REGULAR ARTICLE

Exploration of My Aboriginal Heritage: An Autoethnography

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Abstract

This autoethnography tells the story of myself, a blonde haired blue-eyed Aboriginal woman exploring identity and belonging. It begins with a brief overview of the dark history that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced as a result of colonisation and policy makers. An autoethnographic journal was kept over the course of several months, documenting affective responses to questions concerning the aboriginal identity of the author. These subjective responses informed a written personal narrative as well as creating the foundation for retrospective reflections on the journal that appears later in the autoethnography. A number of theories are then explored in an effort to explain the phenomena behind finding and belonging to two cultures, white Australian and Aboriginal.

Keywords Aboriginal · Ancestry · Colonisation · Indigenous

Our Story

'We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love… and then we return home'.—Australian Aboriginal Proverb.

It is not surprising that every year toward the end of January, the debate resurfaces surrounding Australia Day and the idea to change the date. On one side you have some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ('Indigenous' hereafter) and on the other is some 'white' Australian's ('white' refers to the culture not specifically the skin colour) (David, 2017). Why would we want to celebrate the anniversary of the start of the colonisation process that almost extinguished our culture.

On the 26 January 1788, the first settlement of English convicts was established on Australian shores (David, 2017). It was not long before clashes between Indigenous peoples and the settlers became frequent. With two parties competing for the same land and resources, a genocide was committed (Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997). Additionally, the English also introduced diseases such as smallpox which the Indigenous

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people were not familiar with and did not possess immunity against (Clarke, 2002). It is for these reasons and more that between 1788 and 1900, the Indigenous population decreased by 90% (Markwick et al., 2019).

Despite evidence that Indigenous peoples had been living and working the Australian land for up to 65,000 years prior to the arrival of European settlers, they claimed the land pointing fault at Indigenous people for failing to claim it prior (David, 2017). While land ownership remains a contentious issue to this day in Australia, many people fail to recognise and understand the special connection that Indigenous people have to the land (Ganesharajah, 2009). As more and more land was taken, the Indigenous people were reduced to poverty (David, 2017).

It was becoming assumed by the settlers that Indigenous people could not or would not adapt to their cultural European normalities and were a race doomed for extinction (David, 2017). Reserves were set up in an attempt to segregate Indigenous people from settlers to protect Indigenous people from abuse and 'soften' their passing, or at least that is what the government claimed (David, 2017). Churches created missions in an effort to train Indigenous people for work and teach them the Christian religion (Read, 2000).

By 1909, each state in Australia had passed the Aborigines Protection Act which authorised the establishment of the Aborigines Protection Board (Behrendt & Kennedy, 1997). The Board was appointed to protect Indigenous people from any kind of injustice (Behrendt & Kennedy, 1997). However, in reality, the Boards enforced more injustice and restricted more of the Indigenous people's rights including their right to marry, to control their own finances and their freedom of movement (Behrendt & Kennedy, 1997). One of, if not, the most controversial rights given to the board of protectors, was their right to remove children from their Indigenous parents to be raised in 'white' culture. Thus created, the Stolen Generation (Behrendt & Kennedy, 1997).

The Stolen Generation makes an already dark history pitch black. The Protection board took it upon themselves to remove both 'full-blooded' and 'half-caste' children, a title given to a person of mixed race (Moses, 2004). 'Half-castes' were considered by non-Indigenous Australians a superior race over 'full-blooded' Indigenous people (David, 2017). Social Darwinism lead 'white' Australia to believe that with Indigenous Australians being the most inferior race and unable to adapt to the superior British race, that their people and culture would go extinct (David, 2017). The non-Indigenous Australian's viewed themselves as the protectors of the Indigenous Australians (David, 2017). Therefore, the protectors implemented a plan to try and 'save' the Indigenous population. The protectors believed the white portion of blood in a mixed race child gave them the possibility to become integrated into 'white' society so long as they were removed from their family and culture from a young age and raised 'white' (Behrendt & Kennedy, 1997). These ideas shifted the hierarchy of races. While the 'full-blooded' Indigenous people were deemed unchangeable and left to slowly disappear, the mixed-race people were viewed as having a glimmer of hope for assimilation (David, 2017).

As the years continued, civil rights were granted to Indigenous people in the 1930s (David, 2017). In 1961, the Native Welfare Conference of Federal and State Ministers introduced the policy of assimilation (Native Welfare Conference: Verbatim record of proceedings, 1961). It stated that all 'Aborigines and part-Aborigines' would enjoy the same rights and privileges and would be influenced by the same beliefs and accept the same customs (The Policy of Assimilation, 1961). Essentially, the policy stated that Australia would remain 'white' encompassing colour, culture and way of life. This policy put into words what had been implied since the commencement of colonisation; Australia's foundation is based on whiteness and the British race being superior.

