Research in Aboriginal Contexts: Kimberley Voices

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Research in Aboriginal Contexts:
Kimberley Voices

Honours Dissertation
Behavioural Science

of
Luke Taaffe

Supervised by

Presented 24\textsuperscript{th} October 2008
Declaration:

I declare that this research project is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Luke Taaffe

24th October 2008
Acknowledging Contributors:

The following participants are acknowledged for contributing their intellectual property to this research project.

Andrew Amor: Milliya Rumurra Aboriginal Corporation
Joe Edgar: Nulungu: UNDA Broome, Centre for Indigenous Studies
Kevin Fong: Goolarri Media Enterprises
Steve Kinnane: Nulungu: UNDA Broome, Centre for Indigenous Studies
Tom Lawford: Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre
Wes Morris: Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre
Erica Spry: Nulungu: UNDA Broome, Centre for Indigenous Studies

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Abstract

As a result of the enduring legacy of negative Australian history and culturally inappropriate past research practices, Aboriginal peoples are generally suspicious and mistrusting of research and researchers, particularly non-Indigenous researchers. Poor relations, paternalistic policies, racial discrimination and the inherent unequal power distribution in research relationships has seen many Aboriginal communities exploited, studied as ‘the other’, robbed of intellectual property, sacred artefacts and human remains. The introduction of ethical research guidelines in recent times has since improved contemporary researcher practices; however the lack of grassroots Aboriginal community consultation regarding appropriate, culturally competent research practices led the researcher to ask Aboriginal peoples from the Kimberley region of WA their experiences, values, beliefs and insights regarding research and researchers, in particular non-Aboriginal researchers. Fourteen Aboriginal participants and one non-Aboriginal participant, all with varying past research experiences, were interviewed in Broome and Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia. Results indicate that although participant responses were consistent with formal published guidelines, a number of gaps were identified. The major themes identified in participant interviews reflect: negative history and background understandings, rationales, agendas and vested interests, relationships, dialogue, time and timing, collaboration, partnership and negotiation, power and control, informed consent, understandings and awareness, appropriate researchers, cultural awareness, reflexivity, ownership, intellectual property, acknowledgement and commercialisation, outcomes, accountability, and ethical research. Community awareness of the existence and content of standardised research guidelines is minimal, and guideline accessibility was found to be poor. Researchers must reflect and reconsider their position and the position of Aboriginal participants in research partnerships to honour decolonising research practices, the deconstruction of whiteness and the redistribution of power. A need for research
accountability and an enhanced capacity to enforce research guidelines is recommended. Further research into this topic is also recommended. The research findings are to be utilised in the policy development of Nulungu: The University of Notre Dame Australia’s Centre for Indigenous Studies, Broome Campus.

**Keywords:** Aboriginal, Australia, Awareness, Culturally Appropriate, Decolonisation, Ethical, Guideline, Kimberley, Power, Participatory Research, Principled Practice, Protocol, Reflective Practice, Research, Values Based Practice, Western Australia, Voice, Whiteness.
Contents

Acknowledging Contributors iii
Acknowledgements iv
Abstract v
Preface x
Introduction p.1
Background p.3
Literature Review p.14
Method p.41
Results p.46
Discussion p.84
Conclusion p.95
Reference List p.98
Appendices p.114
  Appendix 1: AIATSIS Guidelines
  Appendix 2: NHMRC Guidelines
  Appendix 3: Interview Questions
  Appendix 4: Introductory Letter / Information Sheet
  Appendix 5: Plain Language Statement
  Appendix 6: Informed Consent
  Appendix 7: Participant Brief Results & Supplementary Consent
  Appendix 8: Reflections: Research Process & Initial Project
  Appendix 9: Additional Recommendations
Table 1: Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronyms:</th>
<th>Explanation:</th>
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<tr>
<td>UNDA</td>
<td>The University of Notre Dame Australia</td>
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<td>CIS</td>
<td>Centre for Indigenous Studies; located at the UNDA Broome Campus. The Aboriginal name given to the UNDA CIS is ‘Nulungu’</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIATSIS</td>
<td>The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies</td>
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<td>National Health and Medical Research Council</td>
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<td>North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance</td>
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“Research is a bit of a grubby word…”

(Participant 10)
Preface

As a non-Indigenous researcher conducting research in Aboriginal contexts, it is important for me to introduce myself and this project. In this preface I clarify the terms used, introduce the supervisors and community cultural consultant, and position myself in this research. I also introduce the ‘initial project’ from which this research was developed.

