

Indigenous Australian experiences of sex work: Stories of Agency, Autonomy and Self-Determination

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
Abstract	v
Candidate's Statement	vi
Dedication.....	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Introducing Indigenous Standpoint Theory to sex work research	4
Thesis Structure	7
Chapter 2: Methodology and Theory	13
Positionality	13
Indigenous Standpoint Theory	15
Method	19
Recruitment and Access.....	21
Data Analysis	25
Conclusion	27
Chapter 3: Who holds the key? Negotiating gatekeepers, community politics and the 'right' to research in Indigenous spaces	29
Chapter 4: Indigenous Australian women's colonial sexual intimacies: positioning Indigenous women's agency.....	55
Chapter 5: 'People pay me for sex': Contemporary lived experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers.....	69
Chapter 6: Majesty in the City: experience of an Aboriginal transgender sex worker in Sydney, Australia.....	93
Chapter 7: Indigenous transmasculine Australians & sex work.....	115
Chapter 8: 'Hot, young, buff': An Indigenous Australian gay cis-male view of sex work	122
Chapter 9: Indigenous Australian Sexualities through the lens of sex work	141
Chapter 10: Conclusion.....	157
Research dissemination.....	161
Scope for further research	162
Closing.....	163
References.....	164
Appendices	168
Appendix A Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval.....	168
Appendix B Indigenous Sex Worker Interview Schedule	170
Appendix C Participant Information and Consent Form	171

Appendix D Service and Support Providers Interview Schedule	173
Appendix E Service and Support Providers Information and Consent Form	174

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant Information 23

Table 2: Support/Service Provider Participant 25

Abstract

The lived experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers are largely unknown. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews with seven Indigenous sex workers and two health/support workers, this thesis shares stories of the ways in which Indigenous Australian sex workers negotiate their everyday lives, as well as their cultural, gender and sexual identities. The thesis finds that Indigenous Australian sex workers work in the sex industry for financial reasons, mainly to achieve economic independence and to support their lifestyles. They reported predominantly positive experiences of working in the sex industry, with negative experiences related to cultural rejection and loss.

This thesis is an exploration of Indigenous Australian sex workers lives and experiences through an Indigenous Standpoint Theoretical lens that draws forward new empirical knowledge about the way in which Indigenous sexuality and gender expression is understood. It sits within geographic and sexuality studies, as well as Indigenous studies. Importantly, the research is sex positive given its emphasis on themes of sex, sexuality and gender, and promotes the multiplicity of Indigenous genders and sexualities, and advocates for the recognition of diversity within Indigenous Australian communities. It is primarily an empirical engagement seeking meaning and understanding in broader social/cultural/political contexts and is firmly rooted in the voices of the participants. The research is warranted due to the insufficient social science research on Indigenous Australian sexualities and genders more broadly. The research in part addresses this significant gap in the research literature on Indigenous sex workers, as well as Indigenous Australian perspectives of sexuality and gender, by providing counter narratives to colonio-centric heteronormative perspectives that have been applied in past research with Indigenous peoples.

Candidate's Statement

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself. This thesis has been prepared following the 'thesis by publication' guidelines format outlined by Macquarie University, and has Human Research Ethics Committee approval (#5201300644 see Appendix A). Chapters Three, Four, Five, Six, Eight, and Nine have been written and prepared as independent publications. Chapter Seven is a co-authored publication, the contributions by myself and co-author are outlined in Chapter Seven. There is some common ground in the arguments and literature cited in various publications in this thesis, leading to some shared material across chapters, although I have attempted to minimise this as much as possible.

(Signed)_____

Date: 2/05/2020_____

Corrinne Sullivan

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my late grandmother Gwendolyn Evelyn Sullivan whom I lost during my candidature. She was not very appreciative of the topic, nevertheless she was always a great support and champion, and forever in my corner. I am grounded and humbled by the belief she had in me. Grandma, I miss you every day. I work hard under your shadow, and leap from your shoulders.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge and pay my respects to Darug Country where this research was primarily produced. I pay my respects to the elders, past and present of this beautiful nation. Darug landscapes and waterscapes have nourished and grown me in many meaningful ways, I promise to always tread lightly. I am Wiradjuri, therefore I pay my respects to the Wiradjuri nation and its ancestors. I wish to nourish myself on Country again soon.

I acknowledge and thank the participants who took part in this study; these are your stories. I am highly honoured and privileged that each of you shared your experiences with me. I hope that this work is of value to you and your communities. I pay my respects to your Countries, and to your elders past and present.

Completing a thesis is a journey straight into a quagmire, filled with ups and downs, successes, false hopes, blood, sweat and tears. It is something that is not delivered, despite the single author, by one person, rather it is the efforts of a village. A village that in the case of this thesis production was populated by the most dedicated and passionate people I have had the very privilege and opportunity to encounter. Firstly, the village comprises of my family. To my daughter Kiana, and my fur children, Mabi, Buddha, and Edison, you have kept me motivated, grounded and tired. I know I missed some stuff over the years but for the most part your wants, needs and demands on my attention helped to get me through. My beautiful wife Michelle, you have been there for me in every way, beyond the romantic and fantastical. You have been there when I needed coffee, a shoulder to cry or lean on, direction, sage advice, and you have helped me to nut out some tough calls. You have stood by me loyal and proud, championing me the whole way. My little family are my everything, I will love you all forever.

Secondly, this thesis can never hope to be, without the patience, thoughtful advice, and dedication of the supervision team, Associate Professor Sandie Suchet-Pearson and Dr Jessica McLean. I know I am not the best student, every discussion has probably been an uphill battle for both of you, but somehow you managed to continue to believe in me, at the very least, I continued to believe that you both believed in me, which is just as important! You both ensured that I had the space to learn and grow, though I fell on my face a few times, they are lessons I will not forget. Some of us must learn the hard way, I am sorry that I am one of those people but thank you for knowing that I would ‘come good’ eventually! Sandie, we have been working together so long, from Honours till now, you have always been a light in my darkness, guiding me through all manner of triumphs and tribulations. Thank you for your unwavering commitment and absolute belief in me, you have helped me shine. Jess, you are amazing, I love your energy and enthusiasm, and willingness to share your knowledge. You have been so supportive and generous, and really dug deep when I needed you. Sandie and Jess, you are both fabulous supervisors and colleagues, and now dear friends. I could never have done this without the both of you. I hope we find a way to work together in the future.

Thirdly, Madi Day, colleague, co-author, and dear friend we have had such interesting and stimulating conversations over the years around identity, gender, sexuality, culture and our shared passion for trash television. Thank you, I learn so much from and with you.

Others that need to be named as part of my village include, Professor Susan Page, Professor Michelle Trudgett, Professor Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews, Professor Richie Howitt, Professor Bronwyn Carlson, Professor (by decree) Gavin Stanbrook, Dr Sandra Trudgett, Samantha Trudgett, Stacey Coates and (almost) Dr Michelle Finneran. And, of course, my fellow students. As a part-time student I have not been grouped with any continuous cohort, rather I have been a part of multiple cohorts. Each of whom have enriched my mind and thinking,

and who I hope I have contributed something to. We have shared many celebrations and occasional commiserations, in the end we will all get there, I look forward to reuniting with you again on the other side!

Finally, I would like to thank the reviewers of each of the papers and chapters that make up this thesis, there was often kind and generous feedback, there were also challenging words that required deep thinking and occasional defence! I am grateful for all opportunities, even in those moments where I thought that my very soul was being destroyed. Nonetheless my work is better for it. Thankyou.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is bound by the concept of the Wiradjuri phrase *Yindyamarra Winhanganha* – respectfully knowing how to live in a world worth knowing.

Sex work has been a topic of debate in academic, feminist and public discourse for some time. The term ‘sex work’ is applied in this thesis as this is the terminology used by the participants whose stories inform and ground this study. Further ‘sex work’ is the preferred terminology determined by sex work activists to describe the various forms of paid sex in Australia, and internationally. This does not suggest that all people who do sex work consider themselves to be sex workers, or use the term ‘sex worker’, although it is a tendency of sex worker activists to preference this term rather than use historically derogatory terms such as ‘prostitute’ or ‘prostitution’. In support of these positions I use the term ‘sex work’, however there are times throughout the thesis where ‘prostitute’ and ‘prostitution’ are used and this is to denote, and at times even amplify, the historical or political temperament of the time.

Interest in the sex industry in geographical research began with Richard Symanski’s work on Nevada’s (United States) prostitution and political situation (Symanski, 1974). Since then other studies have emerged primarily centred on sex work in cities (Hubbard, 1998); moral geographies of sex work (Hubbard et al., 2008; Pini et al., 2013); rural and community based sex work (Hubbard et al., 2014; Pini et al., 2013); public space, sex work and planning (Hubbard, 2013, 2001; Maginn et al., 2017; Maginn et al., 2014; Prior et al., 2013a); and pornography (Maginn and Steinmetz, 2014). More broadly, there is a large body of academic literature about sex workers, including scholarship that focuses on the following issues

related to this practice: health disparities (Donovan et al., 2010; Donovan et al., 2012; Harcourt et al., 2001a); violence and victimisation (Jeffreys, 2009; Lyons et al., 2017; Prior et al., 2013b); spaces of employment (Hubbard, 2019; Maginn and Steinmetz, 2014); legalities, including criminalisation and decriminalisation (Abel, 2010; Barnett et al., 2010; Weitzer, 2012); and the implications of stigma connected to sex work (Benoit et al., 2018; Benoit et al., 2019; Koken; Sanders, 2018). There has been limited research centred on understanding the everyday lives of sex workers (Cheng, 2013; Scorgie et al., 2013; Smith, 2017). Indeed, little research has been conducted on Indigenous, and other people of colour, sex workers' actual lives and experiences. The research that has been produced thus far tends to rely on simplistic and damaging myths, with most studies concentrating on the risks of physical and sexual violence and/or sexually transmitted infections (Donovan et al., 2010; Donovan et al., 2012; Frances, 1999; Harcourt et al., 2001b; Holmes et al., 2011; Jordan, 2010; Spongberg, 1997). Such limited academic attention particularly toward Indigenous experiences of sex work, means that not only do Indigenous Australian sex workers remain under-researched, but also largely an unknown and invisible community of people in social science and humanities scholarship, as well as in policy and practice.

Sex work has been part of the fabric of colonial Australia since the invasion by British forces in 1788 (Frances, 1994, 2007; Frances, 1999). It is not known what, or if any, form of sex work/sex trade/prostitution may have occurred in Indigenous communities prior to invasion. Currently, Indigenous Australian sex workers are estimated to represent 20-23% of the sex industry and are usually participants in street-based economies (Donovan et al., 2012). However, this data is somewhat unreliable as the estimation is drawn from a New South Wales based survey that is reflective of the greater Sydney region, and does not include information from rural and remote areas; those that do not identify as 'sex workers'; and is not inclusive of Indigenous Australian male and transgender sex workers. Although there

have been several quantitative surveys on the sex worker population generally within Australia the research specifically on Indigenous sex workers remains limited.

Recommendation number five of the 2012 New South Wales Sex Industry Report states:

‘[d]ata on the sexual health of regional and rural, Aboriginal, street-based, male, and gender diverse sex workers should be sought and collated’ (Donovan et al., 2012:8). Despite this recommendation there remains a paucity of research in this area. The exclusion of diverse identities in scholarship of the sex industry restricts the political agency and autonomy of Indigenous sex workers. The lives and voices of Indigenous Australian sex workers are concealed by academic and public discourses of exploitation and victimisation, and draw attention to racist and colonio-centric views that fail to include diverse stories and perspectives. I employ the term colonio-centric to emphasise the ‘coloniality of power’ (Grosfoguel, 2011:3) that stems from social, political and historical conditions that are influenced by whiteness, Western, Eurocentric, heteronormative, and Christian norms, which affect those that have been colonised, in this case Indigenous Australians. These ‘norms’ dominate hierarchies of power, social/cultural/political oppression, and uni-lateral knowledge that continues to be (re)produced within Western scholarship.

Within academic literature perceptions of sex work and therefore sex workers tend to be polar, oscillating between extremes that box sex workers within finicky and narrow views. Dominant liberal feminists claim sex work/prostitution is an oppressive tool of the patriarchy, with sex workers portrayed as coerced and/or exploited victims (Jeffreys, 2009). This claim, however, that all sex workers are victims of the sex industry demonstrates ideological bigotry and empirical callowness (Maginn et al., 2015; Weitzer, 2012). Countering this view are sex positive feminists who have positioned sex work as part of the labour market, advocating the phrase ‘sex work is work’ (Sanders et al., 2017; Van der

Meulen, 2012; Van der Meulen et al., 2013). Sex positive perspectives reject individual discomfort and latent moralising about sexuality that underlies dominant liberal feminist critiques of sex work. More recently the notion of the sex industry as progressive and queer has emerged (Showden, 2012). Feminist advocacy for the queering, progression and diversification of the sex industry undermines hegemonic structures of patriarchy and heteronormativity, away from the exploitation and victimhood discourses of dominant liberal feminists.

Introducing Indigenous Standpoint Theory to sex work research

This thesis leans toward a sex positive position, and advocates for the inclusion of queer and diverse voices. The aim of this research is to shift the understandings of Indigenous peoples in the sex industry from exploited victims, by exploring how Indigenous Australian peoples operate in and out of spaces of sex work. The stories from Indigenous peoples lives and experiences demonstrate agency and self-determination to promote the right for Indigenous people to flex their power, agency, and autonomy, and to challenge colonio-centric limiting discourses. Mapping the sex work landscape with Indigenous Australian notions of power, agency and autonomy is a radical act of resistance against colonial ideologies to liberate Indigenous knowledges, practices and discourses (Battiste, 2000). A self-determined future for Indigenous peoples must rely on Indigenous knowledges, practices and discourses to (re)position our identities and sovereignty (Barker et al., 2012; Battiste, 2000; Pickerill, 2009), to ‘reveal the inconsistencies, to challenge the assumptions and the taken for granted’ (Battiste, 2000:xxii).

In this thesis, discourses, knowledges, and practices emerge in particular ways to assist in making sense of how Indigenous Australians negotiate sex work and their bodies and

identities in these spaces (Chapters Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight). The study draws on Indigenous Standpoint Theory (Foley, 2003, 2002; Moreton-Robinson, 2003, 2013; Nakata, 2007), and is constituted of narratives of Indigenous sex workers. Approaching and analysing the narratives from an Indigenous Standpoint has resulted in those stories being re-told in this thesis – not as an assumed grand narrative of Indigenous sex work, rather it is an exploration of what the participants deem important as they narrate their experiences, and how they construct their identities to make sense of their experiences and their lives. Examining the lives and experiences of Indigenous sex workers offers understandings of Indigenous people’s capacities for constructing and embodying multiple meanings, subjectivities and knowledges within the context of sex work. Thereby, Indigenous sex worker bodies are not reduced to meanings ascribed to their choice of employment, rather they are understood and acknowledged for their knowledges, power, agency and autonomy. This research shifts the foci of Indigenous peoples involvement in the sex industry by asking questions about who Indigenous Australian sex workers are, how they relate to their own and other bodies, the myriad things that sex worker’s bodies do, and the spaces in which these things occur. Indigenous sex workers provide a unique context for such possibilities and understandings.

Research with Indigenous Australian sex workers is fraught with stigma and cultural/social politics making the space incredibly difficult to describe and discuss (Chapters Three and Four). From my research experience, such difficulties are often bounded by ‘outsiders’ to the sex industry rather than those directly connected with it. Broader societal beliefs around sex work have permeated Indigenous communities reinforcing normative and mostly Western colonio-centric moral ideologies. Indigenous Australian community values are therefore bounded by Christianity, cultural dogma, heteronormality, community and family, as well as

representations in media and broader society of the deviancy and immorality of sex workers, which tends to draw anxieties and moralisation of sex work within Indigenous communities. This can result in rejection and exclusion of Indigenous sex workers from their communities under the guise of ‘community protection’ which further serves to misrepresent and alienate Indigenous sex workers, leaving Indigenous sex workers silenced and marginalised within, and outside, their own communities. The lack of discussion of Indigenous sex work in academic and popular discourse means that widespread understanding of the actual lived experiences of Indigenous sex workers remains elusive.

In this thesis, space is privileged for Indigenous sex workers to share and centre their lived everyday experiences, opening up possibilities for new knowledge and understandings of sexual and gendered embodiment and subjectivity, and critiques heteronormative public and academic discourses to destabilise pervasive stereotypes of Indigenous Australian sex workers. There are a number of factors that underpin the plurality of knowledges produced. Firstly, the visibility of Indigenous sex workers lives and experiences works to challenge cultural norms and taboos of Indigenous sexual behaviours and gender roles, making it possible to (re)imagine Indigenous sexualities and genders as a source of strength and independence. Secondly, a move towards sex positive ideologies in cultural/social/political spheres can promote bodily autonomy, agency, as well as awareness and celebration of sexual and gender expression. This thesis is underlined with a refusal to signify powerlessness, victimhood, or exploitation of Indigenous bodies, sexualities or genders. This right of refusal speaks to my expression of agency as an Indigenous person, as an Indigenous researcher, and as an act of resistance against ongoing colonio-centric violence levelled against Indigenous peoples and our bodies (Kovach, 2015b; Sylvestre et al., 2018).

The central aim of the research presented in this thesis was to explore, through an Indigenous Standpoint lens, the individual and contextual factors experienced by Indigenous Australian sex workers. A qualitative methods approach was conducted comprising of two phases. Phase one of the project involved semi-structured interviews with two participants that provide support and/or health related services to Indigenous Australian sex workers. Phase two consisted of seven semi-structured interviews with people who identified as being Indigenous Australian, and as working or previously had worked as a sex worker. Initially the project was located in New South Wales, Australia, however as the project evolved it became clear that as the themes emerged the geographical location was less important than the spaces/places in which the sex work occurred – in the case of this thesis the emphasis, and what was stressed by participants, was around body and identity landscapes, such as gender and sexuality. Therefore, the geographic scope of the research shifted and one of the sex worker participants is from Queensland.

Thesis Structure

This is a thesis by publication, consisting of a number of case studies. These case studies have been developed as a book chapter (Chapter Nine) and journal articles (Chapters Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven and Eight). In combination, the seven publications within this thesis provide a unified and necessary exploration of the lives of Indigenous Australian sex workers and begin to address the representations of Indigenous Australian sexualities, sexual and gender expression in various contexts. Further, these publications explore avenues for Indigenous Australian peoples to construct and present their sexual and gendered selves in their own words. These publications are supported by additional chapters that discuss my positionality as author (Chapter Two), the methodological and theoretical underpinning of the thesis (Chapter Two), and a concluding statement (Chapter Ten). The journal articles and

book chapter were published across various international scholarly publications and are therefore reflective of the diverse theoretical and methodological approaches in which particular narratives were analysed and discussed. Broadly speaking, the research draws on geographic and sexualities scholarship along with Indigenous Standpoint Theory. Here, I outline the seven papers that form the body of my thesis. My thesis concludes with a summary chapter (Chapter Ten) that highlights the main arguments and contributions of this research.

Paper One: Who holds the key? Negotiating gatekeepers, community politics and the ‘right’ to research in Indigenous spaces (In Press – *Geographical Research*)

This article contributes a discussion of the ethical considerations and conundrums that researchers negotiate in Indigenous and sex worker research spaces/places. The commentary is based on my personal reflections on working in, and the power exercised within, these spaces/places. Further, this article serves as a powerful reminder and a provocative challenge to systems of rule and representation of Indigenous Australian peoples. This article opens these spaces/places up to enable the presence of multiplicity and diversity to emerge, and exposes the possible ramifications, challenges, and implications for researchers. By opening up these spaces/places I offer a point from which to commence new, different and nuanced conversations around Indigenous research, and Indigenous research spaces/places.

Paper Two: Indigenous Australian women’s colonial sexual intimacies: positioning Indigenous women’s agency (Published – *Culture, Health & Sexuality*)

This article examines debates in regard to Indigenous women’s sexual oppression and agency, with particular reference to their objectification and subjectification since the

colonisation of Australia and includes a discussion of the implications for contemporary Indigenous sex work, as well as sexual identities. The concept of Indigenous women as prostitutes is considered and this paper discusses the multiple ways in which Indigenous Australian women have been demarcated as prostitutes in a powerless position of victimhood and exploitation. This position is re-imagined within this paper to demonstrate Indigenous Australian women's agency not as a new phenomenon but rather as a position that disrupts the popular discourses of exploitation and victimhood that have been persistently perpetrated against Indigenous women since colonisation.

Paper Three: 'People pay me for sex': Contemporary lived experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers (Currently Under Review - *Sexualities*)

Drawing on feminist, Indigenous, and geographic scholarship, this paper extends existing frameworks of analysis by addressing how Indigenous Australian sex work highlights the power of Indigenous sexual agency, and how this power connects to economics, gender, and sexuality. This paper explores the economic relationship of sex work, additionally it charts the relationships between sexuality, gender and race in relation to Indigenous sex workers. In doing so this paper reveals colonio-centric norms in relation to sex and gender and how they are rooted in social and cultural expectations and dogma.

Paper Four: 'Majesty in the city': experiences of an Aboriginal transgender sex worker in Sydney, Australia (Published - *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*)

Centred on a single narrative, this paper expands the scope of existing academic literature by examining Indigenous trans subjectivities and producing a conversation between trans

geography and Indigenous Standpoint Theory. This framework offers tools to investigate this narrative leading to broader questions about the ways in which Indigenous trans people negotiate spaces and how these spaces influence and shape bodily autonomy and agency. The case study of Majesty, viewed through an Indigenous lens, offers a compass to guide emergent discussions on the intersectionality of identities of gender, race, sexuality, and sex work. Majesty's story highlights the tension between the landscapes of her body, and how that terrain is performed; her responses offer new dimensions that locate these tensions and shape her everyday experiences of being trans, a sex worker and a sexual being.

Paper Five: Indigenous transmasculine Australians & sex work (Published - *Emotion, Space and Society*)

Contributing to a greater understanding of the embodied experiences of Indigenous transmasculine sex workers, this co-authored paper examines how Jeremy and JJ's experiences of body, gender, sexuality and race determine how they negotiate social, professional and intimate spaces, and how these spaces impact differently on each of their bodily agencies and autonomies. In sex work they explore the emergent multiplicities and queer temporalities of their trans identities. JJ and Jeremy challenge gender and sexual identity as stable hegemonic categories as they navigate multiple ways of expressing and performing gender and sexual identities. Such knowledge is theoretically important as the participants' stories offer new dimensions which locate these tensions as a powerful empirical critique of the ways in which Indigenous sexualities have been portrayed since colonisation. Further, this knowledge is central to how their identities are reflected in discourses of race and culture, as well as globalised queer culture. This paper considers gender and sexuality from an Indigenous Standpoint connecting with spaces and places of knowing, being and doing, which are fundamental to identities and emotions. Understanding

the emotional connections in sex work experienced by Indigenous transmasculine sex workers requires not only talking to them and other transmasculine sex workers, but also investigating how the environments in which they worked shaped these emotions. These emotions reveal how transgender navigations of both space and place challenge gender, sexuality, and geography.

Paper Six: ‘Hot, young and buff’: An Indigenous Australian gay cis-male view of sex work (Submitted to *Social Inclusion* Special Issue: ‘Young, Indigenous, LGBTIQ+: Understanding and Promoting Social and Emotional Wellbeing’). Submitted for review 1st May, 2020.

Drawing on Indigenous Standpoint Theory and Indigenous wellbeing theory, this paper provides a unique view of Indigenous sex work through the lens of Jack; an Indigenous, queer, cis-male. This paper explores the ways in which Jack negotiates his work, his communities and the capitalisation of his body. Jack’s choice of sex work is explored through the intersections of sexuality and culture, with the consequences of Jack’s social and emotional wellbeing discussed. Within this exploration Jack’s narrative of social inclusion and exclusion are interrogated to challenge conceptions of sexuality and culture within communities.

Paper Seven: Indigenous Australian sexualities explored through the lens of sex work (Published - *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Feminist Geographies*)

The primary contribution of this chapter is that it provides a foundation for expressing Indigenous Australian sexuality and gender diversity. Pieced together, the voices of Indigenous sex workers that participated in this study illustrate complex narratives of

sexuality, gender and race. This chapter develops a useful lexicon to expand Indigenous and academic knowledges for talking honestly, and with complexity, about Indigenous sexuality and gender diversity. This chapter poses a provocative challenge to the academy to develop an understanding of sexual agency, sexual and gender expression, and autotomy. Further it opens the pathway to explore the cultural/social/political potential in making space for the representation of contemporary constructions of Indigenous Australian sexuality and gender in academic literature.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Theory

This chapter focuses on Indigenous Standpoint Theory as methodology and considers its application in relation to Indigenous Australian sex workers. Firstly, I detail my positionality as it is pertinent to the methodological and theoretical lens applied to the research. Secondly, I discuss Indigenous Standpoint Theory as methodology. Finally, I detail the methods used in this thesis that are grounded by Indigenous Standpoint Theory.

Positionality

My positioning in this research enabled and constrained this study in important and fundamental ways. Walter (2013) claims the most significant aspect of defining our methodology is our standpoint. The researcher's standpoint affects all aspects of the research (Haraway, 1995; Willis, 2013) and directs the manner in which the research is conducted (Harding, 1995). A researcher's standpoint is guided by their social/cultural/political position and epistemological (ways of knowing), axiological (ways of doing) and ontological (ways of being) frameworks (Martin et al., 2003; Walter, 2013). Therefore, it is vital that researchers understand their own position within the research. It is not just a matter of having certain training, expertise or qualifications; the researcher must self-reflect and have embedded understanding of themselves and connection to their ideologies (Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2016).

My standpoint, as an Indigenous Australian researcher utilising an Indigenous Standpoint Theoretical framework, is central to this research project, and is bound by the Wiradjuri concept of *Yindyamarra Winhanganha*. Indigenist research takes an emancipatory approach, mapping Indigenous political, social and cultural agendas free from colonial domination of

society and research (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2009; Rigney, 2006). As an Indigenous researcher my responsibility is to produce respectful research that benefits and empowers Indigenous Australian peoples. I have a responsibility to my own communities, and to wider Indigenous Australian communities, to conduct myself ethically and with accountability. In line with Indigenous practice and protocols of Indigenous research, it is imperative that I introduce myself. As Martin (2003) explains ‘in providing these details, I am claiming and declaring my genealogy and my ancestry’ (p.204). This is done to provide information about my political, social and cultural responsibilities and accountabilities, and to present myself so that others can position themselves in relation to me (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Additionally, as this thesis applies an Indigenous lens as a tool of analysis it is essential that I detail the angle of that lens.