In 1965, the policy of assimilation was amended to outline that Indigenous people were encouraged to choose to assimilate (David, 2017). Approximately 90.77% of Australians voted yes to Indigenous people being placed outside of the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth (David, 2017). In the 1970s, there was a recognition of a unique status as Indigenous (David, 2017). This assisted Indigenous people to regain an aspect of their identity. In 1971, the Labour government led by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam was elected (Hocking, 2014). Whitlam was determined to improve the lives of Indigenous people (Hocking, 2014). That same year the Aboriginal flag was embraced, symbolic of unity (David, 2017).

The 1977 Bringing them Home report recognised the wrongs committed against Indigenous people by past governments. Many victims of the Stolen Generation describe a loss of identity and belonging after losing their connection to culture, family and the land whilst also never being considered 'white' by the non-Indigenous community. This report led to the first Sorry Day on 26 May 1998. A reconciliation movement emerged and thrived through the 1990s and into the 2000s. This has been referred to as the reconciliation era. A Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was created comprising of 12 non-Indigenous and 13 Indigenous leaders. Their main objective was to promote a process of reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the wider Australian community. This echoed Prime Minister Paul Keating's desire to acknowledge the damage done to the Indigenous people in the past, accept responsibility for the consequences, and look forward to a united future.

The history wars in Australia are an ongoing debate over the interpretation of Australia's history (Parkes, 2007). The history pertains to the development of Australia's contemporary society through British colonisation and particularly with regard to their treatment of and impact on Indigenous Australian's (Parkes, 2007). Prime Minister Paul Keating was forging a future that saw race relations to be a central characteristic giving attention to the issues of the Indigenous people (Parkes, 2007). Unfortunately, the succession of John Howard as Prime Minster in 1996 saw a shift in vision. John Howard sort to re-establish conservative views of Australia and enhance the achievements made by British culture that was grounded in Christian ethics (Parkes, 2007). In 1993, John Howard criticised the 'black armband' view of history giving the debate a high profile (David, 2017). John Howard continually rejected the idea of a negative Australian history and warned schools against teaching students in Australia about a racist or our bigoted past (David, 2017).

On Sorry Day in 2000, 250,000 people walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge displaying their support for reconciliation. Following the display of support from the non-Indigenous community, the 2000 Olympic Games were held in Sydney featuring our Indigenous cultures and history with the theme of reconciliation. Cathy Freeman became the face of Indigenous Australia when she raced home to win Gold in the 400 m Final.

In 2008, the reconciliation movement climaxed with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd stepping up and doing what John Howard before him refused to do. He officially apologised to the Stolen Generations. Not only was this speech a sincere apology for the mistreatment of the first Australians, but it was a commitment to the development of equality and unity in the future. Racism exists at all levels of Australian culture (Dunn & Nelson, 2011). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020) reports that one in six Australians experienced some form of discrimination in the last 12 months. Systemic racial discrimination is prevalent across different institutions from schools, to hospitals, prisons and into the wider community (Burke et al., 2019). The Indigenous population is overrepresented in prisons nationwide, and as a result, all Indigenous people suffer the stigma of being dangerous and violent (Bagaric et al., 2020). Concurrent with the inherently racist society Australia has, is the culture of denial.

Aim

It is also important to note that.

'Those who lose dreaming are lost'—Aboriginal Australian Proverb.

The aim of this paper is to explore how my two conflicting identities are interplaying within myself and address the struggles I have faced as an Indigenous blonde-haired blue-eyed woman in the claiming of my personal cultural identity, my internal emotions of not knowing where I belong. A particular emphasis is placed on my Aboriginal heritage. This is because when I made claim to my English and German heritage, no one blinked. However, questions are raised when I inform people of my Aboriginality which further perpetuates my fraudulent feelings. Theoretical explorations have interacted reciprocally with introspection, informing my auto-ethnography. These are documented below.

Autoethnography as Method

Until recently, the majority of the research was conducted on Indigenous people and our culture without permission, consultation or involvement from the Indigenous community (Ormiston, 2010). Contemporary research, however, is more participatory, paying attention to notions of self-determination and the value of indigenous knowledge systems (Ormiston, 2010). This can be done through many methods, some are more appropriate than others for use within the Indigenous populations (Smith, 2012). Smith's (2012) work of decolonising research is increasing the culturally appropriate types of research that can be utilised when working with Indigenous culture. The self-exploration of culture found in autoethnographies is one of these methods.

Autoethnographies are a form of qualitative research, growing in popularity (Anderson, 2006). Autoethnographies attempt to experience, reflect on and represent through evoking the interrelationship between individual and collective experience, self and culture, appeals for social justice and identity politics (Holman Jones, 2007). Both Adams (2005) and Wood (2009) advocate autoethnographies, avoid inflexible definitions of what is believed to be meaningful research and look through a wider lens at the world. Anderson (2006) believes autoethnography is a unique form of academic research as the primary outcome is a quest for self-understanding.