Definitions and Terminology

The terminology used throughout this project has been discussed and selected in collaboration with academics at Nulungu: The University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) Broome’s Centre for Indigenous Studies (CIS).

The term ‘Aboriginal’ is derived from the Latin ‘Ab origine’ signifying ‘those from the beginning’. The term was co-opted by Europeans during colonisation as ‘Aborigines’ instead used the names of diverse sovereign tribal groups, not having any need for such a ‘collective’ term (Crawford, 1989; Hirst, 2006; Reconciliation WA, n.d.). Similarly today the term ‘Aboriginal’ refers to the original Indigenous people of mainland Australia occupying the country before Australia’s colonisation (Frank & Smith, 2006). Furthermore, the term ‘Indigenous’ is an umbrella-like phrase referring to either or both ‘Aboriginal’ peoples and ‘Torres Strait Islander’ peoples, again as co-opted during colonisation (Commonwealth of Australia, 1998).

References to the terms ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Indigenous’ for the purposes of this project denote the Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples of Australia respectively. References to the Indigenous peoples of other countries will consequently be stated as such. Furthermore, as the project is located in Western Australia’s Kimberley region, the name of specific community groups will be used where possible and if suitable, thus acknowledging Aboriginal diversity.
and issues of homogenising terminology inherent in words such as ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Aboriginal’. However, such terms will be used if appropriate, or when cited in a direct quote.

The term ‘non-Indigenous’ will be used in this project to refer to people who are not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander ancestry and who do not identify as Indigenous. Similarly, the term ‘non-Aboriginal’ will refer to people who are not of Aboriginal ancestry and who do not identify as such, but may be of Torres Strait Islander ancestry. The term ‘Aboriginal peoples’ is consistently pluralised to again acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal peoples.

The terms ‘arrival’ and ‘colonisation’ will be used in place of ‘settlement’ and ‘invasion’ due to the emotive nature and political connotations associated with these terms. The term ‘Indigenous’ will be capitalised as a noun, and in lowercase when an adjective. Also, the term ‘non’ in ‘non-Indigenous’ will be consistently lowercase.

Supervision and Community Cultural Consultant

The project was significantly advantaged with the opportunity of having a balance of experienced Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal supervisors. The research is supervised in partnership by Associate Professor Lyn Henderson-Yates and Mr Steve Kinnane in Broome, as well as Professor Neil Drew and Dr Diane Costello in Fremantle.

The project engages Mr Joe Edgar, the Indigenous Community Liaison Officer at Nulungu: UNDA Broome’s CIS in the role of community cultural consultant. The role of the community cultural consultant involves guiding and monitoring researcher conduct during fieldwork, ensuring cultural appropriateness, aiding in participant recruitment and attending research interviews to oversee, support and translate if needed.
Positioning Self

In this self reflection I recognise that I carry the respective positive and negative social, political and historical baggage of being in the role of a researcher and representing the UNDA Fremantle and Broome campuses. I also acknowledge my ‘whiteness’ (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007; Kidd, 2002) and through collaborative research practice endeavour to shift the inherent power bound in my role as a researcher.

UNDA Broome is a Catholic institution in an area with a divisive mission history. Some community members hold fond memories of Catholic missions, nuns and priests; whereas others feel resentful and indignant towards Catholicism and mission life. In addition to this, I am a male, I am relatively young, I am non-Indigenous, I am from ‘the city’ (Perth), I was born in England, and I have mixed European ancestry from Poland, Ireland and Wales. I recognise that I am perceived differently and represent different things to different people at different times in different places. I am regarded in different political positions with many different people in settings I am unfamiliar with. I have a certain self-perception, but I must acknowledge that I am perceived in an array of different ways, many others of which I remain unaware.