I am a cisgender Indigenous Australian woman from the Wiradjuri nation in central western New South Wales. I was born on D’harawal Country, yet have lived, worked, studied and raised children on Darug Country for most of my life. I pay my respects to the ancestors of these Countries as they remind me of the deep roots, and therefore responsibilities, that I carry with them and for them. I am particularly indebted to the peoples, lands and waterways of Darug Country, a place/space that in many ways I have come to be(ing). In conducting this research, I have drawn on my experiences as both an Indigenous woman and as a sexual being to view, analyse and interpret the literature and narratives of participants. I have undertaken to position Indigenous peoples as multiply located, engaging with the complexity and ambiguity of Indigenous peoples experiences to un-silence and demarginalise our positions and voices. This strengths-based position is mobilised in this thesis to liberate and incorporate the sexual agencies we possess as Indigenous Australian peoples, however, I also emphasise that this is not definitively the situation for all Indigenous Australians. Our long

histories in this country, in particular our histories of invasion and subsequent colonisation, has meant that many Indigenous peoples have traumatic family histories, many of our children have been born as a result of rape, with many sent into sexual servitude on missions and training schools (Franklin, 2014; Huggins, 1995; Huggins et al., 2000). Although sex and sexuality, and the expression of those things have been exploited, used and abused, as a peoples we also draw on our strength and our defiance against ongoing colonisation, to position us as the purveyors and knowledge holders of our own bodily landscapes. As an Indigenous researcher, I take an Indigenous Standpoint in the research methodology and the research methods employed within the study.

Indigenous Standpoint Theory

Since the invasion by the British of the country now known as Australia, Indigenous Australian peoples have been a subject of curiosity examined by social scientists (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003). Persistent research by Western colonio-centric anthropologists and other social science practitioners has resulted in the bastardisation of Indigenous knowledges, exploitation of Indigenous philosophies and the degradation of Indigenous cultures (Battiste, 2000; Howitt et al., 1998; Rigney, 1999). The findings and outcomes of such research practices have resulted in, and been used to justify, racist attitudes of Western supremacy in Australia (Coombes et al., 2014; Rigney, 2006; Smith, 2012). Additionally, many researchers have disregarded Indigenous peoples and have used them to gather data and knowledge to position themselves as ‘expert’ to further their own academic aspirations (O’Sullivan, 2015; Walter, 2006). The Western notion of intellectual freedom where everyone can access anything in the public domain is significantly different to the Indigenous conceptualisations where knowledges belong to the individual or group even when they are in the public domain (Howitt et al., 2010). Indigenous knowledges needs to be

acknowledged and referenced as belonging to Indigenous peoples; in part because, as Tuhiwai Smith (2012) has pointed out, Indigenous peoples have become outsiders during the process of having their histories and stories told by others. Eurocentric Western research practices have positioned Indigenous peoples as ‘Other’, perpetuating racism and discrimination and situating Indigenous peoples as objects (Battiste, 2000; Louis, 2007; Smith, 2012). Western researchers have alienated Indigenous peoples, and have excluded Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003; Rigney, 2006). As a consequence, many Indigenous peoples are suspicious and distrust researchers and the research process (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003).

The dominant discourses perpetuated by Western researchers is a way in which power and control has been exerted over Indigenous Australian peoples, and these racist discourses have real and valid consequences that continue to affect Indigenous Australians and their cultural and social identities (Rigney, 1999). However, it should be noted that Indigenous peoples are not automatically adverse to research (Rigney, 2006), rather there is much to be ascertained from information and knowledge gained from research, and it is not the methods that are the real issue. The problem lies in that the creators of past (and some present) research, on Indigenous peoples, have developed methods, and their application, have done so from their own social, cultural and political lens (Walter, 2013). Asserting control over knowledge is power, therefore Indigenous scholars worldwide have questioned the ownership of knowledge and how it is collected, analysed and distributed (Kovach, 2015a; Louis, 2007; Rigney, 2006, 1999; Smith, 2012; TallBear, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Therefore, the demand now is for research that facilitates Indigenous empowerment and self-determination, moreover research of this nature commands ethical and responsible research practices that produce positive and effective outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous

scholars have strived to counter and avoid ongoing colonisation of Indigenous peoples that can transpire from applying Western research methods. They have insisted upon methodologies that support Indigenous empowerment, centre Indigenous voice, and position Indigenous peoples as the knowledge holders (Battiste, 2000; Louis, 2007; Smith, 2012). There has been a push in the last few decades by Indigenous scholars to move toward Indigenist research methods (Moreton-Robinson and Walter, 2009; Nakata, 2015, 2007; Rigney, 2006). Indigenist research methodologies locate Indigenous worldviews at the centre of research: they are built on the premise that research is done with and for Indigenous peoples. In doing so the promotion of Indigenous Knowledge becomes the central focus and Standpoint (Kwaymullina, 2016; Kwaymullina et al., 2013; Rigney, 2006).

The use of the term 'Standpoint' is in many ways a substitution for viewpoint or perspective, it applies 'experiences of the marginalised to generate critical questions about the lives of marginalised people and of those in the dominant groups, as well as about the systematic structural and symbolic relations between them' (Harding, 1995:128). Indigenous Standpoint Theory emerges from Feminist Standpoint Theory. Feminist Standpoint Theory was developed in the 1970s to communicate and elevate women's experiences in the face of social, political and cultural organisations that supported the authority and position of men over women (Smith, 1987). As a method of inquiry, Standpoint Theory was established to account for marginalised groups whose experiences were excluded or silenced within academic discourse. However, Feminist Standpoint Theorists are often criticised due to the tendency to 'universalize women as White, middle-classed, and heterosexual' (Allen, 1996:258). Therefore, taking a Standpoint does not imply holding a 'critical stance on the world' (Pohlhaus, 2002:287), and does not refer to all social and/or cultural positions. Rather, a Standpoint brings to bear different questions and ways to understand complex

social, cultural, economic and political issues (Fredericks et al., 2019; TallBear, 2014). It is the engagement with these questions that produces a critical Standpoint (Allen, 1996), engaging with these questions with an Indigenous lens on Indigenous experiences is a ‘method of inquiry ... a way of theorising knowledge from a particular and interested position’ (p.215) that ignites a critical Indigenous Standpoint.

Indigenous Standpoint Theory is a way to critically engage with, and challenge, the construction of colonising knowledge about Indigenous Australians (Nakata, 2007) and enables Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing to take a central position (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003). Upholding the integrity of Indigenous knowledges and philosophies, Indigenous Standpoint situates Indigenous peoples as sovereign, thus presenting worldviews that decolonise research and the research process. Decolonised methodologies ‘invigorate and stimulate geographical theories and scholarship while strengthening peoples’ identities’ (Louis, 2007:130) and purport to centre the voices of those that have been silenced (McDowell, 1992a, b; Smith, 2012). They are underpinned by a careful and considerate engagement with Indigenous peoples (Louis, 2007; Smith, 2012). Decolonised methodologies do not reject Western, colonised ways of knowing (Smith, 2012), rather Indigenous Standpoint Theory promotes a paradigm shift away from Eurocentric Western methodologies of power and control to an emancipatory methodology that positions Indigenous agencies and voices at its centre (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Indigenous Standpoint Theory values Indigenous voices and perspectives foremost, and is an appropriate means in which to bring Indigenous experiences, ways of knowing and doing to the fore (Fredericks et al., 2019; Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003). Indigenous Standpoint enables researcher/s to research with their communities in connection with individual perspectives on cultural, political, and social ideals and needs. However, taking an Indigenous Standpoint

is much more than simply portraying an Indigenous perspective or philosophy (Nakata, 2007). Importantly, Indigenous Standpoint Theory does not represent individuals as a homogenous group, rather it offers a reflection of their social/cultural/political positioning (Nakata, 2007) to make sense of uncertainties, paradoxes and complexities, and to provide explanation from a critical Indigenous Standpoint (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Nakata, 2007).

Method

This thesis details aspects of the lives and experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers, and in doing so it tells the stories and knowledges of those that were involved in the project. These stories are shared from an historical context (Chapter Four), a contemporary context (Chapter Five), a cis-male experience (Chapter Eight), and include transgender people's experiences (Chapters Six and Seven). Further, these stories are heard, shared, and understood, from an Indigenous Standpoint. This section describes the research methods I used for this thesis.

The fieldwork component of this qualitative research involved talking to Indigenous sex workers who identify as cis-female, cis-male and transgender about their experiences in relation to their work. The term 'cis' suggests that a person's sense of identity and gender corresponds with their biological sex at birth (Detournay, 2019), this term can be problematic, however, as it implies that gender and gender identity is static and fixed, and therefore unchangeable. Some research participants also identify as sexually and/or gender diverse and recognising this fluidity was important to the research and writing process. As discussed earlier, this study adopts an Indigenous research methodological approach, grounded by Indigenous Standpoint Theory. Indigenous voices are fundamental to the research, and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing have primacy in the research

methods and methodologies. The research adheres to, and is guided by, the ethical requirements as outlined in key Indigenous research documents – the National Health and Medical Research Centre (NHMRC, 2018), and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (AIATSIS, 2012). Ethical approval was also obtained through Macquarie University Human Ethics Research Committee (see Appendix A). A discussion of the issues related to ethical research, recruitment and access for this study is further detailed in Chapter Three.

The narratives of Indigenous sex workers invigorate understandings of bodies, genders and sexualities. Their perspectives attend to concepts of Indigenous sexuality and in doing so transcend colonial limitations and enable a rethinking of sex, sexuality, gender and race. In keeping with my position to represent Indigenous sex workers' lives as agentic and self-determined, I have resisted perpetuating stereotypes and myths that have been generated about them. These shared geographies of agency and self-determination are embedded in the stories of Indigenous Australian sex workers, making these narratives unique resources of qualitative data on the everyday connections between individual and collective sexual and gender identities. Exposing these deeper and richer understandings creates a fuller insight into the research area (Longhurst, 2003).

Qualitative research is flexible and can therefore be suitable to a variety of methods of data collection. Qualitative research is about 'making meaning' and is useful for research that tends to be with smaller units of people and society that does not require large sets of statistical data (Walter, 2016). Research on sex workers more broadly often tends toward statistical health data, reporting on disease and risk (Prior et al., 2013a; Sanders et al., 2017), with Indigenous Australian sex workers having been represented in health surveys (Donovan

et al., 2012), from historical points of view (Frances, 2007), or in relation to other intersections such as homelessness (Holmes and McRae-Williams, 2011). Whilst Holmes and McRae (2011) conducted qualitative interviews, the voices of their participants were not represented in their findings, this is discussed further in Chapter Five.

My research followed a different trajectory to those outlined above, in part to enable diverse insights from Indigenous peoples on their experiences engaging with sex work. Therefore, in order to bring contemporary Indigenous Australian sex worker views to the fore, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted to discover the meanings the participants placed on their work, experiences and identities (Longhurst, 2003). Given the sensitive nature of the topic, the qualitative research chosen for this thesis suggests a 'less exploitative and more egalitarian relationship between a researcher and her participants than is possible in other methodological frameworks' (McDowell, 1992a:406). An empathetic relationship was critical to build trust and rapport with the participants so they would share their thoughts, stories and experiences (Longhurst, 2003). Given the nature of the broad area of concern, as well as my own epistemological stance, a qualitative research design was deemed most appropriate.

Recruitment and Access

From the outset it was important to me as an Indigenous Australian researcher to tell the story of Indigenous Australian people working in the sex industry. Ethically and culturally I was bound to develop a project that was designed with and for Indigenous peoples that was of benefit to them (Walter, 2013), as discussed earlier, and delineated further in Chapter Three. In the case of this research project it was imperative to speak with Indigenous Australian sex workers. However, locating them as a group of people proved difficult as

there are no formal or fixed group/community of Indigenous Australian sex workers, and sex work is often a hidden element that rests in the blind spots of Indigenous communities. The difficulty in relation to recruitment and access is explored and explained further in Chapter Three. As a result of the difficulties in recruitment and access, participants were identified through word of mouth. In accordance with ethical guidelines and best practice for research with both Indigenous peoples, and sex workers, participants were paid for their time (AIATSIS, 2012; Jeffreys, 2010).

Seven individuals were interviewed (see Table 1). Although all identify as Indigenous Australian or Aboriginal Australian, and used both terms interchangeably, no Torres Strait Islanders took part in the project. I did not ask questions related to age, gender or sexuality, deciding instead to give participants the space to self-report and self-identify, this was done to reinforce the agentic nature of the research and to avoid gratuitous inquiry that is often present in research of non-normative experience. Some of the participants volunteered their identities and/or identifiers within the interview, this information proved pertinent to the study. Five of the participants were interviewed face to face in a public space, such as a café, for approximately one hour. The other two elected to be interviewed together as they knew each other, and as there were two participants the interview went for around 2 hours. More information about this interview is detailed in Chapter Seven.

Table 1: Participant Information

Pseudonym	Interview Date*	Gender Identity	Gender Pronouns	Sexual Orientation	Cultural background	Working environment
Moira	2017	Female	She/her	Heterosexual	Aboriginal	Brothel
Majesty the boobed one**	2013	Trans	She/her	--	Aboriginal	Street
JJ	2018	Trans/Brothaboy	They/them	Queer	Aboriginal	Brothel/Private
Isabelle	2017	Female	She/her	Heterosexual	Aboriginal	Brothel
Jake	2017	Male	He/him	Gay	Aboriginal	Private
Jeremy	2018	Trans/Brothaboy	They/them	Bisexual	Aboriginal	Private
Bianca	2013	Female	She/her	Heterosexual	Aboriginal	Brothel/Street

* The exact dates of the interviews and location details have been withheld to protect the participant's anonymity. Further, the gap in years of data collection is in relation to my need to take several years off from my part-time doctorate due to significant illness.

**The pseudonym 'Majesty the boobed one' – was shortened to Majesty for the purposes of publication.

Each interview consisted of a semi-structured questionnaire that focussed on participant's identities, experiences at work, opinions on sex work, and their access to support and services (see Appendix B). The same interview guide was used for each participant, although follow up questions were asked to clarify and probe each of the participant's responses. Importantly participants were given the space to steer the conversation to other topics that were important to them (Longhurst, 2003). This approach spawned information that was not expected to emerge from the research questions (see Appendix B), for example, participants discussed matters relating to gender and sexuality, additionally I had not considered the extent of the concerns relating to (dis)connection with Indigenous communities. Generally speaking a period of around half an hour prior to each interview was dedicated to discussion around the aims of the project, and to building rapport and establishing cultural/social/political connections (Longhurst, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Moreton-Robinson and Walter, 2009), and to discuss and obtain informed consent.

Participants were given the Information and Consent Form (see Appendix C) either prior to our meeting, or at the beginning of the meeting. Due to the nature of the research, and to

ensure each participant felt that their anonymity and geographical location was protected, no personal data was collected, therefore if I did not know the participant personally, I was unable to provide them with the form prior as I had no means of contact (issues in relation to ethical conduct, and recruitment and access of participants is further explored in Chapter Three). The methodology utilised demanded a highly respectful, collaborative and accountable relationship with the participants, as detailed above. Participants were carefully briefed on all aspects of the research and were informed they were under no obligation to consent to be interviewed and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. It was also impressed upon them that they could refuse to answer any questions. The participants were given every opportunity to withdraw their consent at any time through the research process; all stages of this research were founded on the basis of providing a respectful representation and recognition of their voices (Louis, 2007; Smith, 2012). Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed and analysed. The narratives provided by participants explain and describe their lived experiences working in the sex industry and the narrative analysis evoked concepts of agency, power and identity. The analysis process is described in more detail below.

In addition to Indigenous sex workers, those that provided support and services to sex workers, such as health service providers were invited to participate in the research. However, this too proved difficult for recruitment as detailed in Chapter Three. Two participants (see Table 2) were interviewed with a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix D). These participants were asked questions related to their position, their contact with Indigenous Australian sex workers, their experiences of providing services/support to Indigenous Australian sex workers, and what they considered were the everyday experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers.

Table 2: Support/Service Provider Participant

Pseudonym	Interview Date*	Position
Dell**	2013	Support/Service Provider
Alex**	2013	Support/Service Provider

* The exact dates of the interviews and location details have been withheld to protect the participant's anonymity.

**Both participants were assigned non-gender specific pseudonyms to protect the participant's and communities' anonymity.

Participants were given the Information and Consent Form (see Appendix E) either prior to our meeting, or at the beginning. The participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time during the research process. Differently to the aforementioned research participants, this group were given the option to be known by title, name, or pseudonym. However, in order to protect the identities and communities of Indigenous Australian sex workers I elected to allocate them pseudonyms as it became clear to me that using their actual names and/or titles could expose Indigenous Australian sex workers trading sex in those areas. Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed and analysed.

Data Analysis

I employed a qualitative narrative approach to explore the stories sex workers shared about their entry into sex work, their experiences within the industry, and the implications of these experiences. The accounts were analysed thematically from an Indigenous Standpoint (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Nakata, 2007). Once the data collection phase of my research was completed, the data was analysed using a manual coding system. Coding 'involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labelling those categories with a term' (Creswell, 2009:186). I coded the transcribed interviews for themes that emerged from the narratives of the participants. Firstly, I used descriptive codes, such as stigma, socio-economics, work conditions, emotion, community, and support, to link similar ideas and concepts together (Miles et al., 1994). Secondly, I organised these ideas and concepts under four broad themes

that determined my major findings, these were economics, sexuality and gender, and community/culture. The coding system was re-arranged several times throughout the analysis to ensure that it maintained some flexibility, for example community and culture became too large and unwieldy so were subsequently split into their own categories, allowing for the distinctions between community and culture to emerge (this distinction is explored in Chapter Three). This proved a useful way of structuring and organising the data, and allowed for the data to ‘talk to me’ (Kwan, 2002). Latent content analysis was used to probe deeper into these codes to identify the meaning/s behind them, identifying an overarching theme of ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ (Dunn, 2010). Although the premise of the study was to explore the lives and experiences of Indigenous sex workers, it became very clear from the narratives that gender and sexuality was a compelling point of interest.

Importantly this thesis highlights the necessity of developing an analysis that moves beyond identity and representation of Indigenous peoples. Indeed, with few exceptions, geographical research and research more broadly often reinstate a Western colonio-centric gaze. My work challenges this through my introduction of Indigenous trans methodology (Chapter Six) and, the application of this methodology buoyed by Indigenous Standpoint Theory which enabled an analysis that centres and privileges the realities, identities, histories and contemporalities of Indigenous transgender sex workers lives and experiences (Chapters Six and Seven). The adoption of this methodological praxis offers geography and the broader academy an avenue in which to explore and explain the multiplicity, complexity and fluidity of Indigenous sex workers, as well as illuminating varied concepts of sexuality and gender expression.

Conclusion

Indigenous Standpoint Theory as methodology shapes the platform for Indigenous agency, it comes to bear in the way in which I have approached the research, have heard the stories, and the way in which I have analysed and relayed them. Indigenous Standpoint Theory does not purport to offer grand narratives or singular perspectives, rather it underpins a capacity to express and understand multiplicities and diversities to reveal a grounded knowledge of Indigenous perspectives. The application of Indigenous Standpoint Theory is done to expose the limitations in Western methodologies and theories that often ‘Whiten’ or ignore experiences of Indigenous Australians, this is further explored in Chapter Nine. This limitation was sharpened for me when analysing three of the participant’s stories – namely, JJ, Jeremy, and Majesty, who all identify broadly as transgender. Trans geographies provided an obvious theoretical space in which to conceptualise these particular participants stories, however trans geographies rarely include voices of colour, and certainly not those that are Indigenous Australians. In order to understand the complexities of their intersectional identities I developed the concept of Indigenous trans methodologies. The first iteration of this concept is seen in Chapter Six where I discuss bringing Indigenous Standpoint Theory in conversation with trans geographies allowing for a plurality of identities to be read and understood. It also provides a dialogue of how other geographers can include Indigenous voices and perspectives in their research in order to prevent a ‘whitening’ of research. The concept is further developed with my co-author, Madi Day, in Chapter Seven.

The concept of *Yindyamarra Winhanganha* is echoed throughout this thesis, and although it is not overtly discussed, this philosophy has sat with me throughout my research journey, remaining a constant companion, a reminder of the accountabilities and responsibilities I

hold. In applying a respectful dialogue of *Yindyamarra Winhanganha* I have used Indigenous Standpoint Theory as a means to underpin this philosophy to sustain Indigenous agency and self-determination throughout, I invite my readers to continue and support this approach. In this chapter I have specified the methodologies that are applied throughout the thesis, and in doing so I reveal how these approaches have both enabled, yet also constrained me and this research.

Chapter 3: Who holds the key? Negotiating gatekeepers, community politics and the ‘right’ to research in Indigenous spaces

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Abstract

This article discusses key methodological and ethical issues for qualitative research with Aboriginal sex workers based on the author’s experiences conducting research with this diverse group of people. Issues gaining access to this group through Indigenous community organisations and sex worker community organisations are considered. The aim of detailing these issues is to share critical reflections about some of the assumptions underpinning the research process, ethical engagement with Indigenous communities, and research participants, and to outline researcher responsibilities. In navigating these factors, it was found that working with and for community-based organisations requires considerable attention to power and the dynamics of representation.

Keywords

access; ethics; Indigenous research; Indigenous sex work; sex work; recruitment

Key insights

This article details the implications, challenges, and complexities confronted when undertaking Indigenous research. Key findings are related to issues of identification, access, and recruitment as critical in terms of ethical research and practice as well as those related to the production of power.

Introduction

Contemporary human geographers study places, people, processes, bodies, discourses, silenced voices, fragmented landscapes, and intersectional politics and spaces. The ways in which researchers come to their project are often in response to solving a problem or issue (Thomas, 2017). I arrived at my doctoral research project based on my honours study, which explored Indigenous and non-Indigenous inmate experiences at Parramatta Girls Home (PGH) in Sydney. PGH was a New South Wales (NSW) government facility that incarcerated “corrupt” adolescent girls from 1887 to 1974 (Franklin, 2014; Sullivan, 2017). I learned that, once released from PGH, some of the women became sex workers. I pondered what might be the reasons people enter the sex industry and, as my interest deepened, I noted the paucity of scholarly literature that included discussions of Indigenous Australian sex workers. It became apparent that there was very little geographic scholarship on Indigenous Australian sexuality.

This article aims to understand the gap in scholarship by addressing some of the concerns that inform what it means ethically to access and recruit people from within these communities. I aim to gauge what it means to be an Indigenous researcher doing Indigenous research and reflect on the accountability that such work encompasses. I share my experiences in relation to working ethically on research with Indigenous Australian people who are sex workers. I first consider the concept of community and provide a brief overview of issues pertaining to access through community-based organisations. I then reflect on some of the obstacles I encountered, explore my personal experiences, observations, the issues and challenges I faced, and consider how they influenced my research. Finally, I discuss the implications of working with and around community for research practice.

Doing Indigenous research

My doctoral project investigates the lives and experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers, including cis-male, cis-female, and transgender workers. I completed the fieldwork in 2018 and am writing my findings. My position of interest is as an Aboriginal Australian cis-woman. My ancestral home is the Wiradjuri nation in Central–West New South Wales. From the outset it was important to me as an Indigenous Australian researcher to tell the stories of Indigenous people working in the sex industry. However, I encountered a range of issues associated with recruiting participants because of the nature of the topic. Such impediments left me constantly questioning whether I should be conducting the research.

Ethical research practices, principles, and guidelines produced by National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2018) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS, 2012) detail how researchers should engage with the community to locate suitable participants. Both the AIATSIS “Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies” (2012) and the NHMRC guidelines provide frameworks for researchers, communities, ethics boards, and funding bodies to evaluate the appropriateness and sensitivity of proposed research with Indigenous communities. In the aforementioned guidelines, the two main Australian government research funding bodies, the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), recommend that all funded Indigenous research be based on proof of consultation and negotiation with and participation of Indigenous peoples throughout the entire project life cycle.

In 2018, the ARC, NHMRC, and Universities Australia (UA) released the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research (NHMRC et al., 2018). The Code states that

researchers need to “engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and respect their legal rights and local laws, customs and protocols” (p.4). Researchers need to recognise the right of “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be engaged in research that affects or is of particular significance to them” (p.2); to “value and respect the diversity, heritage, knowledge, cultural property and connection to land of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” (p.2); to “engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples prior to research being undertaken” (p.2); and will “report to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the outcomes of research in which they have engaged” (p.2). The guidelines are a significant part of the accountability regime that researchers must adhere to throughout a research process.

As with other disciplines, in Geography there are sustained histories of research conducted “on” Indigenous Australian peoples (McLean et al., 2016; Smith, 2012). Indeed, we are possibly the most researched group in the world (Rigney, 2001). Historically, most such research was undertaken by non-Indigenous people, some producing research in ways destructive and invasive of Indigenous communities (McLean et al., 2016; Rigney, 2001; Smith, 2012). Indigenous researchers affirm that inappropriate and insensitive research has “led to a continuing oppression and subordination of Indigenous Australians in every facet of Australian society to the point that there is no-where that we can stand that is free of racism” (Rigney, 1999, p.113). As Dodson (2003) has outlined, “since their first intrusive gaze, colonizing cultures have had a preoccupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling [A]boriginal people and Aboriginality” (p.3). The preoccupation with researching and categorising Indigenous peoples has been done without consent, consultation, or involvement of Aboriginal people. Such disregard for Indigenous peoples

rights to choose whether to participate or not in these practices created “mistrust, animosity and resistance” from Indigenous peoples (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003, p.203).

As an Indigenous researcher and doctoral student, I am ethically bound by the guidelines outlined above. Additionally, I am held to account by my own Indigenous communities (for example, my Indigenous family, the Indigenous communities in which I live and work, my ancestral home, broader Indigenous communities, the Indigenous higher education sector, and national and international communities of Indigenous peoples). This is a position that I firmly believe in and adhere to. Many Indigenous researchers argue the focus of research should be on working with Indigenous peoples who hold the knowledge and expertise of their lives and experiences, and on positive change (Louis, 2007; Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003; Nakata, 2007; Rigney, 2001; Smith, 2012; Walter, 2006). The intention of my work as an Indigenous scholar is to build and foster relationships with Indigenous communities and to assert Indigenous scholarly narratives of agency, autonomy, and self-determination.

