The data used in this report are from 11 in-depth narrative interviews of First Nations LGBTIQ+ youth aged 14–25 years. Participants were recruited from November 2019 to May 2020 through First Nations LGBTIQ+ social networks, social media posts by partner organisations (BlaQ and ACON Health) and service provider networks (e.g., Twenty10, Campbelltown City Council, Infant Child Adolescent Mental Health (ICAMHS)/NSW Health). Given the predominance of deficit-based approaches, the larger project took a strengths-based approach focusing on the resistance, successes, voices and perspectives of First Nations LGBTIQ+ youth in overcoming challenges to their SCEWB.

The first phase involved in-depth interviews with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people living in urban centres. These interviews will inform the content of phase 2, an online survey of First Nations LGBTIQ+ young people to obtain quantitative data regarding wellbeing, risk and protective factors, and experiences of health services. A final phase will use participatory action research methods to work with First Nations LGBTIQ+ young people, their organisations, relevant service providers and stakeholders to co-design programs that can support young people's SCEWB. All phases of the research process have been guided by a Youth Advisory Group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ young people.

Prior to submission, this article was reviewed by members of the Youth Advisory Group and the NSW Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council's (AH&MRC) Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The project received ethics approval from the AH&MRC (HREC Ref. 1536/19) on 27 August 2019. All quotes used were also verified and cleared for publication with each of the participants in acknowledgement of their ownership and control of their own stories. The project has taken a Dharug name to reflect this: Dalarinji or 'Your Story.'

### 2.1. Data Analysis

This article thematically analysed transcripts from interviews with participants who identified as First Nations LGBTIQ+ young people. Thematic analysis allows for the development of complex conceptual and thematic categories that emerge from inductively analysing transcripts rather than deductively testing pre-existing theories or hypotheses. Thematic analysis involved different levels of analysis with open, axial and selective coding as foundational techniques (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the first stage of thematic analysis the research team read through the transcripts to open up the text and identify broad themes that lead to more in-depth examination. The transcripts were read line by line to identify and classify recurring themes and common conceptual groupings as well as any outlying or contradictory categories. Conceptually similar themes were grouped together into categories and whereby key relationships and linkages between cases (participants), concepts and categories were identified (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The analysis organised themes and categories around key explanatory concepts emerging from the interviews. Themes and categories built on each other incrementally through abstraction and the generation of higher-order concepts and metaphors with any overarching patterns and categories identified from within the emerging themes. The analytic processes were iterative with different types of analysis feeding back and informing other stages generating increasingly meaningful and thick description. Constant reference was made between the original transcripts and emerging codes

and categories, ensuring that the codes, categories and concepts retained a close link to the original text.

### 3. Findings

All participants identified as proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The participants identified with many different First Nations Peoples across Australia including Birpai, Bundjalung, Djangadi, Gumbayngirr, Kamilaroi, Meriam, Murri, Muruwari, Mineng/Noongar, Nunukul, Wakka Wakka, Wiradjuri, Wuthathi and Yuin. One participant, however, was unable to name their People as their family was part of the Stolen Generations, and consequently did not know where their grandparents came from. The Stolen Generations were the result of assimilatory policies, particularly targeted at children designated as 'mixed race' by state and federal governments in partnership with church and welfare agencies (HREOC, 1997). These policies removed First Nations children from their families and placed them in workhouses, missions, boarding schools and orphanages, as well as adoption into non-Indigenous families (HREOC, 1997). The result was disconnection from family, community, culture and country, frequently combined with abusive practices to create negative outcomes in terms of social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

Participants also identified across a range of gender and sexuality diversity: bisexual, fluid, gay, lesbian, non-binary, omnisexual, pansexual, queer, trans and unsure. Participants were all from significant urban areas as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2016) including Hobart, Canberra and the Western and inner Western suburbs of Sydney. Despite living in urban areas, almost all of the participants reported strong links with First Nations' kinship groups and the lands and waters under their custodianship (called 'country' in Australia).

#### 3.1. Sustaining Wellbeing

SCEWB outcomes were linked to the degree and ways in which different families or communities were exclusionary or inclusionary in their practices and processes. On the deficit side, the interviews demonstrated some of the challenges encountered by participants as they struggled to recover or sustain SCEWB and health. At a structural level, LGBTIQ+-phobia was seen as being more prevalent in more conservative, rural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Participants reported feeling 'comfortable' in urban Queer-specific spaces such as nightclubs, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and other events. However, some young Aboriginal LGBTIQ+ people reported experiencing racism within non-Indigenous LGBTIQ+ urban communities, making them avoid certain events and venues. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ participants frequently used the word "comfortable" to describe when they felt supported and safe, and "uncomfortable" when they felt threatened, excluded or unsafe.