I anticipate that I will be positioned in the out-group of most participants and so in my role as a researcher I must try to understand what I represent in the differing research environments within the Kimberley and how this will affect the process and outcomes of the research project. Additionally, there are further perception issues regarding the stakeholders with whom the project collaborates, engages as participants, those overseeing the project and the community cultural consultant liaising with participants. I further acknowledge that I will never fully realise the political context affecting the project as my immersion in the Kimberley socio-political context is minimal. Instead, I attempt to reflect on the implications surrounding my position as the principal researcher in this project.
Initial Project

This project was preceded by an alternate project titled: Men’s Business: Narratives of the everyday lived experience of Indigenous Australian men in Perth, Western Australia. The aim of the project was to gain an understanding of what it means to be an Indigenous Australian man as told by participants in the Perth area. The research furthermore aimed to include a social action component. The rationale underlying the topic arose from experiences of the researcher finding a significant lack of cultural understanding of Indigenous Australian men by non-Indigenous Australians, and in particular by young people. To honour the values and principles of the NHMRC (2003) ethical research guidelines, this research hoped to extend the life of data beyond the honours thesis. The data was to be compiled into educational resource booklets to promote greater understanding between cultures. The key question of investigation in this project asked: ‘what constitutes the everyday lived experience of Indigenous Australian men in Perth?’ using qualitative research techniques such as semi-structured conversational interviewing, photographs, collage, and also film; conducted in sessions of individual and possibly group interviews. Participants were to comprise of 8-10 Indigenous Australian men aged over 18 in the Perth region of various ages, backgrounds, and language-groups. Participants were to be selected in consultation with an Indigenous Australian Reference Support Group created for the project. This project was important due to the nature of Australia’s very recent history, and also the general lack of understanding that non-Indigenous Australians have of Indigenous Australian men.

Despite this project gaining Human Research Ethics Committee ethical clearance, approval from a purpose-constructed Indigenous Australian Reference Support Group, and approval from academics at UNDA Fremantle and Broome campuses and approval from two Curtin University academics, the project did not get past the stage of participant recruitment.
and it became evident that the research could not complete its projected path. This was realised via recommendations from discussions between the research team and Noongar academic Michael Wright. Wright expressed his concerns regarding the initial engagement period of the research; a topic which was discussed in the original ethics application. Wright instead stated he would support research which concentrated on the topic of non-Aboriginal researchers conducting research in Aboriginal contexts, with a focus on engagement. Wright believes that this longer commitment to the earlier stage of the research would be more appropriate and respectful of Aboriginal participants. Wright remains determined that this preliminary research is conducted ahead of any further work of Aboriginal identity, and so as a consequence the research team respected the views of Wright and have therefore reconfigured the project to focus on research in Aboriginal contexts.

A supplementary amendment to the initial ethics application was submitted stating that the first stage of the initial research project will continue, still to be monitored by Lyn Henderson-Yates. The revision of the initial project’s scope did not change the process as approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee, instead simply restricting the research to the first stage.
**Introduction**

Non-Aboriginal researchers have been conducting culturally inappropriate research in the Kimberley since Europeans first arrived in Australia (Gooda, 2007; Prior, 2007). Reflecting the racist ideologies of the era, researchers documented Aboriginal Australians as ‘the other’ (Dunbar & Scrimgeour, 2006; Smith, 1999; Vallance & Tchacos, 2001); disturbing sacred sites and burial grounds (Martin, 2004) for self-interest, without benefit or compensation for Aboriginal peoples (Prior, 2007). Despite the development of standardised guidelines for the conduct of ethical research in recent times, Aboriginal communities are continually still inundated with culturally inappropriate research projects by government departments, private organisations, PhD candidates and other institutions with vested interests (Fredericks, 2008; Gooda, 2007; Hardcastle, 2007).

Therefore, with an aim to improve current research practices, participants in Broome and Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia (WA) were asked about their thoughts, experiences and insights regarding research, researchers and the existing ethical guidelines. To honour participatory research as well as ethical guidelines, the qualitative research was designed and supervised collaboratively between the researcher, UNDA Fremantle and Nulungu: UNDA Broome’s CIS. A community cultural consultant oversaw appropriate community interactions and supervised interviews.

This dissertation will begin with a background chapter offering a broad account of Australian history from pre-colonisation to contemporary contexts. A review of the literature will follow, exploring past and contemporary research practices, theories offered to enhance understanding as well as a critique of the existing standardised research guidelines. These chapters will indicate a need for further research, shaping the rationale for this project.
The method chapter will highlight the aims, design, process and resourcing of the project, as well as ethical considerations. The results chapter will offer a qualitative narrative of the research. The results will then be discussed with reference to the literature, identified outcomes and what new information the research offers. The dissertation will conclude and offer recommendations for researcher practice and further research.
Chapter 1: Background

Historical Context

There is a significant amount of written and oral literature on topics surrounding ‘Australian history’ and relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples since colonisation. Accounts of Australian history vary from diverse perspectives, much of which is political, emotive, prejudiced and often contradictory in nature (Reynolds, 2006). This is evident in ‘the history wars’ debate between historians such as Keith Windschuttle arguing an objective account of history, promoting the rebirth of *terra nullius* and examining the reliability of ‘black armband’ views; and Henry Reynolds arguing the legitimacy of oral and ‘emotive’ accounts of Australia’s ‘black’ history (Attwood, 2005; Reynolds, 2003).