I have attempted to work with Indigenous communities to conduct research that would be of benefit to them. I started the project with a firm belief that I was an “insider”. For Indigenous researchers, our research is entangled in complex roles, relationships and accountabilities: Smith (2012, pp.10–11) contends that Indigenous researchers “work within a set of ‘insider’ dynamics and it takes considerable sensitivity, skills, maturity, experience and knowledge to work these issues through.” We are usually uniquely positioned to understand the experiences of groups of which we are associated and/or connected with (Nakata, 2007). My connection to different Indigenous communities was largely based on an assumed (and indirect) set of shared lived experiences that struggled to survive against the ongoing forces

of colonisation. A set of shared lived experiences that saw us fall under the Western-imposed label of the homogenous “Aborigine”/Indigenous Australian.

As a result, I was not always known to the very communities I attempted to speak “with/for/of” and so, regardless of my Indigeneity, I am/was an academic, an outsider, a representative of the academy—an institution that in the past (and presently) has included individuals and groups who have not always conducted themselves appropriately in relation to research with/for/on Indigenous communities. Throughout the research process, ongoing critical reflection about my intentions, values, assumptions, ethics, accountabilities, and position was essential. Positioning myself in relation to the project and therefore the participants was complex. As an Indigenous researcher, I felt that I was well positioned to tell the story of Indigenous sex workers. However, it became obvious that I needed to question my position in the field, eventually acknowledging, at least in some important ways, I was an outsider in this research, and my discomfort was warranted. Not only was I struggling with my identity and positionality as an Indigenous researcher, but I was also aware that I was not a sex worker. Sex worker communities have a long and vexed history of outsiders researching in these spaces with often negative consequences for sex workers (Jeffreys, 2010). I was therefore an outsider in that research space too.

I found myself working in practical ways within simultaneous boundaries of “insiderness” and “outsiderness”, sameness and difference, and making critical choices about my research along the way. I had to identify and understand my own complicity in constructing myself as a researcher, and my relationships with communities, organisations, and participants. The tenuousness of my status meant I came to understand that this position had implications for gaining access and developing rapport with participants and for my identity as a researcher and Indigenous academic. Primarily the most significant obstacle and challenge I wrestled

with during the project was whether I had the right to do this research. This ethical conundrum has plagued me throughout my candidature.

To get to the root of my research conundrums I had to engage with reflexive practices. My main concern was my right to do the research, recognising my own power and privilege. Reflexivity can be most powerful when it assists researchers to explore their assumptions, biases, and value judgments (Dowling, 2010). Bringing researchers' biases and assumptions to light can only occur if they are able adequately to reflect on their roles and be aware of "their own discriminatory processes, personal beliefs and how these originate and are embedded within the broader contexts" (Freshwater and Avis, 2004, p.9). At its best, reflexivity involves self-scrutiny and can lead to self-discovery and insight into the research questions (England, 1994). However, reflexivity can be limited by a researcher's ability to fully understand herself and the impact she has on the research. One might question whether reflexivity enables researchers to claim to be transparent without requiring engagement with fundamental and often difficult issues that contribute to the decolonisation and reframing of research. For example, I can say I identify as a Wiradjuri cis-woman, and a sex worker ally, but I must also interrogate what that means, to which communities I belong, and to what extent.

For my research, consideration of who were and what was "the community" arose early in the research design. There are no specific organisations or associations governing this group of participants. In the past there has been a tendency for researchers to enter Indigenous communities (Louis, 2007; Smith, 2012) and sex worker communities (Hubbard, 1999; Jeffreys, 2010) with established agendas, practices, and protocols. I did not want to be one of those researchers, so clearly identifying the community and their needs was essential. I

recognised that I was working across two different community groups: the “Indigenous community” and the “sex worker community”. Both are diverse groups of people with long histories of being researched and both have stories told about them without their voices being included. Therefore, it was imperative that my research would value and privilege them given they are marginalised, disadvantaged and oppressed, and have experiences and lives generally not given space in academic literature.

Community and the role of organisational representation

The word ‘community’ is emotionally tinged. It is usually equated with a condition of happiness. At its best, community provides meaning and purpose to life—but, at its worst, community can be a source of tyranny and inhumanity. Nor is community a simple concept, a synonym for togetherness and love. (Scherer, 1972, pp.xii)

Community is a term that remains elusive to define and that is framed in multiple ways including as a sociological sample, an analytical concept, a geographic location, and an emotional state (Scherer, 1972). How people are connected to community is marked by a sense of belonging and can be central to how many people recognise who they are and how they fit in the world (Franklin, 2014; Manzo, 2005). Determining who or what constitutes a community for research purposes can present a dilemma, particularly given how ill-defined community is, and the work is complex. The concept of Indigenous communities is imagined in multiple ways, encompassing physical, political, social, psychological, linguistic, economic, cultural, and spiritual spaces. Indigenous communities are often viewed as family or kinship groups, or localised communities of people who are geographically collocated (Lee and Tran, 2016). Before colonisation, such communities were most likely to be bounded by location. Indeed, the impact of colonisation and subsequent enforced dislocations of Indigenous peoples from Indigenous lands meant that Indigenous communities have since emerged in diverse ways, including in terms of having shared

Indigenous identity rather than necessarily having a shared ancestral home, family, or kinship bond. At its simplest there is not one singular Indigenous community in Australia; rather there are multitudes of communities formed by the shared commonality of identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (Carlson, 2016). Regardless of where or how they occur, such formations can imply that a shared Indigenous identity is expressed, understood, and lived in the same way.

The shaping of Indigenous communities developed partly via colonial projects that forced the relocation, dislocation, and dispossession of ancestral Country/land. The term “Indigenous community” in popular discourse emerged in the 1970s as a way in which government funding could be funnelled to Indigenous people. Funding resulted in Indigenous organisations coveting the term as a means to secure such resources and become authorities in communities (Peters-Little, 2000). How these resources were distributed and to whom became part of that authorisation, and it would become a significant source of power (Hunt and Smith, 2018). Who is seen to belong and who does not belong in an Indigenous community runs far deeper than simply being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. It is largely government policies and Indigenous community organisations themselves that shape the “who” and the “what” that constitutes an Indigenous community (Peters-Little, 2000). One consequence of either government intervention and/or Indigenous determination is what Peters-Little refers to as “The Community Game” where “prominent and dominant” families or like-minded individuals seize power for their own power and to assert their own agendas (p.10). The organisation then becomes “the community”, subsequently positioned as a powerful force that has considerable input into all things related to the community and the people in which it serves (or is meant to serve). For researchers coming into Indigenous spaces it can be quite problematic to navigate and negotiate, presenting a challenge in identifying the who, the what and the where of “the Indigenous community.”

All Indigenous organisations are relational; they are connected and formed by people who are linked in a web of personal relationships, political, social, and cultural connections (Hunt and Smith, 2018). They are primarily constructed from a notion of Indigenous identity, and the articulation of that identity, and in each organisation the diversity in that identity is carefully controlled (Carlson, 2016; Peters-Little, 2000). The “who” in an Indigenous community is complicated and can be manipulated by those within the organisation. Those who do not participate in these organisations are often viewed as outside the community. Indeed, the three-part definition of Aboriginality developed by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in the 1980s, states that:

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent; who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which they live (Gardiner-Garden, 2003, p.4).

To “be accepted as such by the community” usually means one participates in community organisations. Non-acceptance by community can result in an individual’s inability to prove their Indigeneity, and as a result they will not have access to Indigenous resources and services. Moreover, in relation to identity there are additionally fraught and toxic consequences of not being accepted by community. Maintaining a strong sense of identity is challenged when you are not accepted by a community organisation. Confirmation of Aboriginality and being accepted by community presents many Indigenous peoples with experiences and interactions that create “self-doubt, identity confusion and anguish” (Fredericks, 2004, p.31). The implication of this view is that as Indigenous people we can be restricted, controlled, and isolated if we do not participate in our local Indigenous organisation or if we are not allowed to participate. In short, Indigenous organisations are often in the position to decide who belongs, and who does not. If you are not accepted by an Indigenous organisation, you are seen as not part of the community, and it follows that if you

are not part of the community then are you Indigenous? Hence Indigenous organisations are in positions of great power to control and govern what it means to belong, who gets to belong, and how one must perform that belonging. Hence, our connection or lack thereof to an Indigenous organisation can determine our rights to identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

For the purposes of research, and my research particularly, if an organisation is determining who belongs and who does not, they are also choosing who is represented and how that representation occurs. For Indigenous sex workers, these decisions may mean not being considered an accepted part of the community and therefore sitting in the blind spot of community organisations.

Indigenous organisations can help bring together people, cultural understandings and knowledges, and a sense of belonging and connection; such ideals can lead to feelings of safety, community, and acceptance (Hunt and Smith, 2018; Lee and Tran, 2016). Indigenous organisations can also manage and control identity and belonging and connection more intensely than other kinds of places. They can be spaces/places that shape who belongs and who does not, producing a distinct inequality that persists and which means these are not safe spaces/places for all. Entry can be carefully restricted to guard against a range of unwanted and sometimes real and perceived dangerous intrusions. For example, entry can be denied to those considered not to be Indigenous, or whose lives and experiences may be considered wrong, deviant, or incongruent with the organisation/community such as might be the case with outsiders, researchers, sex workers, sex traders, or sexually and gender diverse people. The point here is to ponder the nature of Indigenous spaces/places and, as researchers, we need to recognise that such politics need to be (re)considered, (re)negotiated,

and recognised in our research processes. The implication for research is that Indigenous organisations are often seen *as* the community and therefore as the authority to consult about whether research can be conducted in an area and with whom. Therefore, for the purposes of research one pressing question is whether engaging with Indigenous organisations is the only path when wanting to work with or speak to a specific Indigenous community?

Finding community

My own research was fraught with challenges in identifying the boundaries of the Indigenous communities that I should work with. My first point of contact was with NSW Health's Aboriginal Health Team to gauge where the research may be best situated, and whether it would be of benefit to Indigenous peoples. In early conversations, it was agreed that sex work/sex trading was occurring in many rural communities in the state. There were concerns that those involved in sexually based practices were unlikely to be receiving adequate or appropriate sexual education and/or treatment (should it be required) because of the stigma and shame that is often associated with sex work. Further, there were issues raised in relation to the possibility of adolescents being involved in sexual services. The Aboriginal Health Team suggested I contact health workers and/or sexual health workers in Indigenous organisations and were clear about which community based organisations I should initially contact.

I contacted every Indigenous organisation suggested by NSW Health and received the same responses from each person with whom I spoke: “those problems do not occur here” and “that happens in [another] community—call them”. It became clear that my probing was unwelcome. Every single organisation had a health worker and/or organisation spokesperson gatekeeping the community and no one supported further inquiry despite, or perhaps because

of ongoing media reports that claim that some Indigenous “teenage girls are exploited in prostitution at rural truck stops” (Houghton, 2010, para 8), with rewards “being offered to get people to dob in truck drivers who sexually exploit young Aboriginal girls in regional NSW” (Drummond, 2008, para 1).

As my research progressed, two individuals who work in Indigenous community health service provision agreed to be interviewed in relation to their knowledge of Indigenous communities and organisations in relation to sex work/sex trading. To maintain anonymity, I assign these participants pseudonyms, Dell and Alex, and do not reveal their locations. In this section I relate Dell’s experiences and will discuss Alex’s position later.

Dell has worked in the area of sexual health for many years and has multiple links with Indigenous communities and organisations as well as Indigenous individuals who use the services offered where Dell works. While Dell worked in this space, they were able to grapple with some of the intricacies of working in and around Indigenous communities and organisations and sexual health. Dell says:

We see a lot of Aboriginal people who either identify as sex workers or participate in providing sexual favours for some kind of benefit. It might be that they have sex with someone to score some dope or alcohol, or to get a ride, sometimes for cash. Sex is a valuable commodity in this area; there is always people coming in and out of the areas around here for work. It’s mostly Aboriginal women and girls; sometimes we see an Aboriginal trans worker, but they don’t often stick around because of how they are treated. But yeah, I see mostly Aboriginal women taking advantage of these seasonal type workers and the truckies.

[Those in] the Aboriginal sex industry, as I see it, are very much a hidden population. I don’t think that’s ever going to change. Culturally, I think it’s taboo and not discussed. There is a big shame element, people don’t want their communities to know what they are doing—so they won’t identify as doing sex work or doing sexual favours. There is too much shaming and too much judgement ... That’s why a lot of them won’t go to the health services in their communities; the judgement keeps them hidden. Aboriginal community members know everything, the Aboriginal grapevine is incredible, there is often no confidence of confidentiality within communities. And communities are very

quick to label. [Sex work or sexual favours are] not accepted practice in Aboriginal communities, at least not around here.

From Dell's observations and my own there appear to be conflicting accounts of what occurs in some Indigenous communities. Aboriginal friends have told me quite sincerely that Aboriginal people simply do not do that type of thing, a kind of moralising that suggests that Aboriginal people would never have sex for money or call themselves, or be, sex workers. It would seem there is a sense of protecting the community from an intrusive gaze, a precarious yet reasonable position given the problems and dangers Indigenous communities face as a result of research that may draw unwanted, unwarranted, and potentially damaging attention. On the flip side this research also raises questions about tendencies to moralising, ignorance, and silencing about what occurs in communities.

Understanding the silences in Indigenous communities

Doing research with Indigenous people and communities and/or organisations includes challenges such as setting the agenda for research, power differentials, ownership, and identity, with processes and outcomes based on particular political and cultural understandings and assumptions (Edwards et al., 2008). Other challenges may relate to scepticism and resistance from Indigenous and non-Indigenous gatekeepers (Day et al., 2008). There remain valid reasons to keep researchers from coming into Indigenous communities, particularly when the nature of inquiry may be or considered to be contentious and potentially dangerous. The potentially negative impact of the research process on Indigenous communities must also be recognised, particularly in Australia, where towns and people are easily identified. For instance, given the size of many Indigenous communities in Australia and their complex internal structures (Carlson, 2016), research participants can be easily identified and socially ostracised. Individuals can be represented in problematic ways and that may affect how an entire community is viewed. For example, an Indigenous

community in New South Wales renowned for being among the state's most historically disadvantaged Indigenous settlements is regularly subjected to media reports that include damaging remarks about poverty, neglect, substance abuse, and prostitution. Such media attention results in government intervention in our communities. As we have witnessed time and time again, intervention in Australia has damaging and long lasting effects on Indigenous communities. Little wonder that some communities may wish to distance themselves from outsiders who may expose things that ultimately will bring further pain and suffering. However, sex work and sex workers become entangled in negative and harmful stereotypes and community organisations often wish to distance themselves from these.

The ways in which an Indigenous community may wish to be perceived speaks directly to concepts of Indigenous Australian identity. Carlson (2016) argues that the concept of Aboriginal identity poses as a dilemma between freedom of expression and a fixed ideology of identity and that this dilemma can result in "suppression and contradiction" (p.161). For example, members of a community discussing sex work or sex trading in their community could be seen as an act reflecting poorly on the rest of the community and outsiders may assume that this is what all Indigenous people do. The angst, then, is both about what is real and what is perceived as appropriate, moral, right, or Aboriginal. An individual who is Aboriginal and a sex worker and is part of such communities could be ostracised, ignored, silenced, be socially and culturally stigmatised, and may face rejection and ejection from the community and/or organisation. This social/cultural rejection is increased for sex workers that also identify as queer and/or gender diverse (Sullivan 2018). Contexts of gender and sexual diversity are not a Western phenomenon nor a recent occurrence, Indigenous individuals who identified as gender and/or sexually diverse were accepted and part of our communities pre-colonisation (Riggs and Toone, 2016). The reduction of Indigenous

Australian gender and sexual diversity in communities points to ongoing acts of colonisation that highlight the more malign way in which the settler state has used its power to produce Indigenous Australian people's sexuality as dirty and deviant (Sullivan, 2018), as a result communities have become bounded by colonial heteropatriarchal ideologies that stymie individual sovereignty (O'Sullivan, 2015; Sullivan and Day, 2019a; Sullivan and Day, 2019b). Individuals in communities are often ignored in order to 'protect' the community, or are within the blind spots and not 'seen' or represented by the organisation (Carlson, 2016; Fforde et al., 2013; Gorringer et al., 2011). Thus:

Issues surrounding identity and the ways in which negative stereotypes are used by Aboriginal people against other Aboriginal people are a matter of great sensitivity, with candid and rigorous debate stifled by valid fears of reprisal, which include being perceived as negating the presence of real disadvantage and exposing people and communities to further misrepresentation and outside attack ... identifying these issues does not mean denying the real need of many Aboriginal people, nor the continuing racism which people experience, but provides mechanisms which may effect change in these areas. (Gorringer et al., 2011, p.3)

The censure of individuals leaves silenced and unchallenged the "un-sayable, the unintelligible, the incomprehensible, or the unpopular" (Carlson, 2016, p.162). Although there are valid reasons for maintaining silences in communities, and regardless of my conviction as a researcher to de-identify individuals or communities, I was not able to navigate this terrain to work with communities and recruit participants. I acknowledge that working with communities and their gatekeepers can have great benefits, the gatekeepers and community leaders have power and influence, and can add value and credibility to a research project. Alternatively, they can prevent access, erect barriers, and effectively hold up or shut down a project. For example, every Indigenous community health worker I spoke to implied that neither sex work nor sex trading happened in their communities even though I had been informed by other sources that they were. Their apparent impulse to protect their communities is reasonable given that there is danger in exposing contentious

issues/problems in a community. Alternatively, it may also imply that gatekeepers were almost certainly working toward their own agenda regardless of who was and was not included, and Indigenous sex workers remain in a blind spot in those agendas. From the outset I was determined to do research that represented the voices of Indigenous peoples, that was designed with and for Indigenous people, and was of benefit to them. In the case of this project, it was imperative to speak with Indigenous Australian sex workers/sex traders, yet the gatekeeping by Indigenous organisations/communities left me at a loss. At this point it seemed to me that it was time to end the project—if the Indigenous community did not want me in their spaces then the ethical decision is to walk away, right?

Figuring out my next steps

At this point, it appeared that my research project had hit a dead end. On advice from Dell, I turned to sex worker community organisations. Dell said there were Aboriginal-identified people working in organisations that may be of value and would not be as likely to be judgemental or fear retaliation in the same way that Indigenous organisations seemed to. I contacted several sex worker community based organisations in New South Wales. At one particular organisation, the staff were highly enthusiastic about the project. I met several times with both the manager and the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, who agreed about the importance of the research and indicated that they would support the project. Regrettably they were unable to aid in the recruitment of participants unless I received ethical approval from their umbrella organisation. Although I had already successfully received approval from my University's ethics committee, I agreed to submit an application for their consideration. However, that application was unsuccessful.

The umbrella organisation was adamant that they would not give their approval unless I changed my research focus. The research agenda they requested was predicated on a highly medicalised framework aimed at positioning Indigenous sex workers as victims of exploitation and disease. I was not convinced this was an appropriate project for me to conduct. I certainly did not feel comfortable approaching my research within this framing. First, it was not appropriate due to my disciplinary background: I am geographer with a background in Indigenous studies, the project the umbrella organisation requested required someone with health sciences expertise. Second, there is already much medicalised research published in and around sex work (Donovan et al., 2010; Donovan et al., 2012; Prior et al., 2013; Sanders et al., 2017). Third, and more importantly, in order to set a research agenda for Indigenous sex workers it needs to be done with Indigenous sex workers. Again, I felt that the research agenda was being constructed by those that were not actually representative of this group of people, and yet were representing them in ways that seemed blind to the needs and wants of Indigenous sex workers.

Without the support of Indigenous community organisations or sex worker community organisations, I felt I did not have the right to do this research, and that I was also not able to, or prepared to do the research these organisations requested. To my mind if I was not doing the research that the representatives or gatekeepers of the ‘community’ wanted then I should not be doing the research—this was the ethical approach to research that I believed in and had been trained for. It became clear that I either change my research focus to suit ‘community’ organisation agendas in order to recruit participants, or I find another avenue to locate the actual (diverse and relatively ambiguous) community that I wanted to work for, and was yet to actually speak with—the Indigenous sex worker community.

It was at one of the sex worker organisations that I met Alex and an opportunity to step towards another approach to ethical engagement with Indigenous sex workers began to form. Alex is an Indigenous woman, a sex worker, and was also an employee at one of these organisations. Alex shared with me the following story:

It's really important that you talk to us [Indigenous sex workers] we have a different story than those other mob [non-Indigenous sex workers], but that's all they care about really. The other mob. They say that they care about us and want to work with us. But I don't think they can really understand where we are coming from. Yes, we face the same kinds of issues, like shame, guilt, being shunned by family and community, being treated like shit by everyone. But even though they are the same issues, as Aboriginal people we experience in a, I don't know, it's just real [sic] different. Only Aboriginal people can tell you that.

The conversation I had with Alex confirmed there was a story to tell and that my instincts to not change the focus of the research to satisfy the agendas of particular organisations was correct. However, this insight did not alter my ability to recruit participants because, without the support of the organisation where Alex worked, they were unable to provide contacts or assist with recruitment. It was a discussion with another Indigenous academic, whose advice I sought in relation to my ethical and methodological issues, that led to the recruitment of my first participant—they knew someone who was a sex worker and approached them about my research. Fortunately, I had ethical clearance from my university to obtain individual consent. This person leapt at the opportunity to speak to me and discuss the research. After this interview, other individuals came forward and asked to take part, some from the very same communities and organisations I had already approached. If these individuals had not come forward of their own volition their voices would have continued to be silenced by their community and organisational gatekeepers who insisted that these things did not occur, or who were pursuing agendas that were incongruent with the Indigenous sex worker community. Distinguishing the relevant players who would become a community in the context of the research was necessary in order to access those that were currently or

previously involved in the sex industry. I found that as I spoke about my project more participants emerged. This iterative recruitment process offered individuals with relevant experience to self-select and effectively recruit me as their researcher was useful in that it enabled me to access those who may be considered vulnerable, or insecure due to community shame and stigma, or who were silenced, ignored or misunderstood by the more conventionally defined communities that neither adequately represented nor supported them.

Implications and lessons from the field

My research journey is a powerful reminder that there are pluralities in communities and that ‘community organisations’ are not necessarily representative, nor able to be representative of every individual, or every group they are seen as (or claim to be) representing. There are groups within groups, hence there are different ways to connect. The ethical discussion around who has the right to do research, and with whom, is by no means complete, rather it is an ongoing process that researchers should engage with critically. In particular, it is important to recognise that attempts to work with and for Indigenous communities and organisations, as well as sex worker organisations can be complex and challenging. As an Indigenous researcher, I have been taught that research is done for the community, as a geographer I have been trained to do ethical best practice research, to work with communities. What I have learnt is that there is a multiplicity of communities, and a plurality in communities, and some are more hidden than others. To really do research for ‘the community’, sometimes you have to work without some of the defined, categorical elements of community too. This paper was not written to provide a rationale for researchers to do research without community consent, or to go around the community or their gatekeepers. Quite the contrary: I advocate for the continuance of community consent and gatekeeping, the agenda setting for research should be set by the very communities that are affected by it. The gatekeepers and community leaders have knowledge and experience, they also have

power and influence, and can add value and credibility to a research project. At times gatekeepers and community leaders will exercise their power to stop a project in its tracks, and we, as researchers must respect that. Yet we must also think critically about this. This is not a call to circumvent communities or organisations, but to be sure that our actions, and research decisions open spaces to respond to issues that are of concern, and be prepared to revise, reconsider and re-examine our own research agenda. In my case, the iterative processes of recruitment and consent that emerged along the journey have built confidence in the ethical integrity of the research, and its capacity to offer new insights into an all too easily buried set of issues.

Two lessons here are that it can be very hard to find the community that you need to work with if you do not have an existing relationship with them, and that there is often not the time or resources to enable the space to form relationships and the trust required to build those relationships (McLean et al., 2016; Raven, 2010; Weir et al., 2019). Research is a timely exercise that requires output for ongoing resources to be able to work with people, communities and organisations. I recognise that the communities and organisations I approached had no reason to work with me, and I surmise two reasons for that. First, that if they were prepared to discuss sex work/sex services that it would unlikely be with me, not because of me personally, but they did not know who I was nor how I would conduct the research. There was a real risk to them. Second, cultural taboos and dogma exist in Indigenous communities/organisations regarding sexual behaviour, there remains a deep moralising that occurs in many of these spaces that I believe stems from the invasion and subsequent colonising of Australia. Our colonisation brought with it Christianity and a European moral code that some Aboriginal people conflate with our own cultural traditions and dogma (Sullivan, 2018). It is evident that it took time for me to find the community that I needed to work for, and they are an informal, fluid and loosely bound group of individuals.

In order to get there, I needed to do the work, take the time to reflect on the myriad responses I was receiving and to think about these things deeply. However, my decisions, and the positions that I have assumed, and presumed are not without consequence.

Making judgements on my own research practices and position is one thing, but to make judgements on Indigenous organisations and communities, and sex worker organisations, is an entirely different and quite fraught process. The potential responses to this paper and how it may be used and interpreted in certain ways presents ongoing challenges. I fear how this paper may be interpreted and used as evidence to support not working with Indigenous organisations (or sex worker organisations)—I do not advocate for that as ethical research practice and process with Indigenous peoples, as well as sex workers, should always be adhered to, and carefully considered. An essential element of that process is working with organisations and communities and working through multifaceted implications and research agenda.

Conclusion

This article raises some of the difficulties that research with Indigenous peoples and communities raises, in particular when addressing a situation in which the research is contentious, and potentially harmful. This kind of research space raises real and persistent complexities for the research process, the researcher, and the research participants. There remains a need for Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars to engage in this conversation so that we can develop a deeper understanding of what it means to do Indigenous research conscientiously and ethically. Today researchers are required to demonstrate they have consulted and negotiated with Indigenous community/ies, and that the planned research is considered useful and beneficial, whilst being respectful and sensitive to the community. For

many universities, the ethics review process, however, has become an exercise in compliance and risk management rather than ethical engagement. In complex socio-political settings, it seems to be easier for review processes to rely on rather colonial and categorical thinking about representative organisations and their gatekeeper roles than to support deeper ethical engagement with unrepresented or poorly recognised non-conforming groups that are not formally organised. As Dimitriadis has stated: ‘there are no safe spaces, no alibis, for researchers anymore. We face ever-present and unavoidable choices about our commitments to the people with whom we work, choices that have implications’ (Dimitriadis, 2001, p.595), as we should do.