Manning and Adams (2015) outline a variety of strengths of autoethnography, providing a critical bridge between the psychological and the cultural domains. This method can be used to critique cultural norms, to challenge readers through accessible and affective means, appealing to both lay and academic audiences. Shweder (1991), the cultural psychology pioneer, argues that the psyche and culture are mutually constructed and cannot be separated. He also suggests cultural psychology is less about psychic unity for humankind; rather, it is about cultural differences within the mind, self and emotion. With this definition in mind, it stands to reason that an autoethnography is a sufficient methodology to undertaking the exploration of my ethnic divergences within my mind, self and emotions.

From an Indigenous perspective, an autoethnography is culturally valid (White, 2010). Indigenous people rely on oral-based story-telling as a form of teaching about the land, culture and the past (White, 2010). Autoethnographies also have been recognised as a tool for correcting versions of history which have been distorted by colonialism (White, 2010) Furthermore, they are a relevant platform for emerging Indigenous researchers to voice aspects of their own culture, research and history of their own people (White, 2010).

There are no set rules when writing an autoethnography; authors approach them individually (Spieldenner & Eguchi, 2019). However, there are commonalities generally observed between the papers. The driving force behind the papers are self (auto), ethno (culture) and graphy (writing) (Whitinui, 2013). Also, autoethnographies are typically written in first person, and whilst usually approached solo, there are some papers that have been done as a collective (Anderson et al., 2020).

I have used my experiences of researching Indigenous culture throughout my higher research degree as a focal point of this autoethnography. This was explored through written journal reflections that focused on how I identify as an Indigenous Australian. Writing started in March 2020, approximately a month post commencement of my PhD research. I wrote entries in times I was feeling conflicted, embarrassed, fraudulent, angry or anxious about a situation pertaining to my identity as an Indigenous Australian. These emotions were chosen as they were the most commonly felt at the time of embarking on this journey of self-discovery. This does raise some concerns for preselection bias. However, I believe it to be a true indication of how I felt navigating my identity last year and I believe this needs to be, and is reflected clearly. It is also important to note that most of the experiences shared revolve around my Aboriginality and the experiences that I have had pertaining to that culture. This is also a reflection of how I felt at the time with my identity. I felt the need to lay my claim to my Aboriginality through a journey of self-discovery to learn more about my culture and myself. It is suspected that this is due to the outward stereotype in which I fit. Based on my appearance, I present how one would expect a person with English and German roots to. Therefore, myself and others do not question my belonging to white Australia. It is for this reason that this autoethnography focuses on my struggles to belong within the Aboriginal community. There is little taught through the education system about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. However, a lot taught about Westernised cultures and the role they have played in history.

To learn more about my culture, I had to do the exploration myself. It is important to note that some of my diary entries were triggered by events happening outside of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Space (e.g. the Black Lives Matter movement). However, my reflections were more rooted within the knock-on effect that the initial event had on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This was done as I was emotionally triggered by the events. It is important to acknowledge that I did originally find a routine with writing reflections and this may have affected some of the entries. At the start of my journal entries, I did set a date for me to sit down and write; however, given the world was plunged into a health pandemic around the same time, my sources for writing inspiration were limited. Therefore, it is believed that some of the first entries may not have been triggered by the emotive feelings previously outlined as the basis for writing. Having said that, as I got further along on my journey, I understood the point of the paper more and therefore adjusted my practice to reflect the method stated. Some of the journal entries have been synthesised into this paper to demonstrate the struggles I have endured and the solutions I have embodied. I hope my realisations and honest experiences may resonate with anyone in a similar position and let them know, you are not alone.

My Story

'Racism is a disease in society. We're all equal. I don't care what their colour is, or religion. Just as long as they're human beings they're my buddies'.—Mandawuy Yunupingu.

This story begins in 1850. Around this time, the introduced European diseases had already significantly declined the Indigenous population. Urbanisation pressures meant more Indigenous people were displaced from their lands to supply more land for the settlers. Concurrently, Indigenous people resisted dispossession and strived for ways to maintain their culture. Furthermore, in Tasmania specifically, the black wars had ended over a decade ago; however, the Indigenous community still lived in fear of what might follow (Johnson & McFarlane, 2015). Additionally, the tragedy at Oyster Bay had started prior to 1850 and would continue afterwards (Johnson & McFarlane, 2015). Lastly, 25 August 1850 in Hobart saw the birth of my ancestor Rachel E Collier.

The information documented in regard to Rachel's life events are minimal. Family history search revealed she was adopted by two settlers from Britain, Henry Collier and Elizabeth Smith, shortly after her birth. The details accessible surrounding the adoption are sparse. However, the circumstances that existed in Tasmania in 1850 make it possible to deduce why her biological parents chose to give her up for adoption. The Administrative Appeals Tribunal and Independent Indigenous Advisory Committee were both satisfied with my family's Aboriginality as it was confirmed by several recounts of our oral history with Rachel being easily identified as Aboriginal given her features. Rachel married George James Price, a white English settler, on 21 March 1866 and produced 14 children including my Grandma's grandfather, Albert Sidney Price.