#### 3.2. "I'll Always Love You": The Centrality of Mothers

And then I think my mum was the first person I told and she knew since I was young. I stood to her in the kitchen and I said, "Mum, what would you do if one of your kids was gay?" And she's like, "Why? Are you gay?" And she was like, "I've known since you were 13," and then she just gave me a big cuddle and said, "I'll always love you just the same as all your other brothers and sisters, so don't worry about me not loving you as much." (Young Djangadi Lesbian)

Within participants' families, mothers were considered pivotal to feelings of inclusion and seen as being the most supportive of young people's LGBTIQ+ identities, attaining and sustaining positive SCEWB outcomes. Except for one young gay man who was shunned by his parents because of his gay identity, all other participants reported the centrality of mothers to their wellbeing. Most young people spoke of the importance of their mother's acceptance and support. A young Wiradjuri queer cis-man describes coming out to his mother as an affirming, loving experience:

I didn't know how to start. I was sitting there for five minutes probably just thinking, "How do I voice it?" And I just said, "Hey, mum, would you care if I was into men?" She said, "No, I don't care." Like, "Doesn't concern me," like, "That doesn't matter to me," like, "You're still my son." I said, "Well, good, 'cause I do like men." And she welcomed me with open arms and she just said, "Yeah, kind of figured."

A young Djangadi gay cis-man also described the acceptance and love he got from his mother whom he sees as his "role model" in life:

She didn't stop me from playing with Bratz dolls. She didn't stop me from doing the dance groups, drama. She didn't stop me with playing netball because she was netballer. She didn't stop me taking me to girly concerts or watching girly shows. She just let me be me. I think that's what helped me the most. She's taught me about I can do anything and I clearly nailed it.

#### 3.3. "I Lean on Them": Family, Kinship and Community

Sisters and brothers also played an important role in supporting young people when they came out, as a young queer Wiradjuri cis-man explains:

My sisters are a big support mechanism for me. I lean on them, they lean on me. Just to have that—we talk about everything and they knew my partner and so, it was good for—as well as a couple close friends. I had that support there.

This did not mean that other family members were not considered important, however, cousins, uncles, aunts, grandmothers, grandfathers and fathers were not discussed to the same degree. And they were not always seen as being as supportive of sexuality or gender identities nor as central to participants' wellbeing.

In many instances, young people had not discussed their sexuality or gender identities for fear of a negative response from extended family members, especially if they lived in more socially conservative rural communities. One young bisexual Murri cis-woman with connections to the Meriam/Wuthathi peoples explains:

I think one of the things that I feel with my grandparents is that one of my grandfathers was stolen and he's got a lot of trauma and he's quite homophobic. I guess the thing that—I never talked to him about being queer 'cause that would make our relationship even worse that it already is. I think we don't have a good relationship already.

Family and community were very important for young First Nations LGBTIQ+ people. Many of the participants talked about the differences between their urban relatives and those living in country towns. A young Wiradjuri lesbian describes the difference between visiting her relatives in a large regional city (Dubbo) and another small rural town (Peak Hill), both in Wiradjuri country, and how this created a disconnect with her grandmother:

So I've got more gay family on my dad's side. So, when I go back to country, I can't actually go back to Peak Hill. I said I'm just really uncomfortable there. So I can't go home. I go to Dubbo and I stay in Dubbo. That's where I feel more comfortable because there's more gays on dad's side of the family and they're more welcoming...but that small town of Peak Hill, where there's 1,400 people in that town, not many, you feel very uncomfortable there, but—yeah, I can't go back...it's very negative. It's had a really negative impact. My grandmother lives in Peak Hill, so I can't really go and visit her. I see her when her and pop come down here [Western Sydney]. I can't actually go there because I feel uncomfortable going back to my hometown. So the only time we go home is for sorry business, but then—and then we leave, head back home.

Despite this, participants felt a connection to First Peoples' Nations and country. Many reported returning to visit country albeit infrequently and despite the likelihood of encountering phobic reactions from their families and rural communities:

Home is—home is tough, 'cause I've moved around a lot as a kid. And so, I definitely have roots in Western Sydney, growing up there majority of the time, but I feel a really strong connection to where my people

are from down Wiradjuri country in Narrandera. Me and my siblings try to go down there once a year to reconnect with our family as well as with the land and we just get a sense of—like our batteries recharged is what we call it.