Due to the contention surrounding differing perspectives of recent Australian history, only a brief summary will be offered here to establish a background context for this project.¹ The challenge in this chapter is to succinctly, cogently and respectfully encapsulate a significant amount of literature from the many standpoints offered, without trivialising. The historical background presented in this chapter aims to describe Australia’s history highlighting the endured destruction and loss, as well as the resilience and survival of Aboriginal peoples throughout history; a history which has been refuted, disregarded and ignored by many, yet lives on in the memory of many people today.

Australian History: Dreaming to Macassan Trading

Many Aboriginal peoples say “we were always here in this country” (Reconciliation WA, n.d., p.5). Others believe Aboriginal peoples are descendants of island-hoppers from the Indonesian archipelago (Gurry, 1990; Reconciliation WA, n.d.). Aboriginal stories tell of

¹ For a complete and cogent account see: Gare & Ritter. (2008). *Making Australian History: Perspectives on the past since 1788*. 
humans carried to Australia on the backs of giant birds, and others again believe that Adam and Eve’s Garden of Eden story is based in Australia (Reconciliation WA, n.d.). Nevertheless, many scientists believe that for at least 40,000 years and arguably up to 120,000 years, Aboriginal peoples have learned to live in Australia’s harsh and variant environment (Berndt & Berndt, 1999; Glowczewski, 1999).

Aboriginal peoples developed lifestyles harmonious with climate, seasonal change, food supplies and water sources. Shelters were generally temporary and land ownership was negotiated between groups as regions of territory (Tucker, 1994). Diverse Aboriginal groups have different cultural and spiritual beliefs, yet have links transcending time, environment and kin (Hirst, 2006). Traditional Aboriginal cultures also practiced fully-enforceable legal systems within tribal groups, and also negotiated intertribal laws with other tribal leaders (Attwood, 2005). Aboriginal cultures also feature complex kin structures and relationships with the environment, relatives, different community people, animals, spirits and places (Meggitt, 1991). Aboriginal people were able to live sustainably for thousands of years working in harmony with nature to manage and live alongside the environment (Attwood, 2005).

The north Western Australian Aborigines had established both a trade and social relationship with the Macassan people of Indonesia, now Sulawesi, for hundreds of years before the arrival of the British (Barwick & Barwick, 2000). The Macassans came to Australia seasonally in search of a cucumber-like sea-slug called ‘trepang’, returning back to Indonesia for most of the year (Tucker, 1994). The Macassan people constructed only temporary shelters or campsites in Australia establishing a ‘home away from home’ (Barwick & Barwick, 2000). Government introduced legislation and the cessation of licences in 1906 subsequently ceased the Aboriginal-Macassan relationship (Tucker, 1994).
Interactions between the Aborigines and other peoples such as the Dutch from 1606, and also the French in 1772 also were established as amicable relationships (Van Zaden, 1997). Although some interactions became hostile between these early European explorers and Aboriginal peoples, the relationships overall were generally positive where language, goods, and knowledge were shared in trade (Barwick & Barwick, 2000; Van Zaden, 1997).

**European Arrival to Present: Aboriginal and European Relations**

The British arrived in Sydney, Australia on January 26th 1788. Captain James Stirling later arrived in ‘settled’ WA in 1829, proclaiming His Majesty’s Authority now applied over the Colony of WA (Government House Australia, n.d.). Despite the sustainable cultural practices of Aboriginal peoples that operated for tens of thousands of years, Europeans claimed Australia as *terra nullius*, an ‘unowned land’. The ethnocentric beliefs of colonists regarding European superiority over ‘indigenous inferiority’ worldwide accounts for the British treating Australia as *terra nullius*, otherwise known in hindsight as ‘The Blindness’ (Attwood, 2005). Consequently, the initial interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians were negative, further compounded by other factors such as the violent nature of European convicts, the ‘female shortage’ reflected in the gender ratio of over 7 men to 1 woman (Summers, 1975), introduced diseases, perpetrated massacres and the ensuing ongoing retaliative hostility and bloodshed between Aboriginal peoples and European colonisers (Bartrop, 2004; Bulbeck, 1998; Reynolds, 2006).