In this article, I have discussed the complexity of Indigenous research, including issues of identification, access and recruitment as critical in terms of ethical research and practice, as well as the production of power. I have reflected on my experiences of working with community/ies and organisations and the power that is exercised within these spaces. I have offered a commentary on, and in places a provocative challenge to, a system of rule and a system of representation. By sharing my story, and in part the story of the participants in this study, I revealed some of the complex spaces/places of Indigenous and sex worker research. I opened these spaces/places up to enable the presence of multiplicity and diversity to emerge, and exposed the possible ramifications, challenges, and implications in having this story heard. This research took me on an ethical and methodological journey; I am not unaffected. My position as a doctoral student means I am apprehensive about publishing a critique of my approach. I am particularly concerned I may be interpreted as oppositional and bitter toward organisations—I am not. Indigenous and sex worker organisations have a specific place, and are positioned to work with, and for, the communities that they represent. They are also spaces that are usually woefully underfunded, and at constant risk of scrutiny

and judgement. However, at times even well-intentioned individuals and groups of people can be caught in the blind spots of these organisations, and either not fairly or adequately represented for a range of reasons, some I have touched on, while others remain a mystery to me. My research has enabled me to view organisations as both a conflated space with/in community/ies, but also starkly reminded me that organisations do not represent everyone in a community. I invite other researchers to take time to reflect on the positive and negative outcomes of working with communities, and to (re)consider the role of organisations in community-based research.

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Pages 55-68 of this thesis have been removed as they contain published material. Please refer to the following citation for details of the article contained in these pages:

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Chapter 5: ‘People pay me for sex’: Contemporary lived experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers

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Abstract

The everyday lived experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers are often made to be invisible. Frequently, they are embedded and left unrecognised within non-Indigenous sex workers’ experiences; alternately, stereotypes about Indigenous sex workers mean their experiences are often overgeneralised and relegated to discussion of exploitation and victimhood. Based on interviews with Indigenous Australians who identify as sex workers, this article examines what sex work means for Indigenous Australians, their views of sex work, and the factors influencing their reasons for engaging in sex work, in order to bring their experiences to the forefront of contemporary discussions. This research goes beyond the polarised and simplistic arguments which have circulated in sex workers’ research leading to important understandings of the complex and nuanced choices made in relation to work, finances, gender and sexuality.

Keywords: Indigenous, sex work, agency, sexual autonomy, stigma, economics

Introduction

People in the sex industry come from a variety of backgrounds, histories, ethnicities – like people in all industries – and therefore have a range of different experiences. However, they are often repressed in academic conversations, and subsequently their placement is at times invisible and unknown in knowledge landscapes (Hubbard, 2002). The ‘oldest profession’ has existed in Australia since colonisation (Frances, 2007). The concept of prostitution or

sex work on Australia's invaded lands is a vexed issue (Sullivan, 2018a). Due to the disproportionate population of males to females during the invasion and early colonisation period the need to 'satisfy the lusts' of men on the frontier was essential to the success of the new colony, simply put, white men would not move or work on the lands where there were no 'available' women (Franklin, 2014). Prostitution and prostituted women burgeoned on the frontier, with Indigenous women and, to a lesser extent, convict women, becoming central to the economy. Prostitution was constructed as a public health problem and an issue of morality (Frances, 2007). With Indigenous women being produced as Other, unruly, immoral and diseased, her body was consequently subjected to control, regulation and surveillance (Sullivan, 2018a). There has been discussion in academic literature in regard to prostitution histories in the colony and on the position of women, particularly Indigenous women, in relation to prostitution and sexual exploitation (see Sullivan, 2018a; Conor, 2016; Frances, 2007). However, this article examines the contemporary landscape of Indigenous sex work in Australia. Focusing on the experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers, this article deconstructs and decolonises normative assumptions, attitudes and opinions that essentialise their experiences. There is limited research exploring the experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers, despite estimations Indigenous Australians represent some 20-23% of the population of sex workers (Donovan et al., 2012). This article responds to this gap in the literature sharing the narratives of seven Indigenous Australian sex workers.

In this article the term 'sex worker' or 'sex work' refers to those who exchange sexually based services for money, and/or other material benefits, for example accommodation, transport, and drugs (Maginn and Steinmetz, 2014; Benoit et al., 2019). There is one other known qualitative study in Australia that reported directly on research with Indigenous women and their role in selling sex. Holmes and McRae-Williams (2011) researched the

intersection of homelessness and transactional sex in the Northern Territory of Australia and assert 'transactional sex' is another term or category to describe the exchange of sex for money and/or goods of value. They argued the term transactional sex can infer both an explicit sex for money exchange that is non-relational, or the exchange of other material goods which may form part of a more relational, support type arrangement. The use of the term 'transactional sex' in their study appears to be a choice made by the authors rather than the participants. They note: 'while the lived experience of these women add credibility to the pro-sex position', they felt it was 'difficult to ignore the volume of evidence that points to the majority of women who exchange sex for money being from impoverished backgrounds where a multiplicity of power struggles are at play' (Holmes and McRae-Williams, 2011: 6). I think, from an Indigenous Standpoint, that this position undermines the power, control and agency the women in their study felt they had. Despite the women asserting sex work and the capitalisation and commodification of sex was of benefit to them and was on their terms (Holmes and McRae-Williams, 2011), the authors maintained the term 'transactional sex'. It is my assertion that whilst the authors tried to justify the use of this terminology and the academic discourses attached to it, 'to capture the intricacy of sex and sexual services as defined and shaped by larger social and cultural processes' (Holmes and McRae-Williams, 2011), what it serves to do is diminish the voices of their participants.

The participants represented within this article used the term sex work, with one exception who preferred the term 'hustler' yet maintained what they did was sex work. As Indigenous people are centred in this project, it is vital to use their terminology and respect those who do exchange sex for money, or other material gain, who understand and appreciate the power of their own sexual agency, and that it is not a position of academics or anyone else to define or decide these terms, nor to moralise anyone's choices.

Academic discourses often portray sex workers as powerless and vulnerable victims of economic inequalities and patriarchal privilege, yet such assumptions ignore how Indigenous peoples' engagement with sex work can also be an economic strategy. Drawing on feminist, Indigenous, and geographical scholarship, I extend existing frameworks of analysis by addressing how Indigenous Australian sex work highlights the power of Indigenous sexual agency, and how this power connects to economics, gender, sexuality. Firstly, I detail the methodological approach to the research, then I explore the economic relationship of sex work, finally I chart the relationships between sexuality, gender and race in relation to Indigenous sex workers. In doing so this article reveals colonio-centric norms in relation to sex and gender and how they are rooted in social and cultural expectations and dogma.

Learning to listen

This article is part of a doctoral study that explores the lives and experiences of seven cis-male, cis-female and transgender Aboriginal sex workers, some of whom also identify as sexually diverse. The narratives derived from semi-structured interviews which consisted of questions related to their experiences as sex workers. This study has ethical approval and all participants involved took part with informed ethical consent which could be withdrawn at any time, each either self-selected or were assigned a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity. Further each participant was paid for their time, as appropriate according to ethical guidelines and best practice for both Indigenous peoples, and sex workers (AIATSIS, 2012; Jeffreys, 2010). The participants identify as Indigenous Australian or Aboriginal Australian, all use these terms interchangeably, it is also important to note I also identify as Indigenous Australian. Although the term Indigenous is used in this article, which is a collective term that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, no Torres Strait Islander

people took part in the study. Most participants identify as being sex workers, one preferred the term ‘hustler’, albeit all agreed to the use of the term sex worker.

Examination of the seven narratives reveals the geographic politics of diverse race/sex body/landscapes. Narratives provide more than representation: they are histories and geographies that represent and create places, spaces, peoples and knowledges (McDonagh, 2018). Indigenous people, although often marginalised, are the keepers of knowledge, their bodies the knower of truths. It is this knowledge of self that affords the right to speak in relation to topics that concern them, and to be the experts in this field (Nakata, 2007; Kwaymullina, 2016; Kwaymullina et al., 2013). Indigenous knowledges such as those produced in this article are demonstrative of how Indigenous people see and experience the world. The re-telling of these knowledges and our rights to tell our stories, to reclaim our spaces and to produce new knowledges, reflect and reinforce dynamics of power, agency and autonomy (Kwaymullina, 2016; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Centring the voices of Indigenous sex workers recognises them as experts of their own lives and places their lived experiences at the core of inquiry. Research that centres Indigenous voices produces knowledges which bring to the foreground the situations, circumstances and experiences Indigenous people deem important.

Indigenous Standpoint Theory commands attention to these narratives and the praxis in which they heard, listened to and understood (Nakata, 2007; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Narratives that are heard, listened to, and understood in this manner are more than data. For Indigenous peoples sharing stories/story-ing is how we connect, how we share knowledges, and how we understand and share our histories and geographies (Kwaymullina et al., 2013). Therefore, Indigenous Standpoint theoretical and methodological position is engaged with to

ensure the retelling of the stories and knowledges contained are self-determined and expressed through an Indigenous lens (Kwaymullina, 2016). This framework is applied to analyse and discuss these stories, leading to new knowledges about the ways in which Indigenous Australians negotiate sex work, and how spaces of sex work shape and influence bodily knowledges. The narratives explored and re-told through an Indigenous lens provide a grounding in which to discuss the intersectionalities of race, gender, sexuality and sex work.

‘People pay me for sex’ – Economics and sex work

Studies show most people are sex workers for economic reasons (Minichiello and Scott, 2014; Hammond and Kingston, 2014; Whowell, 2010; Sanders, 2005) For Indigenous sex workers, financial independence is a key driver (Sullivan, 2018a; Sullivan, 2018b; Sullivan and Day, 2019a). All of the participants spoke in relation to their motivation for money:

‘People pay me for sex. I wouldn’t do it for free...well with some of them I might [laughs] but on the whole I do it for the money, clean and simple. I mean why does anyone else work? It serves my purposes. I work when I want, and I do what I want. It’s the only job I ever had where I get to negotiate what I will and won’t do’ (Isabelle, female, heterosexual).

‘I’m a good lookin’ guy. I know what I have and I know what others want. This is my time to make as much money as I can. I’m not gonna be pretty forever you know...later when I’m old I will go back to office work. I’ve been doing some consultancy work to keep my ‘normal’ career going for later, but for now I just want to make a tonne of cash and have fun’ (Jack, male, gay).

‘I like the money. It’s good money for easy work. I could do other work, I could be a cleaner. But most jobs aren’t very flexible, I choose my hours, the clients I see. And if I need time off like for school holidays, or one of my kids get sick I can. I don’t want to do anything else, at least for now this works for me’ (Moir, female, heterosexual).

‘I work when I need the money, it’s straight like that. I only work part-time so when I need extra cash or when my family is hustlin’ [for money] well I get my ass on the corner’ (Bianca, female, heterosexual).

‘Initially it was to save money and start [a lifestyle] and to have money for that lifestyle and stay out all the time...It’s like yeah. At the time I wasn’t very skilled. I was still a uni student... I mean I could have got skilled in something else and got working but no one was going to let me work the hours I wanted, when I wanted, and they didn’t pay me enough, I like the satisfaction of having money’ (Majesty, trans).

‘I like having extra money because I have a few jobs. But if I need extra money or I want extra money that would be a reason now that I work’ (JJ, queer).

‘Money...I don’t feel like I can go back to a regular job where you get paid such shit money because it’s really easy just to make such quick money. I find that it changed my perception of work. I went fuck that. Why would I want to work in hospitality and get paid shit and get treated like shit when I can make that much money in half an hour or an hour?’ (Jeremy, brotherboy (trans), bisexual).

The role of economic independence is interwoven in these narratives to varying degrees and is manifested in conventional and non-conventional ways. The narratives clearly indicate money was a motivator in taking up sex work, yet this decision was not due to a lack of choices. This position is supported by Sanders (2005) who concluded that although most sex workers were from low economic backgrounds, entry into sex work is more likely to be closely linked with the desire for economic independence rather than poverty, or limited education. Some of the participants spoke of supplementing their main incomes, or to support themselves while undertaking study. Others preferred the ease and flexibility sex work afforded them. As Moira outlined above sex-work is a child-friendly option which allowed her to work during school hours. For others, periods of financial need or outright poverty are often key drivers to sex work, highlighted by Bianca. Many choose this work for the autonomy and flexibility it affords – that is, the ability to choose when and where to work, who they work with, and how much money they earn each week. Sex work for these

participants meant they could maintain, stabilise or improve their economic positions.

Therefore, sex work for Indigenous Australian people in this study is not elected due to lack of options, exploitation or victimhood, it is a legitimate choice made as a means to supplement income, lifestyle, and for economic independence.

Capitalising on body and sexualities

Sex workers utilise their bodies as assets which facilitate them to work and wield their bodily capital to promote themselves as appealing and sexual and therefore viable (Wacquant 1995). Despite transgressions of social and cultural mores, capitalising on the body is often seen by sex workers as ‘another day in the office’ (Perkins and Lovejoy, 2007: 153), sex work is simply ordinary people finding ways to earn an income through the body. Nussbaum (1998) argued that we all ‘take money from the use of our body’ (p.693). With the exception of the unemployed and the independently wealthy, she contends making money from the body is not different from other forms of work. This sentiment is implied in Jack’s statement: ‘you wouldn’t hold it against a carpenter for using their hands to make money, why is it so different that I use my body?’. This stance is echoed by Isabelle, who said:

‘there’s always this idea that people want to moralise you for using your pussy or your mouth to make money, but if you think about it everyone uses their body to make money, it’s just that everyone is so hung up on it because it’s about sex...I think people get very hung up on the sex bit...I think it comes from society...probably the church’.

Capitalising on the body as a resource (re)conceptualises the circumstances and catalysts for effecting choice and therefore agency, the body is the instrument Indigenous sex workers draw upon to secure their economic livelihoods. The argument there are Indigenous bodily

spaces in which sexual capital can be exerted does not imply sex work has the capacity to overthrow larger socioeconomic, gendered or racialised inequalities and structures. However, it suggests even in societies that are heavily hetero-patriarchal, such as Australia (Moreton-Robinson, 2000), we might find spaces of Indigenous bodily autonomy and capitalisation. The premise of Indigenous sexual capital that is derived from Indigenous bodies in this way can inform understandings of gender, sexuality and race. Indigenous bodies can be a significant resource in providing sexual practices, thus commodifying the body to extract money can be seen as an act of agency, empowerment, pride and self-determination. This position recognises Indigenous bodies are not passive materials on which to inscribe colonio-centric scripts, rather they are spaces/places that have their own mobilities, histories, contemporalities and are sites of considerable power (O'Sullivan, 2015).

Indigenous sex workers use their bodies and sexual practices to mobilise and promote their sexual capital and advance themselves economically (Sullivan, 2018b; Sullivan and Day, 2019a). From an Indigenous Standpoint respecting Indigenous peoples' right to self-determine how they view and use their bodies, identify and advocate for themselves negates the colonial project of Indigenous peoples/bodies as objects of the state, and of the church (O'Sullivan, 2019). Indigenous bodies have been seen as a problem that has been historically and deliberately produced by and across systems of colonisation, fuelled by Euro-centric Christianity and moral codes (Sullivan, 2018a). Indigenous sex workers form and promote different associations and spatialities of Indigenous bodies and Indigenous sexualities. From an embodied Indigenous geographical perspective Indigenous bodies must be contextualised in a way that recognises difference between gender, sexuality and race (McDowell, 1991).

Gender and Sexuality

Public and academic discourses about sex work are largely formed by incomplete stereotypes of female street-based sex workers, usually substance abusers, who are viewed as being at the mercy of clients, pimps and society (Hubbard, 2019). Indigenous sex workers are often categorised in this way and seen as broken, deviant, destitute, and out of control (Sullivan, 2018a; Holmes and McRae-Williams, 2011). While this picture may represent some sex workers it is not representative of all sex workers. In reality, very little is documented in academic literature about the everyday lives and identities of Indigenous sex workers, much less about how sex work might be experienced by male, female and transgender people. Fixed imaginations of women sex workers exclude other forms of sex work, reflecting a particular void in sexual and scholarly interest. Rarely included are men, trans or queer people as they disrupt preconceived imaginings of sex work (Minichiello and Scott, 2014; Whowell, 2010; Laing et al., 2015).

The exclusion of diverse identities in sex work scholarship restricts the potentialities of the agency of queer and trans sex workers, moreover it reinforces the very gender dualisms many feminist and queer scholars wish to challenge (Laing et al., 2015). Including male and transgender perspectives disrupts the ‘typical narrative of sex workers, victimhood, prostitution as a women’s domain, and women’s disempowerment’ (Sullivan, 2018b: 1683). Men, trans, and queer sex worker narratives unsettle heteronormative imaginings of sexually based services and complicate depictions of sex workers as victims (Sullivan, 2018b; Minichiello and Scott, 2014; Laing et al., 2015), highlighting clear and tangible rewards that are economic and otherwise (Whowell, 2010).

One of the myriad ways in which Indigenous sex workers operationalise their working identities is through presentations of gender and sexuality. Since the image most frequently presented in the media is of a hyper-feminine heterosexual woman, it is often the presentation many sex workers employ (Sanders, 2005; Hubbard, 2019). Several of the participants spoke of the need to perform in particular ways in their workspaces. Among the cis-female participants there was access to wider employment opportunities which invoked a deeper sense of gender performance. Cis-female participants worked on the street, in brothels, and private situations. None of the female participants referred to themselves as high-end sex workers, or escorts. For example, Moira (female, heterosexual) says:

‘At home, I am a mum. I wear mum clothes, and do mum things. I drop off the kids to school and I might be wearing jeans, you know whatever. I blend in. Once I get to work I turn up the volume. Every bit of me is primped and primed. Hair, face, nails, slinky dresses, sexy heels. I would not bother in my everyday life. What woman has that kind of time! At work it’s all part of the illusion. Men want to believe we go to this effort for them [laughs] I go to this effort to part them with their cash [laughs]. I play the sexy women, I really make them [the client] believe I want them, that I am creamin’ for them [laughs]...at the end of the day I wash it all off, change clothes, go home and cook my kids dinner’.

Moira reflects the performance of gender and sexuality in hyper-feminine and heterosexual ways. Isabelle was forthcoming about the ways in which she plays on gender and sexuality in her workspace:

I like to wear silky dresses at work. The kind that skims over your nipples you know, make them stand out. [The clients] go crazy for that shit. I love to dress up. But when I dress up at work it is a more sexy kind of look. I wouldn’t walk around the street with my nipples on show like at work...it’s a bit slutty.

Bianca who has worked in brothels and street-based settings remarked:

‘I dress differently depending on where I work. I mean it’s still all sexy, and I make sure the girls [breasts] are out...I think the difference is in a brothel we need to look sexy and classy, so you can charge more...on the street the jobs are quick, I need to wear clothes that make it obvious that I’m working you know...I guess I don’t know how to explain it. Street work is mostly blow jobs and hand jobs, I rarely have full sex. So, I wear a top that makes my tits easy to play with you know’.

Jack, a cis-male participant was able to assert his dominance in sex work due to his:

‘body and good looks. I am hot, young, buff and hung...I am also clean, I am not a junkie, I am fit and healthy. I am really masc[uline], I work hard to play that role. I can command how much I want to make. I don’t fuck for less than a thousand bucks’
(Jack, gay, male).

Those who identified as transgender described different working environments, usually private or street-based work, where they have ‘our own spaces, our own streets’ (Majesty). These were the only participants unable to secure employment in brothel-based settings. They were of the belief that these commercial type services did not really exist. There are limited options for transgender people to work in brothels as those spaces tend to cater for heterosexual experiences, or at the very least a performance of heteronormativity (Read, 2013). Jeremy identifies as a Brothaboy. Brothaboy is an Indigenous Australian term which describes any self-identified member of Indigenous transmasculine communities (Sullivan and Day, 2019a), though not all Indigenous transmasculine people identify as Brothaboys, Jeremy states:

I wanted to look into working a brothel, but I don't think it would be – there's nothing for us... But when I was just starting testosterone, I still had that option to do that.

But I've sort of had surgery and I just – there's no way that I would be able to – I wouldn't want to anyway – I wouldn't want to present as a woman.

JJ, who identifies as intersex, non-binary and a Brothaboy, echoes Jeremy's point, JJ says:

You have to basically advertise yourself as a ciswoman to work in a brothel in Sydney. There's nowhere that is available to trans people. Brothel work it just – it doesn't happen... I just have to perform. I just have to perform that identity when I go to work (JJ, queer).

There are limited options for transgender people to work in brothels, as this most often requires a hyper-feminine performance. Majesty who did street-based work said:

It was street work...It was not really a choice. I don't know...I mean things may have been different if I worked in an agency or whatever...some of these [clients] are just – when it comes to trans girls some of them do the paid sex scene because there's a social stigma in place where it brings into question their sexuality and everything else. It was all a bit more hidden.

It has been argued by sex positive researchers that sex workers subvert heteronormative gender roles as their gendered performativity highlight how gender and sexuality are socially constructed (Jackson, 2011; Mavin and Grand, 2013; Read, 2013). However, the participants in this study illuminate the interactions they experienced were largely heteronormative, and gender and sexuality expression were reinforced rather than subverted. Although some of the participants delineated that through sex work they accepted, developed and extended the ways in which they expressed and experienced their sexuality. For example, Jeremy's entry

to sex work was a space in which to explore an emerging sexual identity, prior to transition, Jeremy identified as lesbian. However, through his transition Jeremy identified as bisexual. His desire to express himself sexually with men emerged, although he maintains emotionally he prefers to connect and date women. Jeremy says:

I had to find a way to actually get guys to sleep with me, like by literally advertising for it. Which is kind of how I got into it because I was like, I'm horny. I wanted to have sex. What do I do? I don't want to go out and meet guys in case they think I want to date them. [Sex work has] given me more positivity about sex and given me more confidence in myself as a trans guy to – well just to be more open about myself sexually. (Jeremy, brotherboy (trans), bisexual).

Sex work for Jeremy is about exploring his sexual expression, his body, and validation of that body. Majesty remarked similarly:

There's times when I've gone for a couple of months without any, there's times when I've been a total whore-bag... You get talking to [clients] as well during – you get to know them a bit. I mean you're not supposed to have emotions or whatever... When they press the right buttons – if they're the right – kind of attractive and they press the right buttons...

In contrast, Moira discussed sex work as being 'eye-opening'. Sex work is where she learnt 'what I like and what I don't like. Within sex work Moira was able to establish sexual boundaries, expressing her agency and autonomy, 'it's one of the few spaces where I have really learnt how to say no'. Moira also learnt about her body and how her body responds to

sexual stimulus, Moira detailed it was in sex work that ‘I found my clitoris’, and how amazed she was ‘when somebody else did – it was great. I can just lay there, and wow’.

Through the narratives of research participants, fluidity of sexuality and sexual expression emerged, as Gamson and Moon (2004: 49) argue ‘sexual identities, desires, and categories are fluid and dynamic’. For example, Bianca said:

Sometimes [I] do doubles, you know, with another girl, I consider myself to be straight, totally 100 per cent straight, but you know in those moments it can feel good. Maybe I am not so 100 per cent sure about sex anymore (Bianca, female, heterosexual).

For the participants in this study the sex industry provided a space to explore their sexuality, to validate their desirability, and to be a part of something that defies social-sexual norms and values. The participants were able to explore and manipulate concepts of femininity, masculinity, and heteronormative and homosexual fantasy and desire. As Mavin and Grand (Mavin and Grand, 2013) have argued in these spaces ‘individuals can perform exaggerated expressions of femininity while simultaneously performing alternative expressions of femininity or masculinity’ (p.233). In this way the participant’s identities are realised as multifaceted, fluid, and ambiguous with individuals conceptualising and expressing their gender and sexuality in multiple ways. Indigenous sex workers highlight defiant and limitless possibilities for gender and sexual identity and expression that contravene social and/or cultural constructed identities, these identities are co-produced by environment and individual agency. Indigenous sex workers negotiate their personal identities, societal and cultural stigma, and sexual expression in choosing how to represent themselves. This process

shows Indigenous sex workers strategically move within and against dominant ideologies allowing them to reinforce, subvert, be subservient to, and overcome heteronormativity.

Western understandings of sexual and gender expression are often determined in heteronormative ideologies (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). These ideologies have, at least in part, permeated Indigenous communities resulting in not only the external management of Indigenous bodies, but have also denied us the knowledges and complexities of sexuality and gender in our own communities (O'Sullivan, 2015). Indigenous bodies are not only categorised in particular ways, we are also represented as objects of the State and church (O'Sullivan, 2015). As Barker ruminates:

These representational practices suppress while also concealing the historical and social reality of patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia within Indigenous communities (2017: 13).

Race

Indigenous bodies do/can/will experience the world differently and those experiences are marked by race and culture, these experiences are political, and they are personal (Barker, 2017; O'Sullivan, 2015). The participants in this study spoke of race as something that either was ignored or hidden, rebranded, or capitalised on. For example, Jeremy hid the fact he was Aboriginal:

I actually would be cautious to ever advertise as Aboriginal because I feel like there's definitely a lot of racism in Australia towards Aboriginal people. The idea of what that makes you to them is really negative. I wouldn't want to advertise that which is a shame because I'm proud of being Aboriginal (Jeremy, Brotherboy (Trans), bisexual).

Hiding Aboriginality was also discussed by Jack and Moira. Moira noted her 'fair skin meant that my culture is a non-issue at work, nobody knows I am Aboriginal. I just don't talk about it'. Jack, on the other hand has darker skin, he reflects:

other guys cannot make as much money as me, maybe they are too skinny, or too old, too fat, too something. It's interesting you know, I am brown, so I can get away with being tan, but not black.

Where Jeremy, Jack, and Moira spoke of not being willing to advertise as Aboriginal, or to not discuss it, or that being Aboriginal or black was not financially viable to them, others noted how they might 'rebrand' their race or ethnicity. For example, Bianca says:

At the brothel I can make myself more attractive to the clients...I never say I am Aboriginal though. I don't reckon I would get any work. No one wants to fuck...well they don't want to pay for an Aboriginal woman...over the years I have been all sorts of different people. I've been African, Indonesian, Indian, even Hawaiian...I don't even know what it really means to be any of these things, but you put on a sari or whatever. They [the clients] don't care, if they want to see you, they already got their own fantasy about what these things are (Bianca, female, straight).

Isabelle also saw her racialised body as something to capitalise on. She says:

I would often get chosen for being 'the black one'. The girls get lined up for the client to choose or we meet him one after the other until he chooses one, you know, and they won't remember my name, just my skin colour. But I'm ok with that, in the brothel that makes me special, a bit exotic (Isabelle, female, heterosexual).