### 3.4. "A Second Family"? LGBTIQ+ Communities and Friendship Networks

Participants had mixed experiences in LGBTIQ+ spaces. Despite the high profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ people in large community events such as the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, some participants found that racist behaviour made them avoid some LGBTIQ+ venues and events. A young bisexual Murri cis-woman with connections to the Meriam/Wuthathi peoples spoke of her experiences at white lesbian parties:

It was like a lesbian party and I was there and then this girl came up to me and she was just like, "Oh, you're so brave to come here. Your skin is so beautiful," it was really weird. She was just talking about my skin and making me feel really uncomfortable. She obviously thought it was weird that I was there.

A young Kamilaroi gay man also spoke of the racism he encountered in the LGBTIQ+ gay scene:

I don't like going out to the gay clubs in Sydney because you hear so many racist, disgusting things, also very misogynistic things as well, and sometimes it's not even racist things towards my own people, it's towards other races, but because I don't like that, I don't wanna hear that and, especially from people who are in a community that's so marginalised against, it just goes beyond my brain, it's like beating down those who are already beaten enough to the point where they can't get up, like you're beating on them even more and you don't even have a leg to stand on.

According to a young Djangadi gay cis-man, along with family, having a supportive group of friends was also seen as an important part of a young person's "support system." A young bisexual Murri cis-woman with ties to Meriam/Wuthathi country explains how she feels when her long-time friends do not understand what's important to her as a member of a First Nations people:

I had a group of friends that I used to be friends with when I was in high school and then we are no longer friends because I started talking about politics and they'd be like, "Okay." [I would say] "It's January 26, I'm going to the Invasion Day March, why don't you come with me?" And then it would always be a really uncomfortable like, "I don't wanna talk about January 26," even though obviously that's something that's important to me. (Young Wiradjuri gay cis-man)

Many participants also spoke of finding a “second family” in the LGBTIQ+ community. Young people spoke about the importance of having strong social networks of friends and peers, from both LGBTIQ+ and non-LGBTIQ+ communities. Ideally, young people would like to have networks made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ friends and acquaintances but realise this can at times be difficult to achieve. Young people said that they felt most comfortable with others who understood their experiences of both Indigeneity and sexual/gender diversity and who did not require them to constantly justify or explain their identities or experiences.

A young Gumbaynggirr/Bunjalung gay cis-man with ties to the Djangadi, Birpai, Yuin and Nunukul nations describes how important it was to find a safe, accepting space and friendships within the LGBTIQ+ and creative communities in Hobart. These communities became his “new family” and the support this gave him after being ostracised by his parents:

I found a whole new family and believe it or not, I think it's so much better than what my old family is and was. And you can't pick your family, but you can pick your friends. And I think as LGBT people, we get to choose our families anyway....I had to find somewhere that I was gonna thrive because I felt like what I wanted to do was too important not to. And I think, as people, we all deserve to thrive and to have opportunities and to be successful.

#### 4. Summary and Conclusions

This article analysed interviews from young First Nations LGBTIQ+ people about their SCEWB using a social inclusion/exclusion lens. These findings provide significant new information that supports and adds to the small body of research from Australia (Dudgeon et al., 2015), the US (Balsam et al., 2004; Barney, 2003; Elm et al., 2016; James et al., 2015; Lehavot et al., 2009; Yuan et al., 2014) and Canada (Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010, 2011; Scheim et al., 2013). Research into the SCEWB of First Nations LGBTIQ+ youth in Australia is practically non-existent. A previous scoping review (Soldatic et al., in press) found only one piece of research that had explicit findings about young First Nations LGBTIQ+ participants in Australia (see Dudgeon et al., 2015) and one study with participants from the US (Barney, 2003). Other studies have included participants from this group in their research but the published papers do not consistently present the findings of young First Nations LGBTIQ+ participants separate from other LGBTIQ+ participants especially regarding this group's SCEWB (see Kerr, Fisher, & Jones, 2019; Smith et al., 2014; Hillier et al., 2010, for example). The lack of research highlights the importance of this study as one of the first to focus on young First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples and the implications for their SCEWB. The interviews highlight

important socially inclusive/exclusive spaces, processes and practices that inform understandings of the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ young peoples. Social inclusion/exclusion for this group is a multifaceted, complex issue that includes processes of disconnection, connection and reconnection with family, community, culture and country (Walter, 2016; see also Abramovich, 2016).

To the best of our knowledge this is first time that the role of mothers has been identified as being so critical to the ongoing wellbeing of their LGBTIQ+ children either in Australia or overseas. Almost all of our participants had strong connections with their mothers, with mothers seen as providing strength and protection in times of need. For most of our participants, their mothers were the first person they ‘came out’ to and played an ongoing role of supporting and protecting their sexuality and gender diverse children from discrimination, phobia and negativity. Some participants considered their mothers as their “best friends” and their “role models” for life. As such, the ways mothers reacted to the news of their child's sexuality and/or gender diversity were critical to feelings of inclusion/exclusion for young people and deeply affected their SCEWB.