In the years following Australia’s colonisation, relations between the Europeans and Aboriginal peoples further deteriorated. This clash of cultures can be attributable to the nature of the British Empire’s desire to command and conquer the world (Broome, 2002). The impact of colonisation created disconnections between Aboriginal people and families, community, land, and spirituality; the essential elements of life (Meehan, 2000). European-
derived laws created by early policymakers and enforced in society led to conflict between Aboriginal tribespeople and Australian governmental authorities, with many Aboriginal people punished by hanging for crimes such as stealing sheep or threatening homesteads (Reynolds, 2006). These laws generally favoured the cases of Anglo-Australians, with Aboriginal people given harsher penalties compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Attwood, 2005). In response to colonisation, Aboriginal resistance movements and leaders emerged such as ‘Yagan’ of the South West and ‘Jandamarra’ of the North West (Pedersen & Woorunmurra, 1995; Reynolds, 2006). Frontier resistance led to conflicts between Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal Australians, Aboriginal peoples fighting for survival against mistreatment, land ownership and oppressive European-derived laws (Pedersen & Woorunmurra, 1995; Reynolds, 2006).

After the Europeans established themselves in Australia towards the beginning of the 19th Century, they began creating policies to control and manage Aboriginal people (Haebich, 1992). Although earlier policies such as Protection, Assimilation and Integration were labelled differently, each aimed to exclude Aboriginal peoples from the ‘general Australian public’, particularly for Australians of mixed Aboriginal-European ancestry (Crawford, 1989; Milnes, 2005). These paternalistic policies extended the segregating and isolating barriers between ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians and attempted to ‘breed out’ Australians who were of ‘mixed ancestry’ (Keen, 1991). The Aboriginal Protection Act 1886 gave European colonisers ‘legal authority’ to control Aboriginal peoples under the guise of ‘protecting them’, as characterised in the 1905 Act (Haebich, 1992). Protection policies forced Aboriginal people from their land into missions or settlements and denied Aboriginal peoples basic freedoms or rights regarding healthcare, education, work or travel (Haebich, 1992). Drinking alcohol was forbidden for Aboriginal peoples unless the individual was granted citizenship rights, as stated in the Natives [Citizenship Rights] Act
Aboriginal peoples could be granted a permit coined a ‘dog ticket’, signifying their citizenship rights “only if they adopted a ‘civilised life’ and did not associate with Aboriginal people without citizenship rights…” (ATSIC et al., 2007, p.17). Ideologies such as “social Darwinism” were at their height where it was thought that Indigenous peoples were ‘doomed to extinction’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997). The Bringing Them Home (1997) report highlighted the language used by non-Aboriginal people to describe the impact of social Darwinism on Aboriginal peoples, citing “a natural process of ‘survival of the fittest’ … [and] to ‘smooth the dying pillow’…” (p.23).

The Assimilation policy was thereafter formally adopted in 1951 to fix the ‘Aboriginal problem’ (The Policy of Assimilation, 1961), but the ideologies had been around since the 1930s (Haebich, 1992). The overarching goal of Assimilation was that all Aboriginal peoples were required to abandon what traditional identity they had and culture they practiced (The Policy of Assimilation, 1961); and to adapt to live in the same manner as non-Aboriginal society (Haebich & Montgomerie, 2002). The homogenisation of Aboriginal peoples consequently became a by-product of the Assimilation Policy, where Aboriginal diversity was nullified (Taylor & Nadel-Klein, 1991).

The forcible removal of children was a key feature of the assimilationist period commonly known as the ‘Stolen Generations’ (Beresford & Omaji, 1998; Commonwealth of Australia, 1997). It is generally accepted that the practice of forced Aboriginal child removal in WA was between 1910 and 1970, but others believe that such practices continued beyond this time well into the 1970s (Beresford & Omaji, 1998; Haebich, 1992). Under official policies, Aboriginal children were taken from their families dissolving any legal parental custody of Aboriginal parents (The Acts of the Parliament of Western Australia, 1905). Their children became legal wards of the state and were put into foster care and orphanages and other institutions. Some children were taken overseas and many families suffered the removal
of multiple children (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997). This was an effective method of creating disconnections between Aboriginal people and their families, culture, land, spirituality and identity resulting in many Aboriginal peoples being lost or displaced. The Bringing Them Home (1997) report conservatively estimated that at least 100,000 children were seized from their parents, but the actual number was believed to be much higher (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997). The Stolen Generations contravened the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) as stated in Article 2 (e): “forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” as a crime of genocide. Despite ratifying this convention in 1949, Australia continued assimilatory practices for at least a further 20 years (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948).