My mother found out about our Aboriginal blood after the birth of my eldest brother. Her mother, my grandmother, knew of the family history and realised there may be some benefits of legally claiming our Aboriginal heritage. Although our Aboriginal roots were known throughout the family, it was never discussed. However, in the 90s, during all three of our births, the social and political context was improving to recognise Indigenous people as equal to all others and closing the gap was in everyone's best interest.

I was introduced into the story in 1994. Paul Keating was elected Prime Minster the year before, the reconciliation movement was starting to catch fire, and the history wars were in full swing. I was born in the winter to two middle class white parents. As the first girl from three babies, I like to say I completed the family.

Upon my mum and grandma's investigation of our family history and the claiming procedure of our Aboriginality, some discoveries were made. Firstly, in the 90s, in order to be recognised by the government and claim benefits your family had to be an active member of the mob you originated from. This obstacle proved challenging given all of mum's immediate family had relocated to the Gold Coast. Although my grandma's father still resided in Tasmania, she simply told my mum to 'forget it'.

My grandma's father and brothers were ashamed of our Indigenous heritage. Like many people at the time, they denied any Aboriginal ties and would shut down the conversation if anyone was ever to bring it up. Given the history in which they witnessed firsthand as well as the stigma that has surrounded Indigeneity through the generations, my grandma's immediate family caved to stigmas and negative popular thoughts at the time regarding the Indigenous people and attempted to cut all ties. I can recall many times through my life when enquiring about why we do not claim our heritage mum stated we could not do anything about it. For a long time as a child, this left me unsatisfied and I felt trapped. Upon reflection, it is suspected that my trapped feelings at the time manifested as a result of me wanting to claim my heritage and being told that it was not possible. I had already invested a part of identity to being Aboriginal and being told that I was not enough was quite a traumatic experience. This experience has followed me through my journey and haunted me at the start when I was first connecting with culture. It was hard to lay my claim to my Aboriginality and hold my breath as the person I was talking to decided how they would

respond. Living in fear that at anytime some person may call me out for not being enough Aboriginal. These fears do not arise anywhere near as much as before; however, to say they are completely gone would also be a lie.

By the time I reached university, I had developed a stronger sense of self and found my own passions and voice. It was in this space I was able to align myself with the Indigenous centre on my university's campus. I made great friends and found wonderful cultural mentors within this centre. Most people I met within the centre did not fit a stereotype physically or mentally and offered a sense of reassurance to my place within the community. It is also within this setting that my identity changed, not only within my mind but also officially.

Policy changes within the government applied to the restrictions put in place on an individual's ability to claim their Indigenous heritage were reconsidered. Today, in order to identify as an Indigenous Australian, you must satisfy three statements. One must be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, one must identify as being of said descent and lastly, one must be an active member of the Indigenous community in which they currently or have previously lived. Being officially recognised as an Indigenous Australian gave me a sense of belonging and filled me with a feeling of need, a need to discover my self-identity within a culture that for too long has been fighting to have its voice heard.

Along my cultural journey, I have often felt turmoil inside. Firstly, not being able to claim my heritage identifying as an Indigenous Australian without meeting the stereotype often people raise their eyebrows. I will still often be challenged on my Aboriginality, commonly faced with the question 'how much percent.' This commonly received question suggests that the common conception of Aboriginal identity is synonymous with the stereotype. Every time I received this comment, I felt a rise in my anxiety levels. I think because posing that question suggested some form of doubt from the asker, and previously I may have partially agreed with their doubt. The disconnection to culture I grew up with, in addition to the changing definition of what was accepted by the government in previous time, may offer some kind of explanation to why I may have partially agreed with their doubt. Over the years, I have crafted a response that aligns with my cultural views that also allows me to educate people. I was able to change my reactions to this question as a result of my own personal education into my culture, my heritage and also by forming deeper connections.

In previous years, I have actively sought out opportunities to immerse myself in cultures across the world by volunteering trips, travelling, reading, studying and working. I have done this as a way to engage and understand the hardship facing cultures and minorities in today's society. This is where I developed my love of culture as well as realised the amount of social injustice in everyday life. These discoveries have influenced and driven my research.

Since continuing my tertiary education, I have witnessed my growth in comfort of belonging. However, I have also been able to use the opportunities that arose to benefit myself and others through education. I believe education to be our strongest ally in these times, and as an educator, I believe I have a duty to lead people out of ignorance about the cultures that surround them. In the reflective practice section, you may witness the troubles I faced while studying the Indigenous culture as well as the transition that happened inside me. I went from feeling fraudulent, claiming my heritage as I did not fit the stereotype in regard to looks or upbringing, to then growing in my understanding of in our differences and that identity comes from within.