Although Isabelle does not necessarily discuss her body in a working environment as 'Aboriginal', she does utilise her blackness as a commodity. Some of the participants spoke

of how their culture/race was fetishised not only by the clients, as illustrated by Isabelle and Bianca, but could be a useful marketing tool. Jeremy says:

I did speak to a woman in America recently who wanted – I talked about being a cam-boy for – she's a transgendered porn star. She has her own company that does [trans-fucking] webcam work. She was like, look just know that we would have to fetishize you because of the market. But don't take it personally. I was like, yeah, I know what you mean, like calling me a man with a pussy. She was like, yeah but maybe we could do some kind of Indigenous thing, like man with a didgeridoo and all this kind of stuff. She was not trying to be inappropriate. But I was like, okay yeah, I could see how you guys would want to fetishize – try to fetishize an Aboriginal transman. Like look at this guy with a didgeridoo (Jeremy, brotherboy (trans), bisexual).

JJ also mentioned capitalising on their racial/cultural identity:

I feel like if you're an Indigenous person and you're capitalising on stereotypes about yourself like – those stereotypes exist anyway. You should be getting – you should be making money from them at least (JJ, Queer)

The working landscape is fraught with inequalities, prejudice and racism which largely determines working conditions and environment. In terms of effectively negotiating the working environment race and culture was something which would either be hidden, rebranded, or capitalised upon, though was not raised as a particular problematic issue, as Jack states, 'it just is what it is'. However, participants did raise issues with how their race/culture impacted upon their acceptance within their own communities. The social and cultural stigma of providing sexually based services is not without judgement or moralisation (Sullivan, 2020). Indigenous sex workers are affected by “whore stigma,” a concept that describes how sex workers, most particularly female sex workers, are tainted by

their engagement in what are seen as overt, disorderly and deviant sexual behaviours or have (too) many sexual partners (Hubbard, 2019; Sanders, 2018; Hammond and Kingston, 2014). Indigenous peoples are often represented with a deviant sexuality which have historically infused colonio-centric ‘racial’ attitudes towards Indigenous bodies and sexualities (Sullivan, 2018a). For those who are Indigenous Australian and undertaking sex work there is a doubling of whore stigma, for folk who identify as Indigenous, sex worker, and queer there is indeed a trifecta of stigma. An Indigenous sex worker presence defies the limits of what is seen as acceptable sexuality both within Indigenous Australian communities and broader Australian society (Sullivan, 2020).

Stigma

Stigma is a complex concept, closely linked to the idea of prejudice – that is, how people in positions of relative power and influence treat those who hold less power and influence (Goffman, 1963). In Indigenous communities it is Indigenous organisations that often hold power and influence. They are in positions of considerable power that govern and control who belongs in a community and the attitudes and behaviours of the community – which are often prescribed under a pretence of ‘culture’ (Sullivan and Day, 2019b; Sullivan, 2020). It is quite possible, as illustrated by the participants in this study, the inversion of colonised morality has underpinned and (re)shaped contemporary Indigenous cultural understandings. For example, Majesty said:

I think there is but it's like a lot of stigmas, it comes down through the white society. White society has a stigma about it, so it just filters down. I mean it's like they've [Indigenous communities] adopted all these – because of the missions and everything that was placed on us about religion and how we have to carry ourselves. Some people in communities have embraced that (Majesty, Trans).

There are fraught and toxic consequences of not being accepted by community for Indigenous peoples, and this is in relation to identity (Carlson, 2016). Maintaining a strong sense of identity is challenged when you are not accepted by a community organisation, resulting in loss of status within the community, blame for social problems, and resultant discrimination (Goffman, 1963). The suggestion that sex work is considered immoral is problematic for individuals, broadly such concepts highlight the blurring boundaries between what is private and public, collective identity and individual identity in Indigenous communities.

Further there is much contestation surrounding concepts of sexual and gender expression. The implication being certain behaviours and attitudes, genders and sexualities are considered appropriate and normal in Indigenous communities. There is a particular focus on heteronormative values which have been reproduced through colonio-centric moral codes that are mapped onto Indigenous bodies (O'Sullivan, 2015). In Indigenous communities, Indigenous sex workers pose a disruption, a threat, a challenge in which to consider the relationship between bodies, our desires, and the way in which our bodies take up space and occupy place. Indigenous sex workers challenge concepts of Indigenous sexualities, genders and ways of being, they produce transgressive mobilities that resist control. While the stigma many Indigenous sex workers encounter can make it challenging to maintain a healthy sense of cultural/social-worth, they do however, take considerable pride in being found desirable and/or financially compensated for their sexual services.

Conclusion

Academic literature neglects the multiple realities of Indigenous people involved in sex work, ignoring the ways in which they identify themselves and perform their identities.

There is limited understanding of the motivations for sex work besides financial, these include sexual expression, gender expression, validation, desire and pleasure. In addition, there is little attention paid to stigma and shame extending from within Indigenous communities. The many aspects of Indigenous sex workers lives and experiences are intertwined with their identities, concepts of work, sexuality and gender. The participants' narratives are knotted with and positioned against dominant narratives about Indigenous people and sex work. They highlight complexities, contradictions and multiple meanings; sex work was described as enabling, a means of resistance, and as a source of power. They spoke of the ways social and cultural dogma and taboo produced different experiences of how gender, sex, sexuality and sex work is constituted, and how as Indigenous sex workers, and particularly for those that were also sexually and/or gender diverse, are targets for stigma and shaming by Indigenous communities.

Indigenous sex work is shaped by the cultural, economic and social context in which it takes place, and by preconceived understandings and stereotyping of Indigenous sexuality and gender. The myriad of factors (re)produce, sustain and activate a reimagining of sex work, making sense of sex work experiences for Indigenous Australians. This article makes it possible to read and envision alternative stories, especially those that rely on ambiguity and complexity rather than victimhood and exploitation. The participants in this study constitute the tip of the iceberg in terms of those employed in the sex industry, and for such reasons this article does not represent a grand narrative of the lives and experiences of Indigenous sex workers, rather it reveals the disruption of Indigenous bodies lies in their position of not conforming to colonio-centric or community cultures and ideologies of body, of sexuality, of gender. This interrogation destabilises senses of difference, deviancy, and moral coding which surrounds Indigenous bodies highlighting that the regulation of Indigenous bodies by church, state, and community requires challenging.

From a theoretical and methodological perspective, this is one of the first studies to examine the lived experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers, it has found the benefits of being a sex worker that participants in this study reported are consistent with other sex work research. They enjoyed making money, setting their own schedules, exploring their boundaries, and learning about their sexuality and/or gender (Vanwesenbeeck, 2013; Hammond and Kingston, 2014; Sanders, 2005). The participants reveal how their work is culturally contested, economically charged, and racialised. Although they warn against seeing this in light of victimhood, rather they wish to be recognised for their savviness in exploiting these preconceived stereotypes. The paradox of using stigmatised work to realise social and economic advancement is apparent. When people chose sex work not out of desperation but as a calculated endeavour to fulfil economic independence, the sense of personal control and power is clear.

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Indigenous transmasculine Australians & sex work

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we analyse and discuss how Indigenous transmasculine sex workers negotiate and construct their identities while navigating their financial and social needs. We explore the narratives of Jeremy and JJ, two Indigenous transmasculine Australians who are self-identifying sex workers with different experiences of identity, body and space. Drawing on Indigenous Standpoint Theory and trans geographies we detail the participants' tactics for managing their sexuality, gender and emotion. Further, we examine how transmasculine Indigenous Australians resist as well as rework racism and gender discrimination through sex work, expanding notions of sex workers from victims engaged in practices of survival to people working from a position of autonomy and agency. In doing so, it complicates concepts of race, gender and sexuality, contributing narratives from Indigenous Standpoints which enrich the trans geography literature.

1. Introduction

With the emergence of trans geographies in recent years there has been increasing calls for greater exploration around the experiences of transgender people of colour (Browne et al., 2010; Sullivan, 2018a). If trans geographies are to centre the embodied experiences of transgender people, thereby complicating and expanding thinking and scholarship around the intersections of gender, sexuality and the body (Nash, 2010b), then it follows such scholarship must give careful consideration to race lest it participate in a 'whitening' of intersectionality (Bilge, 2013). The proclivity to prioritise experiences of white trans people and the lack of analysis of the ways in which identities are shaped by intersecting experiences of race, class, gender and sexualities in contemporary scholarship limits opportunities for Indigenous peoples to find meaning in trans geographies. When Indigenous trans sexuality does appear within academic scholarship, there is a tendency to consider sexuality to be problematic (Rosenstreich and Goldner, 2010), pathological (Kerry, 2017), and/or connected to health risk (Pitts et al., 2009), and rarely written from an Indigenous point of view.

As such, we take an Indigenous Standpoint theoretical and methodological position to ensure the re-telling of Indigenous peoples stories is self-determined (Kwaymullina et al., 2013). Indigenous Standpoint indicates the ways Indigenous people, places and philosophies are understood, an Indigenous trans methodology extends this articulation to ensure conversations of sex and sexuality are included. Trans-Indigenous knowledges demonstrate the complexity and heterogeneity of Indigenous experiences illustrating just some of the myriad ways in which queer Indigenous peoples see and experience the world. The re-telling of these narratives reinforce and reflect constructions of power, agency and autonomy. An examination of Indigenous transmasculinities and generating a conversation between trans geography and Indigenous Standpoint expands the scope of existing literature. We acknowledge tensions between 'trans geographies' and 'Indigenous trans methodologies' as epistemological frameworks, in particular trans geographies still operate within a very western paradigm with a tendency to concentrate on what White trans people's experiences can tell us about White gender and sexuality hierarchies and the tyranny of gendered space, often at the expense of and the limited interaction with trans people of colour and trans Indigenous peoples (Namaste, 2000; de Vries, 2015). However, we recognize the productive intersections between the two as they both seek to destabilize categorizations of sexuality and gender, further, when linked, trans geography and Indigenous Standpoint invite a critique of heteronormativity as a colonial project. This framework offers tools to investigate Indigenous narratives leading to broader questions about the ways in which Indigenous trans people negotiate spaces and how these spaces influence and shape bodily autonomy and agency. This article does not solely focus on racialised experiences to enhance western understandings of sexuality, indeed it places Indigenous transmasculinities in wider social contexts to allow for broader discussion in relation to topics such as sexuality, gender and race. Bringing Indigenous Standpoint in conversation with trans geographical scholarship this article pushes forward gender,

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feminist, and Indigenous studies by centring the knowledges and experience of trans Indigenous masculinities.

Dialogues of gender identity include an increasing number of categorisations, a set of possibilities for gender identity, embodiment and emotion that until recently have been unacknowledged in the Eurocentric Western imagination. Indigenous peoples are often implicated in constructions of femininity and masculinity that are bounded by colonial heteropatriarchal ideologies. Further Indigenous Australian trans people can face the particular issue of not being able to find a place in their own communities, Indigenous Australian cultural traditions determine the context in which sex, sexuality and gender are defined, for example the distinction between men's business and women's business can place Indigenous trans people in a precarious position. Indigenous trans emotions intersects with dialogues of gender, their gendered and sexualised identities are a key vehicle in which emotion is underscored. Analysing trans Indigenous emotion provides useful insights into changing relationships between men's and women's roles in Indigenous communities, as well as Indigenous relationships with the State. Acknowledging the sentiments and emotions of Indigenous trans people (re)places them within the conversation and the definitions of gender, sex and sexuality.

Indigenous societies have, in some known cases, histories of acknowledging and celebrating gender diversity, recognising that people may not exist as one of two genders, rather, there is a multiplicity of gender identities. For example the Māori of Aotearoa (New Zealand) use the term *Takataapi*: originally meaning 'intimate companion of the same sex' (Williams, 1971, p.147), *Takataapi* is since adopted to include gender and sexual diversity, the term now refers to cultural and sexual/gender identities (Rands, 2008; Johnston, 2018). Other countries in the Pacific region such as Samoa use the term *fa'afafine*, and Tonga use the term *fakaleiti* to describe those who are born male but adopt feminine attributes in various ways, *fa'afafine* translates to 'in the manner of or like fa'a – a woman' (Schmidt, 2005, p.3; Johnston, 2018). Samoa and other Pacific locales also have the term *fa'atama*, meaning women who are 'like men' (Besnier, 1994; Johnston, 2018), unfortunately there is very limited scholarship written in this area. Another example is the 'two-spirited' Indigenous peoples of Northern America and Canada. Two-spirit is an intertribal term that when used in English conveys multiple traditional, social, and cultural categories of gender (Driskill, 2010), it is 'what we who chose this designation understood is that *nizh manitoag* (two-spirits) indicates the presence of both a feminine and a masculine spirit in one person' (Angusuar La Fortune, 1997, p.221).

To date, little research has been conducted into the lives of trans Indigenous Australians, also known as *Sistagirls* and *Brothaboys* (Kerry, 2014). Transmasculine Indigenous people, sometimes referred to as *Brothaboys*, are an under researched and under acknowledged group of people. Transmasculinity is an identifier which 'defines a person, usually born female, for whom masculine identification is more salient than female identification, but for whom the binary classifications of 'man/woman' do not suffice' (Green, 2010, p.324). The identities of transmasculine people negotiate a continuum of self-reflexive associations and embodiments who favour but are not reductive of male/masculine. As Hansbury outlines:

The real difference among the various identities are based less on how many testosterone injections one has had or which surgeries one has opted to undergo, and more on how each person interprets his or her identity – how she or he [or they] perceives himself or herself [or themselves] and how he or she [or they] wishes to be perceived by others. Someone may identify as a Transsexual Man yet still maintain his breasts and forgo testosterone. Another may choose to undergo a mastectomy, take low dosage testosterone, and identify as a Passing Woman (2005, p.245).

Hansbury's approach expands the category of 'transmasculine' magnifying both the imaginable and the yet to be imagined.

Transmasculine does not mimic the constructs of binary gender (masculine/feminine, man/woman); indeed, it liberates the imaginary to identifications which are far more complex, subtle and self-determined considering the correlation to biological sex is unfixed. We do not articulate or support a singular theory of transmasculinity, transgender, or transition, rather we explore the everyday lived experiences of gender and sex and how those concepts are intersected for those who are racialised. Shields (2008) contends that identity does not only refer to self-identification, it signifies intersecting broader social and cultural structures, and power differentials that are connected to belonging to particular groups. Individuals might belong to multiple social and cultural groups where they may experience homophobia, sexism, classism, and racism. These intersections produce oppression and opportunity, generating occasion for alliances to be formed to combat and resist oppression. Risman (2004, p.442) notes 'one must always take into consideration multiple axes of oppression; to do otherwise presumes the whiteness of women, the maleness of people of color, and the heterosexuality of everyone'. It is only relatively recently that geographers have considered ways of thinking and writing about racialised transgender people (see Irazábal and Claudia, 2016; Abelson, 2016; Bailey and Shabazz, 2014; Sullivan, 2018a).

This article explores the experiences of Jeremy and JJ, two Indigenous transmasculine Australians who are self-identifying sex workers with different experiences of identity, body and space. Other terms such as 'survival sex' and 'transactional sex' have been used to describe primarily Indigenous peoples participation in sex trades (Holmes and McRae-Williams, 2011). Boris et al. (2010) problematize the term 'sex work' arguing it partakes in the debate about whether sex work is legitimate labour or sex slavery, and suggest the use of sexual labour as an alternative descriptor. In this article, the term sex work is utilised to describe the variety of intimate labours performed by Jeremy and JJ. Importantly this is the terminology Jeremy and JJ used to describe their own experiences, although JJ also self-identified as 'being a hustler and just trying to make money all the time. So I feel like hustler is a good term, hey?'. We define a hustler as an individual participating in informal economies and nonconventional trade in order to negotiate life and survival in the context of capitalism and colonialism (Thieme, 2018). Throughout the article this term is used to explore how transmasculine Indigenous Australians resist as well as rework racism and gender discrimination through sex work, expanding notions of sex workers from victims engaged in practices of survival to people hustlin' for gains that are financial and beyond.

To contribute to a greater understanding of the embodied experiences of Indigenous transmasculine sex workers, we examine how Jeremy and JJ's experiences of body, gender, sexuality and race determine how they negotiate social, professional and intimate spaces, and how these spaces impact differently on each of their bodily agencies and autonomies. Sex work constitutes a space where JJ and Jeremy experience themselves as subjects, not objects. In sex work they explore the emergent multiplicities and queer temporalities of their trans identities. JJ and Jeremy challenge gender and sexual identity as stable hegemonic categories as they navigate multiple ways of expressing and performing gender and sexual identities. Highlighting the tension between the landscape of their bodies and the ways in which the terrain is performed. Such knowledge is theoretically important as the participants' stories offer new dimensions which locate these tensions as a powerful empirical critique of the ways in which Indigenous sexualities have been portrayed since colonisation. Further this knowledge is central to how their identities are reflected in discourses of race and culture, as well as globalised queer culture.

In this article we consider gender and sexuality from an Indigenous Standpoint connecting with spaces and places of knowing, being and doing which are fundamental to our identities and emotions, therefore shaping 'the production of knowledge and ways in which we are known and come to know and experience the world' (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p.339). Spaces and emotions are interconnected. Emotional states that

are sexualised, gendered and racialised are produced and reproduced within spaces (Held, 2015). Although these spaces are not only experienced by Indigenous trans people, nonetheless they are apparent, and are producing gendered, sexualised and racialised bodies. Understanding the emotional connections in sex work experienced by Indigenous transmasculine sex workers requires not only talking to them and other transmasculine sex workers, but also investigating how the environments in which they worked shaped these emotions. These emotions reveal how transgender navigations of both space and place challenge gender, sexuality, and geography.

2. Methodology

We build on Sullivan's assertion that 'black, and specifically Indigenous bodies, are located within geographic politics revealing diverse race/sex landscapes' (Sullivan, 2018a, p. 1683). Indigenous here refers to the First People of Australia, with the interview participants and authors hailing from Aboriginal nations in areas known in a colonial context as Queensland and New South Wales. No Torres Strait Islander people participated in this study. Many Indigenous people would prefer to be associated with the Aboriginal nations from which we descend (Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson, 2016), here we avoid this in order to protect the interview participants' identities. For many Indigenous transgender people and/or sex workers, the act of revealing their nations or Countries of origin, while an act of pride and resistance, is also fraught with social, political and cultural tensions, and potential danger. However, we do proceed with the assertion that Indigeneity is a significant and inalienable component of the interview subjects' experiences of sex work, sexuality and gender. We operate under the premise that as Queer and Gender Diverse Indigenous people we live at the intersections of interlocking identities and aspects of our identities are inseparable (Sullivan and Day, *In Press*). We interpret, analyse and discuss the literature and narratives from the position of Queer Indigenous people. Sullivan identifies as a Queer Wiradjuri cis-woman, Day identifies as Aboriginal, a Brothaboy and is actively involved with the Sydney sex work community. Brothaboy is a term which describes any self-identified member of Indigenous transmasculine communities, though not all Indigenous transmasculine people identify as Brothaboys (Sullivan, 2018b). Nonetheless, it has become increasingly popular to use Brothaboys for this diverse community, and the terminology and the community are centred on mutual support and belonging, primarily through social media (Farrell, 2016).

This article forms part of Sullivan's doctoral research investigating the lived experiences of Aboriginal sex workers. As with other participants in the larger study, the two transmasculine participants in this article identify as both Aboriginal and sex workers. One of the participants also identifies with the word 'hustler', speaking to their experience of sex work as an emotional, social and economic strategy. The participants elected to be interviewed together, and were asked questions about their reasons for undertaking sex work, where they worked (for example, street, brothel or privately), their everyday experiences of sex work, and how they felt about sex work. Although there was a set of semi-structured questions provided much of the 2-h long interview flowed as conversation between the two participants. It is important to note the interview participants were known to the authors before the interview was conducted. This impacted the interview structure and the analysis of the transcript, both deepening and complicating our understanding of the information presented in this article. All information present has been included with Jeremy and JJ's consent. Jeremy identifies as a transgender man and a Brothaboy. His pronouns are he/him. JJ identifies as intersex, non-binary and a Brothaboy, and uses the pronouns they/them. Jeremy works independently promoting himself online. JJ has worked independently and via web bookings in the past and currently works in a brothel. Neither relies solely on sex work for their income. Both are pursuing study and other careers, and describe their participation in sex work as opportunistic. Jeremy and JJ were

friends prior to the interview, meeting through the Brothaboy and queer community in digital spaces. Jeremy and JJ are reflexive about themselves, their narratives, their sexual, social and economic agencies as well as critics of powerful discourses that construct their embodied and everyday experiences. Thus, their testimonies are presented not as claims, but as knowledge about their realities. We as authors are engaging from Indigenist perspectives, and as members of Queer and Gender Diverse communities, in order to recognise that as Indigenous Queer people we 'are the primary and most authentic sources of our own cultures and experiences' (Kwaymullina, 2016, p.446). Indigenous Standpoint Theory is used in this article to critique and challenge colonial and western assumptions around Indigenous Australian people and shed light on the realities and agencies of Indigenous transmasculine sex workers.

Indigenous Standpoint Theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Nakata, 2007; Rigney, 1999) recognises our positionality as a queer Wiradjuri woman and a Brothaboy as vital to our analysis and understanding of the stories shared for this article. As Indigenous researchers we explain our connections and belongings, our responsibilities and accountabilities to our communities, and position our relatedness as a means to know, to do, to be (Martin and Mirra-Boopa, 2003). Indigenous Standpoint Theory values Indigenous voices and perspectives foremost, therefore is appropriate here in order to bring Indigenous experiences, ways of knowing and doing to the fore (Martin and Mirra-Boopa, 2003). Indigenous Standpoint enables researcher/s to research with their communities in connection with individual perspectives on cultural, political, and social ideals. We must also acknowledge we are working outside our communities, meaning we have simultaneous insider/outside status (Kwame, 2017); we are Aboriginal researchers, researching with other Aboriginal people warranting an insider status, yet we are not of the same geographical communities therefore acknowledging our outsider status. We recognise this difference in order to carefully ensure we are not applying a pan-Indigenous lens, we do not suggest we are all the same. Rather we acknowledge this position as explicit participants within our engagement with other Indigenous people recognising we have complex accountabilities. As Indigenous queer researchers we apply Indigenous Standpoint as a 'method of inquiry ... a way of theorising knowledge from a particular and interested position' (Nakata, 2007, p.215). The ideas presented are predicated on the context and experiences of Indigenous transmasculine sex workers, however we do not speak for all Indigenous transmasculine people, sex workers or otherwise.

3. Introducing Jeremy and JJ

Jeremy and JJ were both assigned as female at birth but now live with masculine identities. Both identify as members of the Brothaboy community. This does not mean their gender or their gender expression is the same. Jeremy identifies as male. He is a transgender man who has been on testosterone for a long period of time and has undergone top surgery, meaning he has had his breasts removed. Jeremy has participated in sex work since beginning testosterone, advertising himself online as a 'trans guy with a big clit and pussy' (Jeremy). Jeremy's reflection of his genitals is not one of shame, disgust or gender dysphoria, rather he portrays his 'clit' and 'pussy' as both desirable and viable features of his masculine body. He has the physical characteristics of a male and is able to 'pass' as a cisgender man in his day to day life, meaning he is not identifiably transgender to strangers. To 'Pass' or 'Passing' is a fraught term amongst transgender communities. Many, arguing it implies transgender people aspire to appear cisgender, reject it (Halberstam, 2005; Doan, 2007). Conversely, some transgender people rely on 'passing' to negotiate their safety and wellbeing in their everyday life, this is due to 'the likelihood of harassment, threats, or attack while in public' (Schrock et al., 2009, p.703). In addition some Indigenous Australian people maintain hostility toward Indigenous trans people with violent repercussions toward those who are perceived

to transgress particular social and cultural expectations (Kerry, 2018). Problematically, some Indigenous people consider sexual and gender diversity to not be part of our culture, 'Aboriginal people can and do live complex and meaningful lives outside of the dominant and sometimes narrow scope of accepted, normative, stereotypical, and arguably settled and occupied definitions of Aboriginality' (Farrell, 2016, p.584). There is limited research focussed on 'passing' from female to male, and the shaping of masculine identities, identity, and body image, indeed there is limited discussion of Indigenous perspectives of passing. Further examination in this area is required, though is outside the scope of this article. The term is employed in this article to describe how Jeremy and JJ negotiate their gender at work and in everyday life.

While there are some similarities, there are also already some clear differences between Jeremy and JJ's embodied experiences. As Nash writes:

For many transfolk, embodiment in a physical body legible to others as either 'male' or 'female' in no way negates a subjective sense of being 'other gendered' in ways not in tandem with their biological selves. For some individuals, in order for there to be coherence within socially legible configuration, some form of physical alterations may be desired to live unambiguously. For others, 'trans' marks emergent categories of new configurations of gender and bodies that do not require any stability or fixity in order for there to be subjective compatibility, particularly around heterogendered constructs (Nash, 2010a, p.587).

JJ identifies as non-binary and intersex. Non-binary describes their gender as neither male nor female (Doan, 2010). Intersex describes their sex as neither biologically male nor female (Doan, 2010). JJ uses the pronouns of 'they' or 'their' and those identifiers will be used within this article. These are both separate and interrelated aspects of JJ's identity. JJ neither 'passes' nor identifies with being a man, but is able to dress, perform and 'pass' as a cisgender woman when they work in a brothel. JJ says 'I'm just like, yeah I'm just going to put on a wig and shave my legs today and make \$300 or something'. JJ's clientele are both men and women. They primarily see men at the brothel and women privately. JJ describes themselves as very money-oriented, opting for brothel work more recently to avoid the additional emotional work and connections they report with their private female clients. JJ sleeps with men for money, they explain:

But yeah in that way, like in a sexual romantic way, I wouldn't spend any time with a man for free. For me men equate to money. That's something that I think I just learned very early on and was very opportunistic about that. I was like, I see that men have the things that I want. How can I get those things from men? That's how I got into sex work (JJ).

Jeremy agreed, saying

I know, I know. I'm the same. If I was sleeping with women - which I've never, ever had a woman contact me before, but if I was I definitely would get more emotionally attached. I could see myself getting more emotionally attached. Where with men it's just very easy for me to dissociate and just go, yup cool, money, exchange which is good because otherwise it would be too draining I think.

4. Negotiating emotional work

For Jeremy and JJ the emotional experience of sex work is similar. They both acknowledge that the body, culture, sexuality and gender are intertwined. They apply their lived experiences and knowledge to navigate sex working places and spaces, as well as unpack their feelings about sexuality and desire, connection and disconnection. Affects, emotional experiences and physical urges cannot be separated from embodied experiences as our bodies guide and drive our desires. (Edelman and Lal, 2014; Johnston, 2012). It would appear for both JJ

and Jeremy that sex with women produces a stronger emotional connection and is indicative of their sexual preferences. Emotionally, Jeremy connects more with women but he sleeps with men for sexual and financial gains. JJ has had paid sex experiences with women, nevertheless in the same vein as Jeremy, points out the emotional labour of such work:

In the past when I had some more regular clients that I would see privately they would be mostly female clients ... so in that circumstance maybe it gets a little bit more blurred because you're like well I know - for me I get to know them better. I enjoy their company more ... It's a lot of emotional work already. I think when I was younger probably I did a lot more of that with clients whereas now I'm too tired to do that. That's why I go to the brothel these days because I'm just like - you can just go, do the business and then leave afterwards and not have to have it on you (JJ).