The Integration policy introduced in 1965 ‘allowed’ Aboriginal peoples to remain separate from the broader non-Aboriginal society. However, Integration still socially assimilated Aboriginal peoples, creating a pluralistic society (Jonas, 2003; Keen, 1991). Integration aimed for Aboriginal peoples to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of non-Aboriginal Australians and live as members of a single Australian community. In 1972, the Whitlam Government introduced the policies of Self-Determination and Self-Management asserting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be able to make the important decisions regarding their future (Crawford, 1989).

Introduced by the Keating Government in 1991, Reconciliation aims to improve relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Burridge, 2007). Reconciliation further respects and values Indigenous heritage and Australia’s shared history, promotes treaty, compensation, a charter of rights, land and sea rights, addresses disadvantage, creates opportunities for all Australians, and promotes justice and equity (Burridge, 2007; Reconciliation WA, n.d.). Burridge (2007) asserted that if reconciliation fails
to promote and honour substantive reconciliation in place of symbolic, rhetorical or assimilationist reconciliation, then “it is just empty rhetoric accompanied by a few symbolic gestures” (p.71), unacceptable to Indigenous Australians.

**Howard’s Intervention: The Northern Territory Emergency Response**

The previous Federal Government’s Northern Territory Emergency Response ‘Intervention’ was announced on June 21st 2007 by Prime Minister John Howard. The policy was created as an ‘emergency response’ to the problem of child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities as identified in the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle: ‘Little Children are Sacred’* (2007) report. The report outlines conditions of child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. The Intervention, however, barely resembled the *Little Children are Sacred* (2007) report on which the Intervention is said to be based (Behrendt, 2007). Moreover the implementation of the Intervention was a ‘blanket’ strategy indiscriminate of *individual* behaviour and rights (Hinkson, 2007). The Intervention was imposed without consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders. Behrendt (2007) described it as “a top-down paternalistic imposition of a half-baked policy … a recipe for failure” (p.16). Behrendt (2007) criticised the motives and construction of the Intervention as its design and implementation was devoid of any collaboration or input by those affected by it. Furthermore, the Intervention is in Northern and Central Australia; the well known battlegrounds of assimilation where Aboriginal peoples maintain traditional languages, own traditional lands and practice traditional culture while dependently surviving on ill-designed programmes (Dodson, 2007).

The lack of consultation is a pertinent shortcoming in the development and implementation of the Intervention (Hinkson, 2007), particularly as consultation is stated as a key recommendation in the *Little Children are Sacred* (2007) report (Behrendt, 2007). Sue
Gordon, head of the Northern Territory Emergency Task Force claimed that the reason there was no consultation was because the Intervention was an emergency measure. However, the ‘emergency’ is not new as child sexual abuse has been a known issue for decades, yet little had been done about it until 2007, coinciding with a Federal Government election year (Hinkson, 2007). Due to the paternalistic implementation, timing, design and location of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, the Intervention may be recognised as a contemporary example of neo-colonialism.

The recent release of the *Report of the NTER Review Board, October 2008* states in hindsight that “the Intervention was fuelled, accelerated and flawed by the heightened emotion that surrounded its inception” (p.58). Alongside a set of recommendations including adherence to the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, the report calls for genuine, respectful and culturally appropriate engagement between the Government and Aboriginal communities to determine appropriate action to achieve acceptable living standards and resolve Aboriginal “social dislocation” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p.12).