My ancestral history and life experiences thus far have all combined to make me the unique person I am. I believe in the earlier days of my existence I did not understand what

it meant to claim my Indigenous heritage. My grandparent's denial of our cultural past made me think there might be something wrong. This likely contributed to my feelings of struggling to belong I experienced in the early stages of my identity journey. However, taking the time to educate myself and connect further with my Aboriginal culture, I have found that my belonging and understanding of my identity have increased.

I find comfort in the idea I am not alone in this. Many people with dual heritage have walked this path before me and found ways to peacefully identify within themselves. Ineese-Nash (2019) published an article that explores the intersectionality of Indigenous people and as they called it settle nationhood. Ineese-Nash (2019) talks of the 'in-between' people and the implications that are experienced by these people in an ethnically ambiguous space. It is suggested within the article that reconciliation within the self is vital; this is an attempt by me to start my own reconciliation process within (Ineese-Nash, 2019).

Reflections on My Diary

'Being Aboriginal is not the colour of your skin or how broad your nose is. It is a spiritual feeling, an identity you know in your heart. … It is a unique feeling that is difficult for non-Aboriginal to fully understand'.—Unknown.

Uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2007, 2012, 2014) suggests that people are motivated to reduce feelings of uncertainty related to their social identity, in particular about their perception, attitudes and behaviours that reflect directly on themselves. Hogg's (2007, 2012, 2014) theory could be taken different ways by different people. Reducing feelings of uncertainty in this context could mean for some people like my ancestors to deny their heritage. For me and others like me, to reduce my uncertain feelings pertaining to my social identity, I immerse myself in it and learn all I can about it. This autoethnography is part of that immersion process for me.

Thursday 19th March 2020 – Tuesday 24th March 2020.
In the beginning of my degree I was in uncharted waters, my supervisor guided me through readings, previous literature, potential study topics and writing styles because I simply did not know.

This sentence was the first I made in my journal. I still stand by it and the feeling of unease, the unknown and anxiety that accompanied me in my first month of my degree. Expectations of commencing students are something that I felt have been overlooked in all of my university experiences. In a time of such change, one would think that universities could provide more insight into how a new student will be spending the next how every many years in that institution. Take it from me, a new student at a new campus regardless of how many degrees they may already possess will often feel lost, confused or anxious about commencing the degree. The first journal entry took place over the space of a week while I was finding my routine. This routine that I found was previously suggested to have initially affected my writing and the topic. However, as I moved further through this journey, I believe this routine did not affect anything discussed or the outcomes discovered. It describes my family history, back to the 1850s when my ancestors adopted their child who is now known as my great, great, great grandma Rachel.

Starting the journey to connect with one estranged culture is hard, and there are challenges along the way. As I reflect on my journey, Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) comes to mind as the driving force propelling me forward down this path. This theory

positions belongingness and love needs in the third tier. This indicates the essential nature of intimate relations, friends and the need to belong (Maslow, 1943). Additionally, belonging has also been argued that it should be analysed as both a personal and private feeling of being 'at home' in a place as well as a broad resource that constructs, justifies or resists forms of social inclusion or exclusion (Antonsich, 2010). These are all things I have found in part along my journey and things I continue to hope to discover more.

> Thursday 19th March 2020 – Tuesday 24th March 2020.
> A few generations back in 1850 my ancestor Rachel was born in Hobart to two Full Aboriginal parents. The details are murky but from the best of our knowledge she was adopted by Henry and Elizabeth; more ancestors of mine. There were no reasons stated as why her biological parents chose adoption. However, given the historical events and genocides that were taking place between the settlers and the Indigenous people, it is not a stretch to think maybe they wanted their baby girl to live a better life.

I am now a big advocate for the Indigenous community feeling a responsibility to educate the people who are not as fortunate to be as informed as I am. To me being an advocate means working at improving the situation through any means. For some people, this may be through speaking up, through art or community engagement. For me it is through my research and educating. I have always been someone who gets involved. In the past instead of donating money to charity, I have always preferred to donate my time. I have been out to rural Aboriginal communities, I have taught English in poverty-stricken countries and I have provided mental health services in countries that do not believe in mental health. From witnessing and helping firsthand, I was able to grow as a person and it has shaped my research reason interests and personality to this day. I have found from visiting rural and remote communities a way to connect with my culture, through these connections I have been able to continue to construct my identity. It has not always been easy, at times I have been told I am not a true Aboriginal. But that is true, I also have a European heritage that contributes to who I am today. However, these times I have spent learning and helping have in hindsight made it much easier for me to say with confidence, I am Aboriginal.