In contrast Jeremy and JJ outline their different experience of men, and sex with men. Although both see it as a lucrative opportunity to earn money, for example JJ says 'with men I'm just like ... that's only a business transaction to me', Jeremy adds 'with men it's just very easy for me to dissociate and just go, yup cool, money, exchange which is good'. Although Jeremy outlines financial gain for the ease of the transaction, Jeremy works sporadically, depending on demand. His capacity to work is also dependent on his living situation as he works from home. He notes that his increased sex drive from testosterone is his original reason for working. In other words, his desire to have sex with men is more than financial, he asserts:

Yeah - I think just literally the fact that I was just so horny all the time and my sex drive was just insanely high from testosterone. I would yeah just have casual sex with guys. But it was harder to - it's harder to meet a guy out because I'm not gay. I'm not going to gay bars ... I had to find a way to actually get guys to sleep with me, like by literally advertising for it. Which is kind of how I got into it because I was like, I'm horny. I wanted to have sex (Jeremy).

For 'many transgender people, the sex trade can offer greater autonomy and financial stability' (Fitzgerald et al., 2015, p.7). For Jeremy and JJ sex work is not merely an economic transaction, it is an emotional interaction that is illustrated by the complex blurring of money and intimacy (Zelizer, 2005). Jeremy and JJ capitalized on sexually intimate bodily interactions, clouding the boundaries between economic and emotional relations. Thus their sexualities and genders have been shaped through the process of selling sex which gives them economic independence and a sense of value to their bodies. Sexual labour became a means of gaining self-worth, validation and recognition for their expression of sexuality and gender. The significance of sexual intimacy lies in the sense of emotional connection it manifests, their bodies are sexy and desirable, and being sexy and desirable makes them feel good about themselves. Sexual intimacy can enliven the body, revealing its dissonance, its boundaries and its transgressions. Albeit, sex work has also meant having to learn to navigate and negotiate their gender and gender expression, and emotional response in the work place.

Although Jeremy and JJ are part of some of the same communities, they participate in sex work in different bodies with different experiences of sex, sexuality and gender. This determines how they experience, create and influence sex work spaces. Heteronormative and gendernormative standards in brothel and sex work spaces determine how and if Jeremy and JJ are able to enter them. Jeremy and JJ do not operate in, nor do they queer, heteronormative spaces and places.

JJ is able to work in a brothel because they are able to dress and perform as a cisgender woman:

You have to basically advertise yourself as a ciswoman to work in a brothel in Sydney. There's nowhere that is available to trans people. Brothel work it just - it doesn't happen (JJ).

Performing as a cisgender woman is not an option for Jeremy:

when I was just starting testosterone I still had that option to do that. But I've sort of had surgery and I just - there's no way that I would be able to - I wouldn't want to anyway - I wouldn't want to present as a woman. So unless I could work as a man then I wouldn't feel comfortable doing that (Jeremy).

Jeremy operates in his own space. His clients bring complicated sexualities into it: 'I think yeah, more just dudes who seem to want to try it out. I think they feel like they are into guys but if they sleep with a trans guy with a vagina that makes them not as gay' (Jeremy). Jeremy's sex, sexuality and gender influence his capacity to work in a brothel space. His sex as a transgender man that has undergone physiological and physical changes through testosterone and top surgery, means that he is unable to dress and 'pass' as a cisgender woman in a brothel setting. His gender as a Brothaboy and transgender man determines that he is neither comfortable nor able to work or have sex as a woman, and he is restricted by the structural and social constraints of the brothel that determine which bodies are allowed and not allowed in. His sexuality also resists participating in sex work on these terms, 'I previously would not even enjoy having sex with a man but now I do. Because I think I'm getting fucked as a guy, not as a woman. You know what I mean?' (Jeremy). Jeremy created his own sex work space to meet his needs not only financially but sexually. He acknowledges that since testosterone increased his sex drive he might have benefited from going to a brothel as a client but never felt comfortable to do so:

To have that service would be amazing. I would not feel comfortable - I feel like they'd reject me if I walked into a brothel because I don't know any - I just don't feel comfortable - like that's something that only cismen can do (Jeremy).

Jeremy participates in the sex work industry on his own terms by working privately, while JJ works on their own terms by producing a consumable gender performance. They feel that they are not having sex as a woman, but working in a role that requires them to act like a woman: 'For me it's not - I personally in that situation don't experience any dysphoria because that's not me that I'm selling there. That's just a particular product. It's a product' (JJ). These experiences provoke thought around the tensions between the everyday lived experiences of embodiment for transgender people, and theories of performativity and gender:

Being 'transgendered' as it has been utilized in some queer theorizing seemingly means being an ethereal and disembodied subject apparently capable of 'shape-shifting' at will in ways that deny, for some trans folk, the subjective experience of gender, sexuality and embodiment as stable and unchanging (Nash, 2010a, 583).

JJ's performance as a sex worker does not disrupt their everyday gender identity but their gender, sex and sexuality enable them to perform in this way. Their status as an intersex person and their non-binary gender identity allow them to present in a more fluid manner. They do not experience gender dysphoria while they work as a woman because they are working with and around heteronormativity and gender normativity for financial gains. It is part of their 'hustle':

I feel like for me my main thing is - I feel like there's a crossover for me in terms of my lifestyle as being a hustler and just trying to make money all the time (JJ).

Interestingly, JJ defines the act of being 'like a woman' not only in terms of becoming, and therefore performative in Butler (1990) terms, but more so that nonchalance is constitutive of performative identity formation. For Jeremy, being like or acting like a woman is a dysphoric experience. He expresses a distinct inability to perform gender in the sex work space. Boundaries of gender is how both Jeremy and JJ negotiate a space where a particular kind of sex with a particular kind of person is sold in a particular kind of way. What this means is they both

recognise that white cisgender bodies are valued higher than black transgender bodies. Jeremy and JJ increase their marketability by performing as bodies with higher social and financial capital.

5. Negotiating race & racism

The ways in which cultural and racial identity is negotiated by JJ and Jeremy sheds light on the intricacies of sex work, as well as broader concepts of what it means to be Indigenous. Sex workers bring 'their own unique life experiences, values and beliefs, needs and expectations, images of self and other, past sexual experiences, and knowledge of sexual skills and safe sex strategies to the encounter' (Browne and Minichiello, 1995, p.602). Both JJ and Jeremy are challenged in their expression of their cultural identity and the complexity of navigating their Indigeneity in the sex work space. In many ways their cultural and racial identity is at risk within sex work, however the means in which to enact Indigeneity in sex work is problematic. This does not mean that the participants' Indigeneity is not present in their experience of sex work. Jeremy and JJ's sex work spaces are always racialised by what they are willing to reveal about themselves while working in them. Hesitation around identifying impacts on how Jeremy and JJ operate in these spaces. Both are cautious about identifying not only because they are concerned about how they will be treated if they advertise themselves as Indigenous, but also whether they will fit into stereotypes and meet racial expectations:

'Yeah, like you said even if you do market yourself as Indigenous and somebody shows up wanting an Indigenous person, chances that you're going to fit their idea of what an Indigenous person should look like are pretty slim' (JJ).

Neither Jeremy nor JJ feel comfortable revealing themselves as Aboriginal when they work. Jeremy advertises his transgender status but he does not feel he can do the same with his Aboriginality:

No, I never would do that. I actually would be cautious to ever advertise as Aboriginal because I feel like there's definitely a lot of racism in Australia towards Aboriginal people. The idea of what that makes you to them is really negative. I wouldn't want to advertise that which is a shame because I'm proud of being Aboriginal but I know other people who - I've told all - been met with the whole - but you're too white to be Aboriginal. So it's like if I advertise myself as Aboriginal then people will probably expect me to fit into that stereotype which is fucked (Jeremy).

JJ is also cautious:

I reckon that people don't think they have to pay for sex with Indigenous people. That's what I reckon - especially not white people - especially not white men. I reckon they don't think they have to pay for it (JJ).

The brothel where JJ is employed has a large number of queer identifying workers who operate within heteronormative, gendernormative and racialised industry standards:

Yeah, everybody's queer there. So if we have - a good day is if there's a female client or even a couple - sometimes we'll get couples. The guy wants to watch. Yeah, mostly the really effeminate white girls get those bookings. But that's a good day if you get booked by a queer person (JJ).

While JJ can successfully perform as a woman to make money, they cannot successfully perform a race that is easily marketed or fetishized:

There will sometimes be like - oh I'm like last resort for white girls. They'll call me as a last resort for black girls because they're like, oh we can't really advertise you as black because you don't have black enough skin. We can't fetishize that (JJ).

Here JJ intimates that they are too fair to be considered black, but

too black to be considered white. Within both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities there is much debate as to what a 'real' Aboriginal or Indigenous person looks like (Gorringe et al., 2011). Due to the colonisation of Australia, Aboriginal people have a complex relationship with their own cultural identity. Racial identity comprises a sense of self, a vigorous and on-going process that is influenced by various structures, contexts, and individuals (Umana-Taylor and Bamaca-Gomez, 2004) and it is '... this single component [which] is consistently positively related to individual's self-esteem' (Umana-Taylor and Bamaca-Gomez, 2004). It is clear from JJ's words that their body and skin colour is 'exceptionally important in the recognition and validation of Aboriginal identity' (Boladeras, 2002, p.147). This intense struggle with cultural identity and acceptance is related to the intense disruption that fair-skinned Aboriginal people epitomize to the Black-White racial dichotomy which is zealously maintained in Australia. Historically Western notions of Indigeneity have focused on controlling the mobility, socialisation and reproduction of Indigenous people worldwide, from an Indigenous Australian perspective we have only recently begun to carve the space in which to establish, define and debate the meaning of Indigeneity in Australia (Carlson, 2016). This is a common experience for Indigenous people living and working in urban localities as they have the highest Aboriginal population in Australia (ABS, 2016);

Yet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in urban areas are sometimes perceived as 'fake', 'not real' and 'not authentic' because 'real' Aboriginal people belong 'outback', 'on communities' and the 'bush' (Walker et al., 2013, p.4).

Both Jeremy and JJ express concern for how desirable they will be and how they will be treated, specifically in their respective sex work spaces. JJ particularly believes that white men 'don't think they have to pay for it' (JJ). Sullivan explored this in relation to Indigenous women's sexuality arguing that Indigenous and Black women are simultaneously 'caught in a space that defines us as undesired but also always as the vulnerable subjects of clandestine desires' (p. 389, 2018b). Sullivan offers a rereading of historical texts around Indigenous women's sexualities, outlining a history of not only early colonisers both degrading and desiring Indigenous women, but also of Indigenous women's sexual strategies and agencies (2018b). Sullivan's work demonstrates that Indigenous women and, indeed Indigenous people more generally, have a long trajectory of 'hustling' colonisers. Jeremy and JJ's protection of their Indigenous identities and bodies could be seen as a strategy in order to continue to engage with non-Indigenous men and women for sexual and financial gains. Negotiating race and racism in these spaces is part of their work. JJ recognises that concerns around racism and stereotypes are not exclusive to the sex work space:

'I reckon even in any workplace that's not an Indigenous workplace basically, there's always that hesitation because you don't know how it will be met. You don't know how people - the ideas that people will have about you once you say that. I think sex work is kind of - in that way it's no different because people are going to treat you like shit in any workplace presumably if they're racist' (JJ).

The challenges presented in relation to Jeremy and JJ's racialised experiences are huge, and to outline all that is involved is beyond the scope of a single article. Racism and racial identity is both a spatial and an ideological practice (Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson, 2016), embodying the codes with which space is controlled. To recognise and resist racism there needs to be an acknowledgement and understanding of the landscapes on which racialised relations are enacted. These landscapes have historically been constructed often by the observer rather than by those whose experiences are shaped by space and place (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). The racial politics of space and place and the ways in which they are seen and interpreted can challenge how gender, sexuality and racial identity figure in place making. The specificities of Jeremy and JJ's lives demonstrate the ways in which Jeremy

and JJ are within/between/on the margins of the intersections of gender, sexuality and racial politics, exposing the emotion and agency that grounds their experiences.

6. Conclusion

JJ and Jeremy's lived experiences offer insights in to how sex work is entangled with sex and gender, Indigeneity and identity. Their narratives reworks considerations of Indigenous transsexualities engaged in sex work; they reveal that bodies, gender, emotion, self-image, and race intersect Indigenous transmasculine lives in complex ways that exceed heteronormative, homonormative, and transnormative discourse. In both JJ and Jeremy's accounts sexuality and gender was frequently construed as unstable. The failure of existing theoretical frameworks to adequately describe the nuances and ambiguities of Indigenous transmasculine gender, sexuality and culture limits the ways in which their lives and identities are able to be understood and defined. Jeremy and JJ's narratives highlight that Indigenous trans bodies are not merely a fixed site where gendered and racialised ideologies are situated but rather they represent a dynamically co-constructed landscape where gender and sexuality are forged in/by/through everyday interactions. Utilising an Indigenous Standpoint perspective, we, as authors, desire to destabilise normative Western assumptions and ideologies of sex, gender, and sexuality. We do so through JJ and Jeremy's understandings of their own lives and knowledges, requiring attention to the multiple and shifting cultural and emotional contexts in which they emerge. This includes making sense and interpreting their identities and experiences in ways that remain sensitive to broader Indigenous cultural dogma. Jeremy and JJ participate in sex work in distinct social, cultural and emotional spaces with many commonalities and differences of embodied experience.

This article highlights the importance of developing analyses of Indigenous transsexualities that go beyond identity and representational politics. With a few exceptions, trans geographies often reinstate a Western colonio-centric gaze. Moreover, Indigenous sexualities have been largely overlooked. For trans geographies in particular, an Indigenous trans methodology that is buoyed by Indigenous Standpoint Theory points to the possibility of going beyond representing the voices of Indigenous peoples. The application of Indigenous Standpoint Theory to trans geographies provides a way of centring Indigenous perspectives, this supports Indigenous peoples' right to define their realities, their identities, and to own their histories. By shedding light on JJ and Jeremy's stories through an Indigenous Standpoint the complexities and nuances in their experiences as Indigenous transmasculine sex workers, and the place in which those experiences occurred, offers geography an avenue in which to explore and explain the emotional connections between the multiplicity, complexity and fluidity of Indigenous trans identities.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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Chapter 8: ‘Hot, young, buff’: An Indigenous Australian gay cis-male view of sex work

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Abstract

Research has historically constructed youths who are involved in sex work as victims of trafficking, exploitation, poverty and substance abuse. These perceptions often cast the sex worker as deviant and in need of ‘care’ and ‘protection’. Rarely seen are accounts that provide different perspectives and positioning of youth engaged in sex work. This paper explores the lived experiences of Jack, a young gay cis-male who identifies as Indigenous Australian. Despite being a highly successful sex worker, his involvement in such a stigmatised occupation means that he must navigate the social and cultural perceptions of ‘deviant’ and ‘dirty’ work. This qualitative study explores the ways in which Jack negotiates his work, his communities, and the capitalisation of his sexuality. Drawing on Indigenous Standpoint Theory and wellbeing theory, Jack’s choice of sex work is explored through the intersections of sexuality and culture, with the consequences of Jack’s social and emotional wellbeing emerging as his narrative unfolds.

Keywords: gay, Indigenous, male, male sex work, queer, sex work

Introduction

Sex work can take many forms but, generally speaking it is an exchange of sexual based services in exchange for money, or other in-kind goods or services of value; such as accommodation, drugs and/or alcohol, transportation and gifts (Hubbard, 2019). There is a

large body of literature crossing numerous academic disciplines addressing sex work as a multifaceted industry grounded in economic, social, cultural political, and sexual and gender expression. Predominantly sex work literature focusses on cis-female sex workers and almost exclusively on Western subject positioning, only rarely are people of colour, including Indigenous Australians, the focus of, or even included in, sex work studies (Sullivan, 2018). Another significant absence in the research is age based: youths involved in sex work are rarely mentioned, though when it occurs they are usually framed as victims of trafficking (Ditmore, 2011; Mehlman-Orozco, 2015); exploitation (Ditmore, 2011); homelessness (Frederick, 2014) and routinely intermixed with poverty and substance abuse (Frederick, 2014; Lantz, 2005; Mendes et al., 2014), and are in need of ‘care’ and ‘protection’ (Ditmore, 2011). At present the existing literature is comprised of health-based studies that are primarily quantitative and are not adequate in exploring the nature of sex work experiences of youth. Furthermore, the experiences of males in youth sex work studies, and sex work studies more broadly, does not capture the nature of their lives and experiences from a social or cultural perspective (Smith et al., 2013).

Men engaged with sex work are often stigmatised (Minichiello & Scott, 2014) and have drawn parallels with ‘recruitment’ into homosexuality which has been conflated with child sex abuse of youth (Crofts, 2014). Male youths in sex work are often seen as victims to the depravity of gay men, and believed to be significantly in need of ‘care’ and ‘protection’ (Ditmore, 2011). Youth male sex work has typically occupied only marginal public space, often relying on known ‘gay beats’ or in adjoining urban spaces that were known as being ‘gay’ or ‘gay friendly’, for example ‘the Wall’ in Sydney’s urban suburb of Darlinghurst (Crofts, 2014, Sullivan, 2018a). Not only is youth male sex work hidden or clandestine in society with its relegation to ‘gay spaces’, it is also remains significantly hidden in academic

literature, although there has been some interest in the social sciences. However, within the available literature little is shared on how youth male sex workers experience stigma and its effects on social and emotional wellbeing, let alone strategies to prevent the effects of such stigma in the Indigenous Australian context.

The geographic and population size of Indigenous Australian males in sex work is unknown although it is understood that Aboriginal sex workers are estimated to represent 20-23% of the sex industry (Donovan et al., 2012). Further, Aboriginal sex workers are usually understood to be involved in street-based economies (Donovan et al., 2012), as opposed to brothel or private work. By centring on a single narrative, this article will detail an Indigenous cis-male person's experience of selling sex and how the involvement in the sex industry encompasses a range of diverging meanings, motivations, and practices. Jack is a young, gay, cis-male, Indigenous Australian sex worker. These multiple identities are part of Jack, being; Indigenous, young, gay, male, and a sex worker, they are all cultural, they intersect and shape belief systems, knowledges, meanings, interactions and self-worth (O'Sullivan, 2019). In this paper I will discuss how these cultural identities influence Jack's sense of social and emotional being in both positive and negative ways. This influence shapes and produces the way in which Jack feels that he is accepted and included in his social and cultural communities. The tensions between Jack's identities and his sense of acceptance and inclusion can offer ways of thinking through the difficulty of negotiating these spaces and the implications they have for social, cultural and political thought and action both within and outside of Indigenous communities. An application of Indigenous Standpoint Theory, and the concept of Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing, helps draw out meaning from Jack's narrative that highlights the different ways that sex work is lived.

Positionality

Before outlining the conceptual framework applied in this paper, it is important that I introduce myself, and detail my lens of analysis used within this article. Framing my cultural connection and positionality to the project is an important and integral foundation of undertaking research with and for Indigenous peoples (O’Sullivan et al., 2016; Walter, 2013). I am a cisgender Indigenous Australian woman from the Wiradjuri nation in central western New South Wales, I also identify as lesbian/queer. Situating myself in the research is demonstrative of my social/cultural positioning, and my Indigenous ontological (ways of being), epistemological (ways of knowing), axiological (accountabilities and values) and methodologies (ways of approach) frameworks in which I operate (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). As an Indigenous person doing Indigenous research I have accountabilities and responsibilities to other Indigenous people, and to my own communities (for example, my Indigenous family, the Indigenous communities in which I live and work, my ancestral home, as well as the broader national Indigenous community). In conducting this research, I have drawn on my experiences as both an Indigenous queer person to view, analyse and interpret the literature and narratives of participants in the study. This research comes from a particular position that is partial and situated, according to Haraway, ‘[t]he only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular’ (1991, p. 196).

However, I do emphasise that although the participant in this article and I both identify as ‘queer’, I do not suggest that we, or our experiences and knowledges are the same. I have taken this strength-based position to mobilise and liberate the collective sexual agency we possess as Indigenous Australian peoples, and use my position to catapult our voices and knowledges. It is composed of shared meanings and social/cultural norms of Indigenous peoples, not in an effort to produce a grand narrative or provide a sense of pan-Aboriginality.

Rather this positioning is a basis of shared meanings that make understanding aspects of Indigenous Australia visible. The privileging of Indigenous voice is intended to un-silence and demarginalise our position as queer Indigenous Australians and our voices are raised to bolster knowledges of our own sexual landscapes. My intention as an Indigenous Australian scholar is to assert Indigenous scholarly narratives of agency, autonomy, and self-determination. Therefore, I take an Indigenous Standpoint in the research methodology and the research methods employed within the study.

Conceptual framework

There are two distinct lenses in which this article is contextualised: Indigenous Standpoint Theory, and the concept of Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing. Research with Indigenous Australians requires a thoughtful and ethical approach that demands responsibility and accountability (Rigney, 1999). Therefore, this article draws on Indigenous Standpoint Theory as this framework values and centres Indigenous voices and perspectives; it is appropriate here in order to bring Indigenous experiences, ways of knowing and doing to the fore (Martin and Mirraboopa 2003). Indigenous Standpoint Theory recognises knowledge as acquired through interaction, engagement and relationships (Kwaymullina 2016; Nakata 2007; Moreton-Robinson 2013; Foley 2002, 2003). Importantly, Standpoint does not represent individuals as a homogenous group: rather it is a position that recognises Indigenous people are the ‘primary and most authentic sources of our own cultures and experiences’ (Kwaymullina 2016, p.446), and that their stories ‘however expressed or embodied, hold power, spirit and agency’ (Kwaymullina et al., 2013, p. 5; Nakata, 2007).

Accordingly, Indigenous peoples needs and interests are prioritised as a means of empowerment and self-determination (Moreton-Robinson, 2013), doing so locates Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003) to produce

agency and autonomy within the research process, analysis and outcome (Tur et al., 2010). Bringing Indigenous voice and centring it in this way responds to colonio-centric stereotypes of Indigenous people and supports the (re)construction of Indigenous representations on our own terms. I employ the term colonio-centric to emphasise the ‘coloniality of power’ (Grosfoguel, 2011, p. 3) that stems from social, political and historical conditions that are influenced by whiteness, Western, Eurocentric, heteronormative, and Christian norms, which effect those that have been colonised, in this case Indigenous Australians. These ‘norms’ dominate hierarchies of power, social/cultural/political oppression, and uni-lateral knowledge that continues to be (re)produced within Western scholarship.

Untangling Indigenous people from pre-conceived stereotypes that limit us is a key principle of Indigenous Standpoint Theory, as we strive to determine ‘who, what or how we can or can’t be, to help see ourselves with some charge of the everyday, and to help understand our varied responses to the colonial world’ (Nakata, 2007, p. 217). In this article I have looked to spaces where Indigenous representation is silenced or mis-understood with a particular emphasis on the position of young Indigenous male sex workers and their social and emotional wellbeing. Hopkins (2020), drawing on [Author] work, indicates that engaging in these spaces is crucial to the ‘construction and contestation of Indigenous Australian sexualities’ (p.6). The concept of social and emotional wellbeing is situated in a framework that places Indigenous Australian world views and culture as central. Connection to culture, family and community can shape Indigenous Australian experiences and is a key understanding of what social and emotional wellbeing means for Indigenous peoples (Gee et al., 2014). Indigenous Australian conceptions of social and emotional wellbeing has developed and deepened understandings of mental health as being more than a singular entity (Raphael, 2000). Instead, it is a holistic view that encompasses the social, cultural and

emotional health and wellbeing as a whole of life view at both the level of the individual and of whole communities (Tsey et al., 2009).

Critical to this study, and as a key analysis of Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing, is the concept of empowerment, whereby people gain power and are able to activate their agency and autonomy. As a theoretical construct, empowerment includes both the process and the outcomes that can transform and strengthen the way an individual thinks and feels about themselves and their place in the world (Tsey et al., 2009). Tsey et al (2009) discuss individual empowerment as a vital component of social and emotional wellbeing in achieving whole of community structural change, and is understood as an ‘integrated process between the individual and the community’ (Whiteside, 2009, p. 12). However, this places the onus on individuals to generate positive social/cultural structural change of the whole community of which they may have no control. This becomes a point of contention for if an individual is not accepted in their communities, how are they to be expected to generate the structural changes required to be accepted, to facilitate the concept of Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing of whole communities?

Empowerment is a connecting concept across Indigenous Standpoint Theory and Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing, which is underpinned by concepts of agency and autonomy, hence the relevance of application to this study. A useful principle to apply Indigenous Standpoint Theory is the recognition and amplification of Indigenous agency as framed within the limits and possibilities of what can be known (Nakata, 2007). Indigenous Standpoint Theory and Indigenous concepts of social and emotional wellbeing can invigorate and strengthen Indigenous peoples and support efforts to achieve self-determination. In an academic context, these two theoretical orientations assist us to read

narratives such as Jack's in a way that fosters self-determination and recognition of agency, as opposed to sometimes tired readings of victimisation and marginalisation. Therefore, the analysis of Jack's narrative, and the re-telling of his story in this article, is an act of agency and resistance, and is positioned in this article as more than representation; rather, it re-tells Jack's story to create places, space, peoples and knowledges. The bringing together of Indigenous Standpoint Theory and social and emotional wellbeing is a useful framework in which to understand, interpret and analyse the histories and geographies of Jack.

Methodology

This article forms part of a doctoral study that explores the lives and experiences of seven cis-male, cis-female and transgender Aboriginal sex workers, some of whom also identify as sexually diverse. All participants in the study identify as Indigenous Australian or Aboriginal and all use these terms interchangeably; it is also important to note that I identify as Indigenous Australian. Each participant was over 18 years old at the time of data collection. This study has ethical approval through an Australian university ethics committee process, and all participants involved took part with informed ethical consent which could be withdrawn at any time. Each research participant either self-selected or were assigned a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity and these strategies help to give opportunities for assertion of agency and necessary protection of identity. Further each participant was compensated for their time, as appropriate according to ethical guidelines and best practice for both Indigenous peoples, and sex workers (AIATSIS, 2012; Jeffreys, 2010).