**Rudd’s Apology: ‘Sorry’**

The *Bringing Them Home* (1997) report put pressure on then Prime Minister John Howard to apologise to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Federal Government (Briskman, 2007). However, Howard “consistently refused” (Briskman, 2007, p.239). Pearson (2008) attributed this to an ongoing ‘cultural war’. The change of Federal Government from Liberal to Labor in December 2007 saw a change in Australian Prime Minister (Labor Australia, 2008), as well as a change in attitude towards an apology to the Stolen Generations. Kevin Rudd ended John Howard’s twelve years of Prime Ministership, and only weeks after beginning his term as Australian Prime Minister, Rudd sought to collaborate with Aboriginal
peoples to negotiate an appropriate apology. On February 13th 2008 Rudd apologised to the Stolen Generations:

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry… (Rudd’s apology revealed, 2008).

The day before the apology was announced, Pearson (2008) highlighted issues in the way Rudd’s apology was to be received. The symbolic implications of the apology would promote a view of Aboriginal “victimhood, rather than a stronger one of defiance, survival and agency” (Pearson, 2008). Furthermore, the lack of compensation or other tangible outcomes for Aboriginal peoples suggests that “Blackfellas will get the words, the Whitefellas will keep the money” (Pearson, 2008). The apology was overall received well by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, but the debate for compensation continues today (Pearson, 2008).

**Contemporary Context: A Fortnight in Indigenous Australian Newspapers**

Three newspapers purchased from a Broome service station offer a balanced representation of the current topics of importance to many Aboriginal peoples. The following brief account of ‘a fortnight in Indigenous Australian newspapers’ illustrates clearly and accurately stories making news in July 2008. *The Kimberley Echo* (2008) reported that a giant boab tree is being relocated from Warmun to Kings Park in Perth, as well as NAIDOC week successes and sports news. The *National Indigenous Times* (2008) reported protests of the
“racist, draconian and insulting” (p.4) 2007 Howard Intervention, sexual abuse court proceedings, the chance for a ‘US hip-hop star’ to visit an Aboriginal community, as well as sports news. The Koori Mail (2008) reported that Aboriginal men confront demons raised by the Intervention, local artists prosper, a Stolen Generations campaigner dies, a school thrives, a winning native title claim, a call for new services, and sports news.

These articles contain both positive and negative contemporary stories signifying themes of non-Indigenous interventions, celebration and awareness of culture, community issues, community successes, community needs, popular international influences and sporting successes. Dodson (1997) stated “…we read our own news because a lot of it is good news; it’s about our communities’ achievements as well as our difficulties” (p.7). The balance of stories published in these newspapers show the positive as well as negative aspects of everyday Aboriginal life despite negative Australian history.

The Enduring Consequences of Colonisation

As illustrated above, Australia’s recent colonial history was harmful and destructive, despite its refutation by some non-Indigenous Australians. After a long Aboriginal history of productivity, sustainability and sovereignty over thousands of years, Europeans have succeeded over the last 250 years in causing hurt, suffering and loss. Federal and State Governments are still unwilling or unable to fully comprehend and respect the distinctive nature of Aboriginal societies and cultures (Calma, 2006). Significant disparities exist in fundamental elements of Aboriginal lives as comparable to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Current research and statistics show that life expectancy, suicide, health, education, murder, assault, child protection, incarceration, home ownership, unemployment, income and welfare are everyday issues facing many Aboriginal peoples2 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007).

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Aboriginal mistrust, suspicion and lack of confidence in non-Aboriginal authorities are the result of racist beliefs, inappropriate policies, poor relations throughout recent history and a continuing lack of appropriate measures to resolve inherent inequities. This negative history causes what Garvey (2007) described as transgenerational trauma, stating “it is difficult to just ‘get over it’ and move on” further describing it as “the enduring legacy of Indigenous post-colonial history” (Garvey, 2007, p.43). The impunity accompanying Australia’s darker moments of recent history compounds this barrier to engagement, termed ‘thick skin’ (Garvey, 2007, p.43; Opotow, 2001). Calma (2006) in The Social Justice Report 2006 stated that “until this situation changes, even with the best will in the world, policies of ‘direct engagement’ with Aboriginal peoples are unlikely to succeed” (p.89).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

To understand and appreciate the impact of research in contemporary Aboriginal contexts, this literature review will first illustrate past research practices. Contemporary recommended research principles and practices from researcher and academic reflections will then be explored, and applicable theories will be considered. The existing accepted standardised Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (2000) (see Appendix 1) and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (2003) guidelines (see Appendix 2) will then be critiqued, and finally the literature review will state in conclusion the significance and rationale for this research project.