Hints of this advocacy rears its head even in my first entry when I was feeling so confused about how a blonde-haired, blue eyed, Gold Coast born and raised girl would ever feel like she could honestly say and believe that she was Aboriginal. To me, being an advocate and an educator is one of the most rewarding roles. It allows me to better inform others of the history and current needs of the Aboriginal community. When I staked my claim in my schooling years to my family, they laughed, to my friends they asked in disbelief "What percentage?" Back then, with no connections to my community and only an oral history to validate my story, I fell victim to the belief of my social surroundings and their construction of what an Aboriginal person needs to be. The passage below was written when I was starting this self-exploration of my identity and more specifically my diary. One can see that it was written by someone struggling with their identity; it talks of me feeling fraudulent in my claim on my Aboriginal heritage. When I felt fraudulent through this experience, I often thought someone was going to realise I was an imposter, and this made my anxiety levels skyrocket. Through this process I was able to break down these feelings and it becomes evident as one continues through this paper that my whole attitude changes and there is a shift in my comfortability of identifying as being Aboriginal.

> Thursday 19th March 2020 – Tuesday 24th March 2020.

I know back then and still to this day feel a bit fraudulent in my claim to my Indigenous ancestors routine because I myself do not meet the stereotype. Not in looks, not in geographical locations, not in association, not in my upbringing, not in my connection to my culture, not in my social circle, not in my struggles and not in my success etc. But something I do know is that I am doing everything I can through my studies and actions to find a connection to my heritage where I don't feel like a token white girl with a bit of black blood but where I can advocate for Indigenous mental health and wellbeing, where I can implement strategies to try and further the Indigenous population of Australia and where I can accept that I do belong to this culture despite how different my personal journey has been to get here.

During 2020, many more stories of growth, resiliency and self-discovery have taken place with more to come. We as one world are still facing the struggles brought on by COVID-19. The role that a worldwide pandemic plays through my journal entries offers an interesting intersection. I was still finding my feet with the journal entries when the fear and Australia wide lock downs happened. Luckily, the remote and rural Indigenous communities were able to contain the outbreak and isolate any major risks to health. However, according to my thoughts back in late March, early April, the media coverage and health advice being given really highlight the health disparities that are so evident within Australian culture.

Sunday 29th March 2020.
The word on everyone's lips is Corona and do not we wish it was because they were giving away free beer. This virus has taken most of the world by surprise. The densely populated cities of Australia are no exception with Sydney and Melbourne areas leading the count of infected people. It is not surprising however, that central Australia has now had two confirmed cases of a pair that was travelling abroad recently.

At this stage, I had not completely grasped the full idea of my methodology and only writing when irked. I was in the mindset of needing electronically to put pen to paper and document my thoughts, feelings and opinions every week regardless if I had something to say or not. Therefore, on that same day, advocate Emily took to her computer and highlighted what at that time I called…
The everyday facts that are brought to light once again during a crisis.

– A large portion of Indigenous people live in remote locations with diminished access to health care
– Indigenous people are vulnerable and at an increased amount of risk.
– Indigenous Australians are facing increased amounts of racism from the medical industry
– Funding is reaching remote communities last.
– Indigenous people are having to make do.

I found some benefits to arise from COVID-19; I was able to give my full attention to my studies. At the time I was participating in a long distance relationship and we were able to lock down together for 6 weeks before returning to our distant communities. Also, how could I not mention the coronavirus supplement offered by the Australian government. However, accompanying the good is always the bad, such as unnecessary deaths,

increased mental health issues, most economies nose dived and more personally not only did it the breaks on my social life but also my journey of self-discovery.

Sunday 5th April 2020.
Well it feels like the world is on hold. As more positive coronavirus cases are confirmed the more restrictions get put in place which makes my journey of ethnic discovery hit the breaks. Not much to discover in a two-bedroom apartment.

Thankfully, COVID-19 could not kill the internet, so the research continued. I had a bit of a revelation on 21 April 2020. Like most breakthroughs, it was preceded by feelings of embarrassment, followed by self-reflection and the breakthrough coming from hindsight. At this point in my journey, I had realised that if I was talking to a fellow Indigenous person about Indigenous issues, I would assume a fly on the wall role. However, if put in front of anyone else who is not informed on Indigenous issues, I would be the first one to offer an opinion and share my education. Reflecting upon this now, I believe, this was fuelled by struggle with my identity. I did not want to be caught out as not being a 'real Aboriginal' and figured as long as the person whom I am conversing with knows less about the topic than I do, I am fine to offer my thoughts on the subject. I have in the past always found it hard to ask about the Aboriginal culture. I felt like I needed to know everything as I was claiming to be a part of it. That is why the below passage made it into my diary. Knowing I had to ask another student a question about culture in which I claim to be part of made my anxiety rise, like I was going to be caught out as an imposter. I now know that most people are on a journey of self-discovery within this culture. It is why we often consult our elders for respectful practice, as they know most about the culture. Accepting that I am on a journey and not supposed to have all the answers has really helped me grow further.