Although the larger study included people of diverse gender and sexual identities, the data presented here were collected through a single qualitative semi-structured interview with a cis-male. The interview consisted of a set of questions related to his experiences as a sex

worker, and was subsequently analysed using Indigenous Standpoint Theory. Current academic literature does not account broadly for Indigenous Australian sex workers, particularly so those that fall into categories of being youth, queer, and Indigenous. Therefore the inclusion of a single narrative is warranted as this story provides a unique working knowledge of the sex industry as an Indigenous gay male, providing a rich and detailed contribution to the literature.

Getting to know Jack

Jack, an Aboriginal man, identifies as young, gay, male. Jack also works as a sex worker. 'I don't really like all the labels. I am not all these things all the time. Sometimes who, or what I am depends on who I am with' (Jack). He was born and raised in a country town of New South Wales and moved to the city at the age of 16 years old. He says, 'I left my family and community and moved [to the city] to get away from them. They didn't like that I was gay. I was the only gay kid in the community – that they knew about'. Here Jack expresses that he did not feel able to stay at home due to homophobia within the family and in his broader community. Jack details:

Growing up there were lots of comments being made about gay people, and things that were considered to be gay...like wearing certain clothes, or even what you drank. My mum used to say things like only white women and gay men drink wine. Really stupid stuff, but it stuck. I really tried to hide who I was...but some people just, like, it's like they knew. I would hear slurs like, faggot and fairy. It really stressed me out. I couldn't be who I wanted...when I was sixteen, nearly seventeen, I left home. I moved to Sydney in with some friends who I knew there. It was a great time.

The significance of sexual diversity in Indigenous communities has been minimized and obscured by the force of social and cultural taboos (Farrell, 2016; Sullivan & Day, 2019), and is rarely reflected in the literature. The distancing from sexual diversity in some Indigenous communities, I would argue stems directly from the impact of the invasion and

subsequent colonisation of the country now known as Australia. Colonisation brought with it Western and Christian values and beliefs about sexuality and gender (Sullivan, 2020). The colonio-centric narrative has infiltrated some Indigenous communities and individuals to the point where Christian values are now conflated with Indigenous Australian cultural ways (Jolivet, 2018). An example of this conflation can be found in a 2013 social media post by infamous Indigenous Australian boxer Anthony Mundine who wrote homophobic remarks pages in response to a gay Indigenous male couple who were featured in the television series 'Redfern Now', he wrote:

Watching redfern now & they promoting homosexuality! (Like it's ok in our culture) that ain't in our culture & our ancestors would have there [sic] head for it! Like my dad told me GOD made ADAM & EVE not Adam & Steve (News, 2013. para 5).

Such belief systems demonstrate the importance of acknowledging and affirming sexual diversity across Indigenous communities as this discrimination and homophobia can have a direct impact on social and emotional wellbeing. As a gay Indigenous male Jack did not feel that he could remain part of his family and community and be an 'out' gay man, 'I was not kicked out of home, I chose to leave, it did make me sad, but I was also really happy to be free of the bullshit' (Jack). In order to express his identity safely, Jack made his way to the city, living with friends and to support himself financially, he eventually turned to sex work. He says:

I never intended to go into sex work. It was a bit of an accident to start with. I was having sex and enjoying the Sydney queer scene...here I am accepted for who I am...I would often find that, probably because of my age. I was given lots of gifts. I guess I was a bit of a sugar baby. I got clothes, shoes, cigarettes and alcohol. Nights in swanky hotels, one guy even took me with him on holidays. Sometimes I was given cash. Everything I got was expensive. I liked it. Eventually I decided to actually make it my job...I probably really started actual 'sex work' when I was 18, or 19. I wanted to go to Uni[versity] so I needed something stable, but didn't take up my time. I only do high-end work...when I first started I worked for an [escort] agency, now though I see regulars [clients] only.

Here Jack discusses his experience of becoming a sex worker. Jack's experiences are not usually recorded in academic literature, the voices of young, gay Indigenous males who are also sex workers are rarely, if ever, featured. His experience provides an example that refutes academic discourses of males engaged in sex work as being trafficked, homeless, exploited, in poverty, or in need of protection (Ditmore, 2011). The indication to Jack being a 'sugar baby' could indicate sexual exchanges that could be read as coercive, or evidence of deviancy on the part of older men (Crofts, 2014). A sugar baby refers to someone who participates in dating, talking, or having sexual interactions with a sugar daddy or sugar mummy. The arrangement replicates a dating relationship, instead of exchanging money for a single service, a sugar baby may receive material goods and benefits, such as money or accommodation, in exchange for being in the relationship, typically with someone who is older (Rakić, 2020). Indeed, Jack's account of his role as a sugar baby, when read and understood through an Indigenous lens, is not a coercive, or deviant act. Conversely, he sees his role as a sugar baby as a powerful and niche act of agency that enabled him to access money and material goods, sexual experiences and social status. Agency in this context highlights Jack's ability to make autonomous decisions in the pursuit of his desires. Agency is structured by a person's socially and culturally shaped position and can be constrained in application by their social, cultural, political and economic circumstances (Barnett et al., 2011). Jack's statement clearly elucidates that he has made an agentic choice, one that he works for him and his schedule, and capitalises his social status and physical desirability, he adds:

'I am hot, young, buff and hung...I'm also clean, I am not a junkie, I am fit and healthy. I am really masc[uline], I work hard to play that role. I can command how much I want to make. I don't fuck for less than a thousand bucks' (Jack, gay, male).

Sex workers capitalise on their bodies to work and promote themselves as appealing, sexual and viable (Sanders, 2005). Notwithstanding the transgressions of social and cultural taboos,

capitalising on the body is often seen by sex workers as ‘another day in the office’ (Perkins and Lovejoy, 2007: 153) and similarly, sex work for Jack is a way to earn an income through his body and sexuality. Nussbaum (1998) argued that we all ‘take money from the use of our body’ (p.693), then the consideration of sex work as somehow unique in terms of bodily exploitation could be read as inconsistent and hypocritical. With the exception of the unemployed and the independently wealthy, she contends that making money from the body is not different from other forms of work. This sentiment is implied in Jack’s statement: ‘you wouldn’t hold it against a carpenter for using their hands to make money, why is it so different that I use my body?’. Evidently he does not feel that he is in need of ‘care’ and ‘protection’ (Ditmore, 2011), or that he is being exploited or that he is doing sex work through lack of choice. He claims:

‘I’m a good lookin’ guy. I know what I have and I know what others want. This is my time to make as much money as I can. I’m not gonna be pretty forever you know...later when I’m old I will go back to office work. I’ve been doing some consultancy work to keep my ‘normal’ career going for later, but for now I just want to make a tonne of cash and have fun’ (Jack).

Jack identifies as a ‘high-end’ worker, and that sex work, and being part of the queer scene has had positive impact on his sense of self-worth; ‘I am accepted for who I am, and what I do’ (Jack). For Jack his youth is an important part of his identity, as both a gay male, and as a sex worker. He is emboldened by his masculinity, his looks, and his youth. Being young is an exciting time for Jack, he is able to explore different aspects of his identity and has been able to engage freely as a gay man. The importance of being recognised and accepted for being queer is evident. For Jack sex work is a financially viable option that allows him to live in the city and be close to the gay scene is a positive experience, thus contributing to positive social and emotional outcomes for him. However, although Jack is now accepted for being gay, he does not feel that he is accepted for being Indigenous:

I definitely don't advertise or discuss that I am Indigenous with my clients. You have to promote yourself in certain ways. Being Aboriginal is not considered a sexy thing in the gay community. There's lots of racism you know, and all sorts of other prejudices, like being Asian, or fat...I guess I play into that when I am working. I am too dark, to say I am white...other guys cannot make as much money as me, maybe they are too skinny, or too old, too fat, too something. It's interesting you know, I am brown, so I can get away with being tan, but not black.

Here Jack identifies that although his sexuality is accepted, his culture is not. He declares his unwillingness to advertise as being Indigenous Australian and does not discuss his Aboriginality with his clients due to inherent racism in the queer scene. As Jack points, being Indigenous is not financially viable as it is not considered to be 'sexy'. Jack's narrative is indicative of the social exclusion that can be felt by Indigenous queer people from their social and cultural communities (Sullivan & Day, 2019). In his Indigenous community Jack is socially and culturally excluded, conversely, in the queer community Jack is culturally excluded. Jack is dependent on his communities for acceptance and affirmation. Indigenous Standpoint Theory helps us to see that this is a difficult positioning that is not quite intersectional. Intersectional theory tends to examine politics of difference as cumulative rather than how Jack is experiencing discrimination in different contexts (Johnston, 2018). The application of intersectional theory usually stipulates that a person can experience more severe discrimination depending on their identities; women who are also people of colour experience more discrimination than women who are white (Crenshaw, 1990). Jack, in contrast, experiences marginalisation that is contingent on the cultural space that he is inhabiting and Indigenous Standpoint Theory help us read the racial oppression and colonio-centric processes that (re)produce, inscribe and maintain difference between Indigenous and 'other' bodies (Radcliffe, 2018). For Jack, the only place that he feels that he gets complete sense of self-value is from other Indigenous sex workers. He says:

Over the years I have met heaps of Indigenous queers who have moved to the city because of the homophobic shit in their communities. Many of them have done sex work here and there. When we start yarnin' and feelin' comfortable with each other you start to hear stories. Sex work is pretty common you know, I don't know...but I know a few guys, and girls, that have worked the streets over the years. I like hanging out with them, sometimes it feels like it's the only time I can just be myself. I don't have to lie about what I do, or who I am. I can just be.

For Jack, it is amongst his peers that are also Indigenous sex workers that he is able to find a sense of belonging. Few studies of Indigenous sex workers explore belonging and, in particular, the locality of belonging spaces, as mediators of social exclusion and inclusion. Building this sense of belonging is a source of empowerment for Jack. Knowing people like him, give him a sense of belonging and community, highlights that a sense of empowerment 'enhances individual social and emotional wellbeing' (Tsey et al., 2009, p. 9). At present, the literature discusses the concept of Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing and expresses the importance of whole of community wellbeing as integral to the individual. The limits in the literature express 'whole of community' as being connected to land and country or geographically located, and familial relationships. For queer Indigenous people, and other apparent 'deviants', such as sex workers, this is not always possible. However, it is clear from Jack's story that building and maintaining connection to Indigenous community can be understood in multiple ways. His connection to other queer, and sex worker, Indigenous peoples has given him a space in which to connect to his culture and to feel valued and free to express himself.

Discussion

For Jack sex work is a space of financial stability and is also where he has been able to explore his sexual expression and self-value. However, despite being socially and financially well, his feelings of social and emotional wellbeing are limited by the lack of social/cultural validation and belonging, resulting in social exclusion. For Indigenous people, a sense of

belonging is an important aspect of identity and wellbeing (Franklin, 2014). The concept of social exclusion denotes multifarious interactions, that include cultural marginalisation, restricted spatial mobility and social inequalities (Moore, 2014). Indigenous social standing is a critical factor underpinning social inequality (Author 2018), challenging this social position is important toward achieving social justice and so we need to be explicitly political in advocating for it within our communities (Hopkins, 2020).

Retuning to Tsey et al (2009), who discussed the importance of individual empowerment as essential to community structural change. It is my position that Jack has achieved that, just not in the way that is understood currently in the literature. Indigenous spaces are emerging for Indigenous queer people that should be thought of, and understood, as Indigenous communities. For example, Jack's community with other like-minded people, although an informal and fluid group, are a group that have built connection and a sense of belonging to enhance their own sense of social and emotional wellbeing as empowered people.

Additionally, there are community-based groups that are working toward social/cultural structural change for Indigenous queer people such as, 'Black Rainbow', and 'Blaq Aboriginal Corporation'. Both are Indigenous community advocate groups who provide spaces of social inclusion to Indigenous queer people and are crucially working toward building capacity within familial and geographically located Indigenous communities. This work is vital as it recognises Indigenous queer people as always existing within our familial and kinship communities. It is my position that our inclusion within these communities is fundamental to the social and emotional wellbeing of those communities – they need us.

The concept of whole of community in Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing is a narrowed vision and understanding of what constitutes 'Indigenous community'. The

concept of ‘whole of community’ needs to be interrogated further and recognised as plural. Additionally, the concept of empowerment is elemental and can occur on multiple levels, including at the individual and community level, however, it should not imply that you cannot have one without the other. Furthermore, this article has highlighted the importance of capacity building within and outside of Indigenous communities. I highlight that experiences of belonging and connection are contextual, being closely linked to different forms of social and cultural networks, and the negative and positive implications for social and emotional wellbeing.

Conclusion

The experiences of sex workers are often more nuanced than debates have led us to believe, particularly when such arguments fail to offer Indigenous Australian sex workers’ perspectives. Sex based research with Indigenous people poses particular challenges. For many, it implies a focus on negative issues and exacerbates anxieties around particular social and cultural taboos. As a result, there has been an apparent reluctance in the research community to undertake sex and sexuality research directly involving Indigenous people. However, Indigenous involvement in sex based research can challenge the social and cultural signification of sexuality and gender and it can also shine light on how queer and sex worker are identifiers that are positioned outside the cultural (hetero)norms of sex-gender and inclusion/exclusion dualities that exist in some Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

This article has explored sex work through the lenses of Indigenous Standpoint Theory and social and emotional wellbeing drawing attention to the intersections of culture and sexuality with the consequences of Jacks’ social and emotional wellbeing discussed. Jacks’ story

highlights the way in which Indigenous people, and non-Indigenous people disregard Indigenous gender and sexual diversity leading to social exclusion that can have a detrimental effect on social and emotional wellbeing. Providing a story told by an Indigenous youth is evidence that Indigenous communities are still subjected to colonio-centric ideologies that stifle our identities and philosophies. As queer and Indigenous people, we must seek to assert our multiply located and queer identities, and speak back against colonio-centric narratives that seek to homogenise our communities, and Indigenous people more broadly. More work is needed to better understand the practice of sex work for queer Indigenous youth and its impacts on social/cultural relations, sexuality and gender, and social and emotional wellbeing.

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Chapter 9: Indigenous Australian Sexualities through the lens of sex work

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Introduction

The concept of Indigenous sexuality often produces an abundance of recirculated ideas and (mis)conceptions which, on interrogation, tend to show more about the minds that wrote them than they do about Indigenous Australians or Indigenous sexuality. Further, there may well be a connection between the type of narratives and the silences that occur in Indigenous, geographical and feminist scholarship, as intimated in this chapter. Representations of Indigenous sexuality, particularly Indigenous women's sexuality, are usually linked to violence and exploitation. There is limited writing on pleasure, desire or enjoyment. My research with Indigenous Australian sex workers brings to light the limited perspectives presented in the academic literature that discusses Indigenous sexuality. Through my research, Indigenous male, female and transgender sex workers provide counter-narratives that are not solely reacting to colonial and/ or cultural constructions of sexuality. Rather, these counter- narratives centre Indigenous Australian experiences, rendering colonial and cultural constructions as a process to be understood, not as the defining factor in the way in which Indigenous sexuality, gender diversity and identity is represented. As an Indigenous person from the Wiradjuri nation in central-western New South Wales, I draw on my experiences as both an Indigenous woman and as a sexual being to view, analyse and interpret the narratives and the literature. Engaging with the lives of Aboriginal Australian sex workers propelled me back to the imperialist nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when hierarchies of race dominated public discourse. The conceptual terrain of historical works provides a familiar narrative of Indigenous people who suffered sexual exploitation and

victimhood, and many such stories are produced and reproduced in academic literature (Langton 2008; Moreton-Robinson 1998; Ryan 2016) and, although sexual exploitation did and does occur in Indigenous communities, such positions are not taken from an Indigenous point of view, nor do they include counter-narratives to these assertions. Barker observes:

These representational practices suppress Indigenous epistemologies, histories, and cultural practices regarding gender and sexuality while also concealing the historical and social reality of patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia within Indigenous communities. *2017a, 13*

Scholars may well be continuing these tracks of thought without question or interrogation. I argue that, in large measure, this blindness stems from the fact that, again and again, scholars of Indigenous histories and contemporalities sidestep an essential truth: as human beings, our sexuality as Indigenous people is central to our sense of self and our desires. Indigenous sexuality and gender diversity are often ignored, silenced or misunderstood in Indigenous, geographic and feminist scholarship (Brown 2012; Moreton-Robinson 2000, 2013; Sullivan 2018) and are rarely written from the point of view of Indigenous people. It is striking that questions of Indigenous sex, sexuality and gender are rarely evident in geographical, feminist and Indigenous literature, as such matters should be intertwined with the most central topics related to Indigenous being, such as identity, body and emotion, as well as the very nature of Indigenous people as social and cultural beings. Though scholars have had much to say about Indigenous ways of life, for the most part they have had little to say in regard to Indigenous sexuality. One way to map Indigenous sexuality is to chronicle Indigenous peoples' lives in sexual spaces. In this chapter, I engage with Indigenous Australian people in the sphere of sex work. The space of the body and its geographies of sexuality and gender are highlighted within the bounds of sex-work labour, economics and sexual autonomy. Such research on Indigenous Australians' sexual relations aims to encourage new understandings of sex, sexuality and gender and to stimulate different ways

of (re)imagining Indigenous bodies. This chapter is offered as an affirmation of Indigenous rights to self- determination, as well as a form of resistance against the misrepresentation of Indigenous sexualities and gender diversity. Indigenous sexuality is not just about having sex; it is about identity and self- determination (Barker 2017b). It is about gender, body and the expression of those two things.

The colonial hangover

This section provides an account of the dominant Australian historical discourses, finding that Indigenous people, in particular Indigenous women, were viewed as exotic, erotic and something to be desired, and yet simultaneously caused anxiety and were objects to be feared. Indigenous Australian people were described as savage, promiscuous and primitive (Moreton- Robinson 1998). In order for the colonizing male to maintain control, Indigenous Australian people's disturbing and disruptive sexual energies had to be contained, and they became increasingly targeted in violent interventions and racialized legislation and policies. Assimilationist federal and state policies and legislation were central to a regime of sexual surveillance, and this control of supposedly degenerate sexuality became pivotal to the portrayal of Indigenous people. These anxieties and fears emerged from the moment of the invasion of Australia. A key feature of colonial anxiety was the fabrication of the sexualities of Indigenous people – a subject well documented by Indigenous feminist scholars (Barker 2017b; Langton 1993, 2008; Moreton- Robinson 1998, 2000; Sullivan 2018). Colonial discourses on Indigenous people's sexuality led to the objectification and ensuing dehumanization of Indigenous people globally (Barker 2017b; Smith 2012). In Australia, Indigenous people were, and often continue to be, situated on the lowest rung of the class ladder, our social standing a critical factor underpinning social inequality, a social position closely linked to long- held beliefs regarding people of colour globally (McKittrick 2006; Moreton- Robinson 2000; Sullivan 2018).

Representations of Indigenous sexualities are shaped almost entirely by historically and colonially constituted narratives that determine/ explain/ describe the deepest intimacies of our lives at any given time and place. These narratives are socially constructed and are bounded legally, socially, culturally and sexually, trapping Indigenous sexuality within the imagination of predominantly White people, a position that is shaped and reinforced by history, racism and discrimination and that renders the nuances of particular people's experiences invisible – actually, not invisible; rather silenced and unacknowledged. Indeed, racialized constructions of sexuality and bodies were essential to the rationale for invasion and colonization, fashioning Indigenous bodies as savage and primitive in order to justify and reinforce the imposition of Western superiority and civilization (Levine 2008). Moreover, the bodies and physical appearances of Indigenous peoples were unfairly forged through a colonizing Western gaze, based on Eurocentric aesthetic standards (Conor 2016). Indigenous people have been portrayed as 'animalistic, not quite human' and the 'most docile creature lacking agency' (Bond 2015, para 4). Indigenous Australian artist Troy-Anthony Baylis surmises:

it is as if history has constructed Aboriginality as being so pure and so savage ... that if tainted by the complexity of sexuality and gender, mixed ethnographies, mixed geographies and mixed appearances, the whole look would be ruined. 2015, *I*

What better way to colonize a people than to make them ashamed of their bodies and the expressions of those bodies? Perhaps the 'original violence' of colonialism was 'to cover our being with its rules and regulations' (Watson 1998, 2). The covering of Indigenous bodies in clothing, in legislation, in practice and in policies transpired in ways that were pathologized, exoticized and fetishized, obscuring Indigenous sexuality (Franklin 2014). Obscuring Indigenous sexuality, in this context, is described by Behrendt as 'neo- colonial power

relationships [which] carry the baggage and the legacy of frontier and colonial power relations' (2000, 365). These analyses place Indigenous people in a context of heterosexuality, a binary that does not afford the voices of those who are both and neither, nor, one without the other. These are racially and gendered snapshots of sexuality, stagnant images of femininity and masculinity that stifle Indigenous peoples' knowledges and power over their own culture and identity. These representations, enacted through racialized, gendered and sexualized images of Indigenous people, heterosexual and pan- Aboriginal (meaning all the same), are not a novelty or coincidence. They serve a purpose. Colonialism demands that Indigenous people fit within the heterosexual 'norm'.

The sexual and gender diversity of Indigenous peoples remains mostly absent from the records and interpretations of Australian histories, and these absences reinforce a hetero-centric reading of Indigenous Australian cultures. These representations often frame sexuality in terms of gender, and the performance of gender. The favouring of Western, social and cultural constructive discourses of gender, in particular of Indigenous Australian gender roles, tends to inscribe Indigenous people as oppressed, subordinated by patriarchal structures or performances (Clark 2017; Huggins 1991; Moreton- Robinson 1998, 2000). Rarely were Indigenous bodies and sexualities granted an agentic, diverse or self-determined presence in White Australian imaginaries.

The reluctance of scholars to discuss Indigenous sexuality is apparent by its lack of inclusion in the literature. While some studies are explicitly concerned with geographies of race and sexuality (McKittrick and Peake 2005; Oliver, Flicker et al. 2015; Peake 2010), geographers studying 'race' or 'Indigeneity' are culpable of often neglecting sexuality in their discussions or viewing it through a White Anglophone lens. To shift away from Western discourses and engage with Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing the world would assist in dismantling

‘a priori categories but could also help undo dominant constructions of race, sexuality and gender that hide from view more humane and just ways of organizing the world’ (Peake 2010, 70). Unfortunately, we have yet to witness much work on the geography of sexuality conducted in this way: the ethnocentricity of the literature on sexuality and space remains largely unchallenged, despite the growth of material on the intersections of race and sexuality elsewhere (Hopkins 2018).

Although a relatively large body of work by Indigenous scholars aims to reposition representations of Indigenous Australian people as agentic and resistant (see, for example, Behrendt 2000; Langton 2008; Moffatt 1987; Moreton- Robinson 2000; Sullivan 2018), only a small number of ground- breaking seminal texts from Indigenous Australian scholars, artists and filmmakers provide Indigenous representations that pay specific attention to sexuality, bodies and gender and disrupt previously held beliefs. In her essay, ‘Well I Heard it on the Television’ (1993), Langton’s anti- colonial critique of colonial narratives, highlights ‘distorted’ and narrow representations of Indigenous Australian sexuality and gender. In the film *Nice Coloured Girls*, world- renowned artist and filmmaker Tracey Moffatt generates a powerful commentary of the way in which Indigenous women are represented through stereotypes, clichés and colonial moralism (1987). This body of work provides formidable and challenging observations in relation to representational politics. However, there is a glaring absence from broader research that attends to the voices of Indigenous Australian people, as well as those of Indigenous people globally, and their views on sex and sexuality.

Engaging with sexuality with Indigenous Australian sex workers

The narratives of Indigenous sex workers invigorate understandings of bodies and sexualities; their perspectives attend to concepts of Indigenous sexuality and, in doing so,

transcend colonial limitations and enable a rethinking of sex, sexuality, gender and race. The inclusion of Indigenous female, male, trans and queer sex- worker narratives unsettles heteronormative conceptualizations of sexually based services and complicates depictions of sex workers as victims. These narratives are derived from a doctoral study investigating the everyday lives and experiences of seven Aboriginal sex workers. The participants in this study have self- selected a pseudonym to protect their identities. I employed a qualitative narrative approach to explore the stories that sex workers shared about their entry into sex work, their experiences within the industry and the implications of these experiences. The accounts were analysed thematically from an Indigenous Standpoint (Moreton- Robinson 2013; Nakata 2007). Instead of articulating Indigenous sexual and gender identities as a categorically imposed colonial demarcation, Indigenous Standpoint centralizes and positions Indigenous ways of seeing, doing and knowing as situated knowledges. Indigenous sexuality and gender diversity are hence positioned as a constitutive method of seeing, doing and knowing. Knowledges from the body are a form of understanding, a way of perceiving the world that occurs between and across bodies, cultures and geographies (Louis 2007; Martin and Mirraboopu 2003; Moreton- Robinson 2013).

For the purpose of this chapter, sex work is defined as an occupation where a sex worker is hired to provide sexual services for monetary considerations (Sanders 2013). Terms such as prostitute, sex work and sex worker generally invoke an image of a female and of sexual interaction with a client, who is presumed to be male, and is often seen as an entirely heterosexual affair. This fixation on female sex workers excludes other involvement in sex work, reflecting a particular void in sexual and scholarly interest. The inclusion of Indigenous, female, male, trans and queer sex- worker narratives unsettles the heteronormative thinking of sexually based services and complicates depictions of sex workers as victims. Although my research intention was to explore the experiences of

Aboriginal people in the sex industry and to fill gaps in this area of knowledge, it soon became clear that there were further gaps in scholarly thought, particularly in regard to Indigenous Australians' contemporary sexual relations.

From an academic perspective, Indigenous Australian sex workers are an under-researched group and therefore an unknown group of people. Recommendation number 5 of the 2012 New South Wales Sex Industry Report states that 'Data on the sexual health of regional and rural, Aboriginal, street-based, male, and gender diverse sex workers should be sought and collated' (Donovan et al. 2012, 8). Despite this recommendation, there remains a paucity of research in this area. The exclusion of diverse identities in scholarship on the sex industry restricts the political agency of Indigenous sex workers yet also reinforces the very gender dualisms that many feminist and queer scholars wish to challenge. The lives and voices of Indigenous Australian sex workers are concealed by discourses of exploitation and victimization that draw attention to marginalization and colonio-centric views and fail to include diverse stories and perspectives. Despite recent work that highlights the intrinsic nature of sex work as not all oppressive and as involving different kinds of worker and client experiences and varying degrees of victimization, exploitation, agency and choice, there remains a distinct silence in the literature (Sullivan 2018).