In addition to their mothers, the acceptance and support of both immediate and extended family and kinship networks were important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ youth. Participants did not feel as strongly about the role of other family members, and experiences and feelings were much more mixed. Some participants reported close connections and acceptance from sisters, brothers and fathers, but this was not as strongly and consistently expressed as that from mothers. Some extended family such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, also provided social, cultural and emotional support, but others did not. Some participants were rejected by extended family members, many of whom lived in socially conservative rural towns and communities. Even so, maintaining connections to extended family members was important for many of the participants. If participants had affirming and accepting relationships, this enabled them to visit community and country without having to worry about the potential antagonisms of LGBTIQ+-phobia.

This supports the existing literature's findings on the importance of immediate and extended family connections. Dudgeon et al. (2015, p. 3) report, for example, found that “discrimination and negative perceptions” from First Nations communities and families affected wellbeing. The report also found that experiences were mixed, with some remote and rural communities supportive and accepting, while others were not. This is also apparent in our participants' stories. Some had good connections with extended families while others avoided certain family members, towns and communities for fear of phobic reactions and discrimination. The American and Canadian literature also highlights the importance of supportive First Nations families, communities and

cultural practices as well as the negative effects that phobia, discrimination, childhood trauma and abuse can have (Balsam et al., 2004; Barney, 2003; Elm et al., 2016; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010, 2011; Scheim et al., 2013). In much of the existing literature, healthy collective relationships and connectivity (family, community, culture) were pivotal to First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples achieving and sustaining health SCEWB outcomes. Our findings add to this body of research on the importance for this group of “collective resilience” (Elm et al., 2016, p. 359) in the form of supportive and accepting families and communities.

Our participants also talked about the importance of finding a space to feel comfortable, accepted and supported. For many of our participants, this was non-Indigenous LGBTIQ+ communities and friendship networks, often located in urban settings. LGBTIQ+ communities and friendship networks were important, but participants reported mixed experiences in these spaces. Many were positive about the urban Queer communities, however, some have had disconcerting experiences that made them feel unsafe. In a similar way, friendships were important but some young people reported that social networks had to be carefully negotiated, with participants avoiding social events such as parties where they knew they would not feel comfortable. Finding spaces and networks where they do not have to constantly explain their sexuality/gender diversity and their experiences as First Nations Peoples was important for participants and for their overall SCEWB. Urban spaces provided young people with some much needed anonymity that also allowed them to express their sexuality and gender diversity.

This is also reflected in the current body of research. Dudgeon et al. (2015, p. 18) report states that “where you live matters” with First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples relocating to safer spaces, usually located in larger towns and cities. The US and Canadian literature also reports that negative experiences in Indigenous communities can result in Indigenous LGBTIQ+ youth moving to larger towns and cities to find communities and spaces where they feel comfortable and able to openly express their sexuality and gender diversity (Balsam et al., 2004; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010, 2011). The Australian, US and Canadian research also shows that relocating away from community can lead to loss of connection to culture and kinship groups, potentially exposing young people to racism and discrimination from non-Indigenous communities (Balsam et al., 2004; Dudgeon et al., 2015; Passante, 2012; Ristock et al., 2010). Connecting with extended families was important to our participants, as was being able to return to country and community. Not being able to visit grandmothers, grandfathers, aunties, uncles and others in community was seen as a loss of connection valued by participants.

The experiences of young First Nations LGBTIQ+ peoples in Australia are diverse and the research team recognises that this is a small body of interviews. These

stories do not necessarily represent the lived experiences of all First Nations LGBTIQ+ young people in Australia. As the findings show, participants encountered challenges that come from living in a modern settler colonial state. However, they also learnt, with support of mothers, families and communities, how to navigate and resist neo-colonial attempts to erase identity, culture and wellbeing. In Australia, First Nations LGBTIQ+ youth are organising and advocating for themselves for the first time demonstrating a capacity for resistance and strength in the face of adversity (Black Rainbow, 2020; BlaQ, 2020; First Nations Rainbow, 2020). This capacity was demonstrated in all of the interviews, as a young gay Bunjalung/Gumbaingirr cis-man so aptly puts it:

I think as a black LGBT person, I think it's more important...to be pushed through or to work harder because there's gonna be a thousand other people there that haven't gone through anything that you've survived, or gone through, and so that's just gonna make you stronger I feel. If you can push through it, if you can learn, and you can watch, and you can listen, and you can somehow say that was a then thing, that was in the past and then push through, I think that will give you more success.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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