Tuesday 21st April 2020.
It was quite an embarrassing but also a formative time yesterday… I emailed another student a question who has more connections to our heritage as she grew up in it. Despite having told her my lack of connectivity with our culture in the past I still felt the need to explain it to her again at the start of the email in an effort to justify my question and not look unknowledgeable… I realise this has nothing to do with me worrying about being silly specifically…It is this subject in specific that I feel increased amounts of turbulence within myself. It's like I have this tug-o-war going on inside my head. On one side we have thoughts like,
"You are studying Indigenous Australians in your PhD and you don't know the first thing about their culture". "Everyone always looks surprised or asks you what percentage when you tell them". "You haven't experienced the hardship or problems that Indigenous people stereotypically face". "What gives you the right to claim your Indigenous heritage?"
And on the other end hand I fight back the negative talk with comments like "it's about finding your own journey", "I cannot fix how my ancestors chose to live, I cannot control the way they chose not to claim their heritage, all I can do is change the way I live my life, making the choice to identify, advocate and do the research to make a change for future generations". "Older generations may have only been disowning their heritage to protect their family, goodness knows the history here is dark". "You are making an impact and change the way you know how". "Sure, I might not have faced the negative outcomes of stereotypical Indigenous people, but I sure as hell didn't get the positive ones either, I don't know how rich our culture is and how resourceful we can be and I have barely heard any dream time stories" "I am

a little disappointed, that I haven't been able to get the same cultural upbringing that other people with a similar bloodline have".

In the end, it really comes down to my identity, how I feel like a bit of a token Aboriginal; How I really want to feel like looking the way I do and claiming my heritage doesn't stir up doubtful looks on others faces or even a fraudulence/ anxiety within myself. I want to find where I belong.

The previous entry was a pivotal moment for me. A theme emerges in the following entries that can only be self-described as strength. From 21 April 2020 onwards, it becomes clear to me that I am finding myself comfortable in my identity and feel like I belong to my culture that I had previously doubted. There is no more second guessing myself or internal struggles, rather more second guessing other peoples' use of language and media representations of the Indigenous Australian culture.

The diary entry below highlights one of the many names in which people with a unique dual heritage have been called in the past. However, I resonate with this idea of being a hybrid. This idea was proposed through hybridity theory (Bhadha, 1994). The theory postulates hybrid self-identity as related to an individual who has access to two or more ethnic identities (Easthope, 1998). Bhadha (1994) suggests there is a space between the designations of identity, and within this place, the possibility of cultural hybridity postulates a difference without an assumed or enforced hierarchy. Hybridity theory was established alongside Third Space Theory. It was also created by Homi Bhadha (1994) emphasising the uniqueness that lies within each person or context. Each person is seen as a product of their unique set of identity factors, conditions, location, social contexts and locations of social cultural exchange (Bhadha, 1994). Between these theories, they cover aspects of my personal feelings and self-identity that really resonate with me.

Wednesday 29th April 2020.
"Cultureless outcasts" is how urban Indigenous people have historically been referred to. That hurts. No one wants to be referred to as an outcast, that infers we are aliens, isolated and a social outsider.
Thursday 7th May 2020
The point of this piece is not to talk about the embarrassment that has haunted my family. I want to point out that the government thinks they can dictate how I Identify.
Friday 29th May 2020
Well happy Reconciliation week.
Two of the biggest days in contemporary Australian Indigenous history passed this week. And they passed by almost without a trace. Reconciliation week has been supressed this year. There's a pandemic on our hands so the media coverage has been minimal.

The Black Lives Matter movement has been happening in the background of most people's lives for many years. Police brutality and deaths in custody are something that affect many people of colour across the world. It came to a head in May when another black man named George Floyd died as a result of police brutality in Minneapolis, USA. His last few minutes were caught on camera with the police officer firmly applying pressure to his neck and George exclaiming 'I can't breathe'. This act of brutality lit a fire under the Black Lives Matter movement with rioters and protesters taking to the streets in major cities áCross America with the world soon following suit.

This event reminded me of Critical Race Theory, a framework that uses critical perspectives to examine society and culture as they relate to race, law and power (Delgado,

& Stefancic, 2017). Originally, this theory began as a theoretical movement within American Law schools which aimed to pursue a project of achieving racial anti-subordination and emancipation (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2017). Critical Race Theory recognises that racism is engrained in the foundations and systems of society. Furthermore, Critical Race Theory examines power structures and recognises they are based on white supremacy and white privilege which continues to maintain the marginalisation of people of colour (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2017). I believe this theory offers a strong explanation for the action that happened in Minnesota and the continued actions happening across America, Australia and other parts of the world. Whilst the theory originated in America, the marginalisation of minority races and the need to achieve racial emancipation and anti-subordination exist within Australia also.

> Friday May 29th 2020.
> This whole protest makes me excited. As I previously mentioned about the violence, I believe it is never the way. It is also disgusting to see how the authorities are battling the violence with even more violence. Not to mention I cannot begin to imagine the impact this is having on the African American police officers as they would, I imagine, identify with both groups. But the change I am hopeful to see in America and across the world could be the result of these riots. The communities are reacting to a social injustice that has been taking place for far too long! The rioters are taking a stand for what they believe is right and whilst you can fault the method they may have taken, I challenge anyone to say they can't see the point or the problem.