Indigenous sex-worker views on sex and sexuality

Like many previous studies of sex workers (see Vanwesenbeeck 2001; Weitzer 2005, 2010), the sex workers who participated in this study stated that money was their primary motivation for entering sex work. Many felt that the money earned in sex work was better than the earnings they could command in other jobs:

At the time I wasn't very skilled. I was still a uni student. I mean I could have got skilled in something else and got working but ... I had no idea ... no one was going to let me work the hours I wanted, when I wanted, and they didn't pay me enough, I like the satisfaction of having money. It's not easy being poor. *Majesty, trans*

I could do other work, I could be a cleaner. But most jobs aren't very flexible, I choose my hours, the clients I see. And if I need time off like for school holidays, or one of my kids get sick, I can. I don't want to do anything else, at least for now, this works for me. *Moira, female, heterosexual*

I work when I need the money, it's straight like that. I only work part time so when I need extra cash or when my family is hustlin' [for money] well I get my ass on the corner. It's easier, it's straightforward. I work till I get the money I need, sometimes a bit more and that's it. *Bianca, female, heterosexual*

I like having extra money because I have a few jobs. But if I need extra money or I want extra money that would be a reason now that I work. Whereas maybe in the past it also might have been for my own entertainment, depending on the client I guess. *JJ, queer*

I'm a good lookin' guy. I know what I have and I know what others want. This is my time to make as much money as I can. I'm not gonna be pretty forever you know ...my body and face would be wasted in an office, what's the point! Later when I'm old I will go back to office work. I've been doing some consultancy work to keep my 'normal' career going for later, but for now I just want to make a tonne of cash and have fun. *Jack, male, gay.*

These narratives show that sex work was not chosen due to a lack of other choices. This observation is supported by the findings of Sanders (2005), who observed that, while most sex workers were likely from low- economic backgrounds, their entry may have been more related to a desire for economic and social independence than a means of survival.

Although economic benefit was the primary reason for sex work, there are indications that money was not the only motivator. JJ's and Jack's examples above highlight that interest, desire, intimacy and fantasy are also involved. Majesty highlights the difference between working in her male identity and in her trans identity: when she worked as a male, it was 'about having money so that we could go to breakfast in the morning', whereas as a trans woman Majesty's sex work is far more complex and nuanced than it is about money, opportunity, emotion and validation. The work became:

less cash based, yeah. Although when the cash would present itself, why not? Is there something else sometimes? ... there might be. There's a possibility. This is what I need, you possibly need something, swapsies? *Majesty*.

Regarding sexuality, body and desire, the participants disclosed that providing sexually based services resulted in an improved sense of sexuality and bodily awareness. Although none of the participants were asked direct questions in relation to sex or sexuality, it emerged as a key theme within the research. Expression of sexuality was one of the foremost rewards of their line of work, underscoring the notion that, for some people, sex work has significant bodily implications that impart meaning and self-determination to their lives. For example, Jeremy, who identifies as a brotherboy (trans) and is bisexual, reveals:

it's actually been a positive thing for me, I reckon. It's just given me more positivity about sex and given me more confidence in myself as a trans guy to – well, just to be more open about myself sexually ... I do it because I do like sex. I'm pretty horny right now. I want to fuck someone. So I'll do it for that reason. [Or] it's just about the money kind of thing, you know. You take the opportunity if it comes along. *Jeremy, brotherboy (trans), bisexual*.

Another example comes from Moira:

I was raised to not talk about sex, or even think about it really. Sex for women was something that we endured. Never enjoyed. Sex work has been eye-opening for me, I have learnt what I like and what I don't like. I feel like I have more control over my body ... I used to be real shamed of my body, but now I love it. Men love it. It makes me feel good. Sometimes I get lucky and the client is hot, like yes I would be interested if I met you at a bar kinda hot. When that happens I just enjoy it. It's even better if he's good at it. *Moira, female, heterosexual*.

There were other accounts that highlighted not only expressions of sexuality but also the fluidity of sexuality. For example:

sometimes do doubles, you know, with another girl, I consider myself to be straight, totally 100 per cent straight, but you know in those moments it can feel good. Maybe I am not so 100 per cent sure about sex anymore. *Bianca, female, heterosexual*.

Another participant intimated the sense of power and control that she derived from sex work. Isabelle says:

I thought sex was dirty, or that there was something wrong with you if you wanted, or liked, to have sex. I thought there was something wrong with me. I loved [sex work], I felt powerful, sexual and in control. There aren't too many places where you can feel that way, as a Black woman, and be paid. *Isabelle, female, heterosexual.*

Isabelle expressed feeling affirmed by the positive attention from clients who valued her appearance, although she also offered reflections about the fetishized nature of her Black body. She said,

I would often get chosen for being 'the Black one'; the girls get lined up for the client to choose or we meet him one after the other until he chooses one, you know, and they won't remember my name, just my skin colour. But I'm OK with that; in the brothel, that makes me special, a bit exotic.

For Isabelle, the financial aspects of sex work led to her fiscal self-sufficiency and her social interaction, assisted by her exploration of her identities as both a sexual being and a Black woman. Sex work, for Isabelle, was a means by which to validate and explore aspects of those identities. Her satisfaction and enjoyment of sex work were linked to the financial benefits of the work, but also the feelings of power and control she felt.

For the most part, participants articulated feelings of satisfaction about their work, the way in which they used their bodies and their ability to utilize sex work to help to stabilize their lives financially. Although Indigenous sex workers fitting the popular negative stereotypes do exist and their experiences need to be recognized and addressed, those descriptions do not recognize the diversity of lifestyles and experiences that constitute Indigenous sex workers' lives. Furthermore, such representations ignore broader structural understandings of the sex industry, which tend to portray Indigenous sex workers as oppressed victims who are incapable of rational choice. Rather, what can be ascertained from the voices of the participants in this study is that their involvement in the sex industry is predominantly about

economic freedom, and it is also in some cases about sexual desire and sexual expression. The evidence provided by participants in my research is not of victimhood, exploitation or abuse. Rather, it is overwhelmingly a narrative of agency, bodily autonomy and self-determination. For the participants in this study, entering into sex work is the outcome of a dignified rational choice for financial gain that has also had positive impacts on their sexual and gender identities.

Indigenous sexuality, as demonstrated by the narratives highlighted here, is not synonymous with biological sex (being female or male) or gender or defined by sexual practice (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual). It is matter of shifting relationships between bodies, desires, emotions, selves and others. It is something that should be self-determined and realized, rather than socially and culturally predetermined. Indigenous identities are not fixed; rather, they are evolving entities that are transformative, fluid, collective, personal and ambiguous. The narratives provided in this chapter refute the colonial claims of deviancy, victimization and social control that are used to explain and discipline Indigenous sexuality and gender. Rather, the narratives illustrate that sex work is chosen by some Indigenous Australian people as a means of expressing agency and empowerment, and communicates a political statement through challenging the cultural, sexual and gendered identities that Indigenous people are normatively ascribed in society.

Conclusion

The ways that Indigenous people experience sexuality and gender in sex work are one path of inquiry into how gender and other identities are mapped onto bodies. While academic scholarship is increasingly addressing issues of sexual and gender identity at a macro level, its particular attention remains largely on a White or Western focus, therefore a conceptual deconstruction is required. The challenge of unpacking colonial lines of thinking on sex and

sexuality in Indigenous Australia, it would seem, halts discussion or imagination of Indigenous sexuality. As Shino Konishi points out, ethnographies of Indigenous sexuality rely exclusively on European records to construct their images of Indigenous society and practices, however unstable (2008). While there is a considerable amount of material on Western, Eurocentric perspectives of Indigenous peoples and their sexualities and genders, it is difficult to find Indigenous people's accounts of their views and perspectives of sexual relations, sexualities and gender diversity within the literature.

This chapter presents some of the first accounts of Indigenous Australian sex workers shared in the academic literature. Such voices are powerful, representing a discussion of sexual freedom and expression that is under-narrated throughout history and across written texts. Acknowledging, including and centring Indigenous perspectives of sexuality and gender are necessary in Indigenous, feminist and geographical scholarship. The narratives of Indigenous people contribute important understandings and perspectives, and such inclusion promotes exciting theoretical innovation with highly valuable insights. The narratives of Indigenous sex workers open the door for conversations around Indigenous sexuality being heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, cisgender, transgender, queer and non-binary. Such conversations challenge notions of sexuality, gender, identity and race. The future of geographical research must do more to engage with and include Indigenous people and perspectives. Indigenous people and their knowledges need to be centred, agentic and free to express themselves in their own voices. There is a growing insurgence of Indigenous academics actively discussing matters of relevance to Indigenous people globally. They have created a space for their voices where there was none, and the strength of this scholarship needs to be readily and actively represented and taken into account. The inclusion of Indigenous people's academic literature, their voices, knowledges and perspectives in

geographic and feminist literature serve to strengthen the discipline/ s – if only they would listen.

A provocation ...

What if ‘we’, as scholars, refuse to accept the equation of Indigenous people and sex with shame, disease, victimization, exploitation or moral degeneracy? What if, let’s say, scholars stop reproducing and recirculating colonio-centric ideologies of who and what Indigenous Australia is? What if ‘we’ listen and include the voices of Indigenous Australians, centring them as the privileged holders of their own views and perspectives of the world?

Contemplation of an alternative reality such as this might help to foster ‘our’ imaginations as ‘we’ try to envision a world in which Indigenous sex, sexuality and gender diversity are not shameful, taboo or to be hidden or silenced; where Indigenous sexualities and expression of those sexualities are not just considered, but where multifaceted, complex and nuanced views and perspectives are accepted – and, dare I say, even highly respected and valued. As scholars interested in sex, sexuality and gender research, ‘we’ need to open ‘our’ imaginations and ‘our’ ears, then perhaps ‘we’ will no longer be challenged by Indigenous Australians’ right to fuck and to be fucked, without being fucked over.

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Chapter 10: Conclusion

This thesis explored the myriad ways in which Indigenous sex workers navigate their entry, experience, and meaning in sex work in order to gain an understanding of how Indigenous sex workers perceive their work and identify with their position in the sex work industry. Particular attention was given to how these stories revealed examples of choice and constraint and are powerful in representing the reality of Indigenous sex workers lives and experiences. My research recognises how colonio-centric discourses of Indigenous sex work have detrimentally positioned Indigenous peoples as powerless, vulnerable and exploited victims and counters these long held beliefs and perspectives with stories from Indigenous people's lives that demonstrate agency and empowerment. This has been established by challenging dominant discourses of Indigenous peoples being conquests in the invasion of Australia, by producing a counter-narrative that reveals those that have worked the system, as active agents, of their own benefit and power, intimacy and desire. In doing so, I promoted the right for Indigenous people to flex their power, agency, autonomy and have challenged colonio-centric limiting discourses.

However, in order to discuss matters of Indigenous Australian sexualities and genders there must be a countering of long held, mainly Eurocentric beliefs and perspectives of Indigenous peoples. This is difficult to achieve due to oppressive colonial regimes and cultural dogma that reveal the Christian, taboo and moral tensions in Indigenous communities. This thesis raises difficulties that research with Indigenous peoples and communities presents, in particular when addressing a situation in which the research is contentious, and potentially harmful. This kind of research space identifies real and persistent complexities for the research process, the researcher, and the research participants. If different discourses of

Indigenous sexualities and genders can be established within Indigenous Australian ontologies, then perhaps the colonial hangover that persists in some Indigenous communities can be addressed. To fully appreciate Indigenous peoples, our bodies, and the use or expression of those bodies, we must challenge, as Indigenous peoples, the colonio-centric narratives that have persisted about us; in part, this is what bodily sovereignty would look like. Speaking back, and up, in this way promotes Indigenous peoples' sovereign right to reframe the definitions and to self-determine our sexualities and genders, and to ensure that we are not in the blind spots of our communities.

Accordingly, Indigenous Australian sex workers held the platform in this thesis, it is their voices narrating their lives and experiences of sex work that does the work of exposing Indigenous knowledges of bodily landscapes, identity and sexual and gender expression. Their stories were collected and analysed using a narrative approach to data collection that was underpinned by Indigenous Standpoint Theory in order to promote freedom for the participants to bring their own knowledges to the interview setting, thereby enabling the appropriate negotiation of the gap between the “researcher” and the “researched”. Prioritising and centring Indigenous peoples in research relating to their lives and experiences is a powerful process, one that demands relationships be built between communities of participants and the researcher. Critical to this process is sharing stories and opening spaces where Indigenous people can contribute to knowledges which shape their lives. A key lesson here is understanding and working with the multiplicities and the pluralities that exist in communities, and to bear in mind where the blind spots within communities are.

The aim of this study was to generate foundational knowledge about the lives and experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers. A thematic narrative analysis was used in exploring the various constructions and representations made by Indigenous sex workers in talking about their stories of entry and experience, and the meanings they ascribed to their work and presence in the industry. Findings revealed that Indigenous sex worker experiences of sex, sexuality, and gender, occur on multiple levels, including the social, cultural and political, and in diverse ways, including generative and constructive forms. This foundational knowledge adds to the theoretical understanding of gender and sexuality from the point of view of Indigenous Australian peoples and unsettles assertions that Indigenous sex workers are uniformly exploited. Providing clear evidence that sex work is a temporal space in which to explore sexuality, to validate desirability, and defy social/cultural norms and values. Importantly it is recognised that sex work can be both affirming and validating of gender and sexuality, the exploration and manipulation of concepts of femininity, masculinity, and heteronormative and homosexual fantasy and desire is resounding. Indigenous sexual and gender identities are realised in this thesis as multifaceted, fluid and ambiguous and shine light on the defiant and limitless possibilities of further exploration of those that contravene social/cultural constructed identities.

As an empirical exploration of the lives and experiences of Indigenous Australian sex workers, this thesis contributes to geographic and sexualities scholarship. Whilst the relationship between gender and sexuality has been well-theorised across geographic and sexuality scholarship, I have broadly established the gaps in this scholarship, identifying that there is a need, and exciting research possibilities, in understanding how gender and sexuality is regarded in the lives and experiences of diverse groups of people, including Indigenous Australians. One of the key findings of this thesis is how Indigenous sex workers

made sense of their sexualities and genders, and the expression of those things, and demonstrates the processes to accomplish this research. This finding opens the door for further research exploring Indigenous Australian sexualities and genders in all their wonderful, complex, ambiguous and nuanced manifestations.

This thesis has highlighted the need to move away from abstract academic pondering of how Indigenous Australian sex work might be subversive to actually engaging with the way it is lived and felt on the ground. Therefore, any theorisation that is produced hereafter needs to be more firmly grounded in participants' accounts, and assumptions relating to theoretical or disciplinary perspectives need to be interrogated, or at least reflexively engaged with. I have attempted to highlight ways that this might be done within this thesis. A key method introduced in this thesis is Indigenous trans methodologies. I cultivated a relationship between trans geographies and Indigenous Standpoint Theory to explore the spatial dimensions of the lived reality of Indigenous trans sex workers. Trans geographies provided an opportunity to 'queer' Indigenous Standpoint Theory – broadening the potential to understand how Indigenous sexualities and genders are known and recognised while further engaging with the way in which they are lived and experienced. Therefore, an Indigenous trans methodologies was developed to unpack and explore the socio/cultural/political context of Indigenous hetero/colonio-patriarchy. I traced how notions of sex work, sexual agency, sexual expression, gender expression are coalesced with concepts of desire, emotion, and economic independence. In doing this I was able to shine light on the impacts on both the construction of sexualities and genders for Indigenous trans people, as well as the experiences they had in their everyday lives, thus bringing geographical and sexuality research much closer to urgent social/cultural politics around Indigenous Australian lives and the spatial dimensions of genders and sexualities.

Research dissemination

Since the commencement of this study, my research has made significant contributions, to geographic, feminist and Indigenous studies, including; Indigenous Standpoint Theory (Chapters Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine); Indigenous community politics (Chapters Three, Five, Seven, and Eight); sexuality and gender studies (Chapters Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine); social and emotional wellbeing (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight); Indigenous trans methodologies (Chapters Five, Six, Seven); Indigenous research politics (Chapters Two, Three, Nine); body and bodily autonomy (Chapters Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine); Indigenous agency and autonomy (Chapters Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine); and Indigenous identities (Chapters Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine). Additionally, this thesis is one of a few studies that explores Indigenous Australian lives and experiences in sex work, and is the only known study that includes, and centres, the voices of Indigenous Australian female, male and transgender people in sex work. Furthermore, this thesis has shone light on the lack of research in the field of Indigenous Australian gender and sexuality studies, and has provided an original lens in which to analyse and discuss this exciting field of exploration. The findings of this study have been, and will be, disseminated in a wide range of high impact Australian and international publications *Geographical Research; Culture, Health & Sexuality; Sexualities* (under review); *Gender, Place & Culture; Emotion, Space and Society, Routledge Handbook for Feminist and Gender Geographies*, and *Social Inclusion* (submitted). The book chapter and the article, submitted to the journal *Social Inclusion*, were both invited papers. The invitations to submit in these fora were a result of disseminating this research at several conferences and symposia.

To ensure that at least some of the findings are accessible to Indigenous Australians, sexual health services, and policy makers the submitted article to *Social Inclusion* is open access. Additionally, I have incorporated the research findings into my learning and teaching, and in my other areas of research, collaborative projects with Indigenous queer students. I intend to continue publishing my findings in accessible formats for use by Indigenous individuals and communities.

Furthermore, my research and findings have come to the attention of some Indigenous organisations, and I have delivered presentations of these findings to assist in the facilitation of Indigenous community capacity building. Additionally, I now serve as a Director on the board of ‘Blaq Aboriginal Corporation’, an organisation that works to strengthen the visibility of Indigenous sexual and gender diverse youth, and to advocate broadly for safe and inclusive places for Indigenous sexual and gender diverse peoples in Australia.

Scope for further research

This study contributes to the discussion of sex work in Australia in a sexual and gender diverse context, including male, female and transgender Indigenous Australians, an area in which there has been a distinct lack of research. It also has demonstrated a methodology for research in this context. This is a beginning, and there remains a need for further research and deepened knowledge and understanding in this area. This study has provided a foundational platform in which to explore other spaces of Indigenous gender and sexuality in various contexts and environments.

Closing

In closing this thesis, I am optimistic that its themes and findings are of relevance beyond academic scholarship and may contribute to the communities in which the primacy of the research is important. There is more work to do on that front: sharing academic work in accessible, open formats will be part of that project. This thesis has provided a counter narrative to colonio-centric heteronormative perspectives that have been applied in past (and some present) research with Indigenous peoples thus addressing the significant gap in the research literature on Indigenous sex workers, as well as Indigenous Australian perspectives of sexuality and gender. I hope this beginning offers a platform for more conversations, directions and spaces to open. I'd like to suggest that it's time 'we' move away from social/cultural/political ingrained beliefs and fixed discourses of Indigenous bodies, genders and sexualities. Imagine wrenching ourselves away from the tyranny of colonial discourses and cultural dogma, to promote, celebrate and affirm sexuality and gender in all its multiplicity.

Yindyamarra winhanganha

- may we all respectfully know how to live in a world worth knowing...

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Appendices

Appendix A Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval



MACQUARIE
University

Corrinne Franklin <corrinne.franklin@mq.edu.au>

Approved- Ethics application- Trudgett (Ref No: 5201300644)

1 message

Ethics Secretariat <ethics.secretariat@mq.edu.au>

3 October 2013 at 10:15

To: Associate Professor Michelle Trudgett <michelle.trudgett@mq.edu.au>

Cc: Dr Sandie Suchet-Pearson <sandie.suchet@mq.edu.au>, Mrs Corrinne Tayce Franklin <corrinne.hughan@students.mq.edu.au>

Dear Associate Professor Trudgett

Re: "Investigation of Indigenous Sex Workers" (Ethics Ref: 5201300644)

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Human Sciences and Humanities), effective 03-Oct-13. This email constitutes ethical approval only.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Associate Professor Michelle Trudgett

Dr Sandie Suchet-Pearson

Mrs Corrinne Tayce Franklin

NB. STUDENTS: IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP A COPY OF THIS APPROVAL EMAIL TO SUBMIT WITH YOUR THESIS.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 03 October 2014

Progress Report 2 Due: 03 October 2015

Progress Report 3 Due: 03 October 2016

Progress Report 4 Due: 03 October 2017

Final Report Due: 03 October 2018

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew

approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/>

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of ethics approval.

Yours sincerely

Dr Karolyn White
Director of Research Ethics
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committees

Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)

Ethics Secretariat
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CRICOS Provider Number 00002J

Please consider the environment before printing this email.

Appendix B Indigenous Sex Worker Interview Schedule

Interview schedule – Indigenous Australian Sex Workers

1. Are you an Indigenous Australian?
2. Do you see yourself as, or have you been, a sex worker? Do you consider it work? Would you refer to what you do/did as something else?
3. What type of location (City/Regional/Rural/Remote) and setting (street, brothel, private etc) do/did you work in? Why do/did you choose to work in that setting?
4. How often do you/did you work?
5. Why do/did you work in the sex industry? Is there other work you would prefer to do?
6. Can you describe to me how you feel/felt about being a sex worker?
7. What are/were your 'everyday' experiences of being a sex worker?
8. Does/did working in the sex industry impact on other aspects of your everyday life?
9. Do/did you feel you have/had access to the right resources, services and supports?
10. Do/did you have the support of your family and friends?
11. Do/did you have much knowledge about the laws regarding sex workers? If so, what are your thoughts about them?
12. Do/did you believe that you are/were discriminated against because of your work?
13. Have you had any paid/unpaid roles supporting or providing services to Indigenous Sex Workers? Can you tell me about your experiences in this role?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

Appendix C Participant Information and Consent Form



FACULTY OF
ARTS

Warawara

Department of Indigenous Studies

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109 AUSTRALIA

Associate Professor Michelle Trudgett
Email: michelle.trudgett@mq.edu.au
Phone: (02) 9850-8631

Information and Consent Form

Name of Project: *Understanding Indigenous Sex Workers in New South Wales*

You are invited to participate in a study of Indigenous Sex Workers in New South Wales. The purpose of the study is to understand the everyday lives of Indigenous sex workers, their identity, and some of the reasons why they have entered the sex industry.

The study is being conducted by Corrinne Franklin, through the Department of Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University. Corrinne be contacted on: 02 9850 6751 or corrinne.franklin@mq.edu.au.

The project is being conducted to meet the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of:

Associate Professor Michelle Trudgett
Warawara, the Department of Indigenous Studies
michelle.trudgett@mq.edu.au or (02) 9850 8631

and

Dr. Sandie Suchet-Pearson
Department of Environment and Geography
sandie.suchet@mq.edu.au or (02) 9850 8393

If you decide to be involved, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. It is expected that each interview will last for 60-90 minutes duration. You will be given a Coles-Myer gift card of \$50.00 to thank you for your time. With your permission Corrinne will audio-record the interview and take notes. The recording is for transcription purposes only. The recording will not be shared with anyone outside the research team or a professional transcription service.

Whilst not intended, participating in this research may be emotionally distressing or uncomfortable, therefore you may wish to bring a family member or support person with you. A list of support and counselling services are included with this form. Any ethical concerns in regards to this research may be directed to A/Prof Michelle Trudgett on 02 9850 8631 or michelle.trudgett@mq.edu.au.

The information you provide will be used in the writing of a Doctoral thesis as well as resulting publications and presentations. Whilst the information will be made public knowledge, your identity will be kept confidential. Participants should note that the purpose of this study is to understand your everyday experiences of sex work and any information regarding illegal behaviour should not be divulged.

If you are willing to be involved in this study please contact Corrinne Franklin on 02 9850 6751 or corrinne.franklin@mq.edu.au to arrange a suitable time and venue for the interview.



I, *(participant's name)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name: _____
(Block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____
(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please indicate how you would like to be referred to in the thesis and other publications (including journal article and conference presentations): Preferred pseudonym (optional) _____

☐ - I agree to have my de-identified quotes used in publications, presentations and related outputs.

A summary of the results of the data can be made available to you. Please indicate a postal or email to send summary _____

Alternatively, if you do not wish to supply your contact details you can contact Corrinne Franklin, on corrinne.franklin@mq.edu.au for a summary of the results.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)

Appendix D Service and Support Providers Interview Schedule

Interview schedule – Service and Support Providers

1. What is your current position?
2. Do you have much contact with Indigenous Sex Workers?
3. What services, and supports to you provide to Indigenous Sex Workers?
4. Can you tell me about your experiences in providing services and support to Indigenous Sex Workers?
5. Do you feel that Indigenous Sex Workers have access to appropriate resources, services and supports across NSW?
6. What do you think are the 'everyday' experiences for Indigenous Sex Workers?
7. Do you think that Indigenous Sex Workers have different experiences compared to non-Indigenous Sex Workers?
8. What do you think are the current issues facing Indigenous Sex Workers?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

Appendix E Service and Support Providers Information and Consent Form



FACULTY OF
ARTS

Warawara

Department of Indigenous Studies
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109 AUSTRALIA

Associate Professor Michelle Trudgett
Email: michelle.trudgett@mq.edu.au
Phone: (02) 9850-8631

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Name of Project: *Understanding Indigenous Sex Workers in New South Wales*

You are invited to participate in a study of Indigenous Sex Workers in New South Wales. The purpose of the study is to understand the everyday lives of Indigenous sex workers, their identity, and why they have entered the sex industry. As a service or support provider to Indigenous Sex Workers your experiences will inform current resource, service and support provision, as well as current policy and legislation debates.

The study is being conducted by Corrinne Franklin, through the Department of Indigenous Studies contact: 02 9850 6751 or corrinne.franklin@mq.edu.au.

The project is being conducted to meet the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of:

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If you decide to be involved, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. It is expected that each interview will last for 60-90 minutes. With your permission I will audio-record the interview and take notes. The recording is for transcription purposes only. The recording will not be shared with anyone outside the research team or a professional transcription service.

Any ethical concerns in regards to this research may be directed to Dr Michelle Trudgett on 02 9850 8631 or michelle.trudgett@mq.edu.au.

The information you provide will be used in the writing of a Doctoral thesis as well as resulting publications and presentations.

If you are willing to be involved in this study please contact Corrinne Franklin on 02 9850 6751 or corrinne.franklin@mq.edu.au to arrange a suitable time and venue for the interview.

I, *(participant's name)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name: _____
(Block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____
(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please indicate how you would like to be referred to in the thesis and other publications (including journal article and conference presentations):

Name and position: _____

or if you wish to remain anonymous please provide a pseudonym: _____

☐ - I agree to have my quotes used in publications, presentations and related outputs.

Individuals will only be referred to as indicated above. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the data. A summary of the results of the data can be made available to you. Please indicate a postal or email to send summary _____

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)