I have always tried to be involved in community; however, the above excerpt triggers a dire need inside myself to get involved even further and I believe it made me feel more connected to culture. Vikki Bell (1999) investigated belonging within the realms of performativity. By placing an emphasis on performance, Bell (1999) suggests that does not mean assuming identities are fluid and forever changing. Rather, by taking this performative nature of identities as the grounds of the theory, she identifies the increasing importance of one's need to question how identities continue to be produced, represented, and performed, effectively and passionately within a social and political context (Bell, 1999). The notion that identity is the effect of performance gives me a stronger sense of belonging within the Indigenous culture while also identifying possible ways in which to enhance my feelings of belonging. This is one of the theories that came up in my research after I wrote the below passage, and it aided in my understanding and still helps inform my actions and choices today.

I took it upon myself during the course of this year to investigate how other people in a similar position with a dual heritage find their peace with identity and belonging. After talking to different people, their thoughts, feelings and beliefs aid the development of my own identity. I felt I was not alone in this struggle between culture and identity. Their insights were similar to mine, and they had their own struggles and triumphs. These unique insights lead research in the direction to investigate belonging and acceptance and group identity.

> Friday June 29th 2020.
> I decided to take a broader approach to the issues in my research which widened my views. Belonging and acceptance are two highly researched fields within psychology. It is not just applicable to culture but probably every group. Normalising my feelings, I have found to be quite a comforting feeling. And therefore, it is no surprise

I could not find a specific theory that encompasses all I want. I was targeting a very niche part of research when the body of literature targets the masses. Hence, I have redirected my train of thought, and broadened my horizons towards the theories of belonging and acceptance, let's see how this goes.

During the COVID lockdown period, I took the opportunity to not only further my research but also my cultural development and experiences. I figured, the more integration I have within my culture and community, the more accepted I would feel from other members of the community and that would perhaps aid me in feeling like I belong. Running on this idea, I was successful with my application to be one of two Indigenous post-graduate student representatives. By inward investigation and recognition of my struggles and active participation within the Indigenous culture, I have come to feel comfortable between my dual heritage and finally found a place to belong.

Wednesday August 12th 2020.
The original premise of this methodology was to write when I am angry or uncomfortable or anxiety ridden. Well I could not be more proud to report that I don't feel uncomfortable nor do I have anxiety pertaining to identity anymore. Through the conversations I have had, the research I have done and the experiences and the studies I have participated in I have gained an understanding of identity which seems quite basic in hindsight. It is not about what other people think or want, the truth of the matter is that I am Aboriginal… As long as I do what I need to satisfy my own standards of what I believe being Indigenous means to me and how I keep fighting for our rights and educating those who need it… Whilst the fight for decolonisation continues the internal battle for me about my identity has been put to rest. I am who I am.

Leroy Little Bear (2000) suggests there are several ways to interpret the world despite the dominant worldview. He proposes the different interpretations are manifested through cultures (Bear, 2000). Specifically, it is noted that any individuals within a culture are going to possess their own personal views on all aspects of the world. I believe I have understood this theory as I have continued down my identity journey. It has become increasingly clear to me that everyone has their own views on their identity and other aspects of their life. This is such a personal experience, and no one can tell you do not belong to your culture.

Punctuation

Australia's history tells a version of history that other countries have also experienced, from our dark history in the context of colonisation to the promise of working towards reconciliation. Given the past, it is not surprising that my family history has been affected and ultimately our heritage lost. The Tasmanian Indigenous community arguably experienced the worst effects of colonisation, and I believe that contributes to the difficulty in tracing my family history.

A lot of theories were considered to try and offer an explanation to the autoethnography. No theories could be found to explain the phenomena faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that have been removed from their culture and the onwards effects that has had on their offspring. However, Marsico (2011) did aid in my understanding and made an important point. My identity is fluid, like most there will be days I am strong in my conviction and others where I might waver. This is to be expected and used as a learning curve. Perhaps in the future, there will be a more encompassing theory that more accurately

explains the space between two cultures and the struggles involved with identifying and getting actively involved.

My journal entries and reflections depict the struggles of many people that may be in a similar position. Whilst they represent my own personal thoughts, opinions and beliefs, I believe the storyline and the feelings are shared among the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that find themselves in a similar circumstance. It is important to note that every individuals' journey to discover their identity is unique. The road that I took indicates a lot about the identity process, how it can be fluid, exhausting, frightening and so empowering at the same time. It also suggests to offer long-term satisfaction and stability for those brave enough to ask themselves the hard questions. This is all very valuable information when it comes to theory building. Hopefully, my journey might provide a guide of how others may connect with their heritage also.

Declarations

Consent for Publication Both authors consent for publication.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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