Past Research Practices

“Research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous vocabulary” (Smith, 1999, p.1). Aboriginal peoples have been the subject of much research inquiry throughout Australian history since the arrival of Europeans. It is widely viewed that Aboriginal people in Australia are the most researched people in the world (Fredericks, 2008; Gooda, 2007; Hardcastle, 2007; Prior, 2007; Smith, 1999).

Past research, for the purpose of this section refers to research practices from periods in time before contemporary contexts representing different ideologies ranging from colonisation until within the last thirty or so years. Nevertheless, some negative ‘past’ research practices are still maintained in present-day research projects. As a consequence of the ongoing legacy of Australia’s negative history, research invokes feelings of suspicion, mistrust and defensiveness amongst many Aboriginal peoples today (Gooda, 2007; Prior, 2007; Stewart, Anderson, Dunbar, Shibasaki, Pyett & Devitt, 2006).
Australia’s recent paternalistic research history has been described as racist, having minimal community benefit and designed without consultation (Bishop, 2007). The negative legacy of past research is rooted in colonial ideologies and misguided scientific thought (NHMRC, 2003). “…Ill-formed perceptions and assumptions about the values and ways of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures … emerged from the comparison of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world to the spiritual, social, political and economic perspectives of European colonisers” (NHMRC, 2003, p.1).

Researcher perceptions of superiority, as well as understandings rooted in European perspectives may account for the “ethnocentric authority of the researcher…” (Prior, 2007, p.164). Prior (2007) identified that founding anthropological methodologies from Malinowski, Mead, Boas, Elkin and Tindale were intrusive and inherently oppressive; likening “anthropology as a reminder of colonisation” (p.164). “Many Indigenous people remain sceptical about research, given the history of objectification and lack of Indigenous ownership” (Briskman, 2007, p.148), as well as further perpetuating beliefs of Aboriginal ‘otherness’ (Dunbar & Scrimgeour, 2006). Gower (2003) further emphasised the inappropriateness of such culturally insensitive methodologies and procedures which disregard Aboriginal “social and emotional wellbeing” (de Crespigny, Emden, Kowanko & Murray, 2004, p.7), further identifying that Aboriginal peoples have been excluded from research partnerships and ownership of projects (de Crespigny et al., 2004; Gower, 2003).

European and early Australian scientific research was conducted on plants, animals and on Australia’s Indigenous peoples, where researchers examined “the bodies and social habits of the ‘natives’ … [and] it was common practice for the scientists to collect body parts and remains … without respect [or regard] for cultural significance” (Prior, 2007 p.163). Such cultural insensitivity was further perpetrated throughout Australian history. The Australian Psychological Society (APS) (2003) recognised cultural insensitivity and lack of consultation
in past psychological research. The APS (2003) identified that such practices formed a precursor to the poor provision of services, and as a consequence the appropriated data had little or no benefits to participants, “[contributing] minimally, if at all, to the quality of life of these people” (p.6).

Throughout history, academic ‘experts’ for the enhancement of status have damagingly appropriated, reconstructed and misrepresented Aboriginal cultural knowledge (Briskman, 2007; Gower, 2003; Hardcastle, 2007). “While researchers got their PhDs and built reputations around that research, there was little or no benefit to the research subjects” (Gooda, 2007, p.6). As a result, Aboriginal peoples became sceptical of research benefits highlighting the extractive one-way nature of past research (Hardcastle, 2007; Prior, 2007).

Case study example:

The following case study is a fitting example of extractive past research practices which were well publicised and well-known to many Aboriginal peoples in the Kimberley. Swedish scientist Eric Mjöberg conducted zoological and ethnographic research in 1910 through the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and also in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria (King, 2004; Prior, 2007). Mjöberg bribed Aboriginal peoples to take him to their sacred sites and burial grounds where, without Aboriginal permission, he disturbed and excavated the sites and smuggled skeletons and artefacts to Sweden telling authorities they were ‘kangaroo bones’ (Martin, 2004). King (2004) reported that the publication of Mjöberg’s diaries, “exposing his unethical and illegal exploits as a collector” prompted Sweden’s Museum of Ethnography to initiate the return of Aboriginal artefacts and remains to the Kimberley. Aboriginal elders retook ownership of the remains in a ceremony held in Stockholm, later escorting the remains back to the Kimberley for a traditional ceremony and reburial in traditional country in September 2004 (King, 2004).


**Shifting From History**

As a consequence of negative Australian research history, Aboriginal peoples are generally suspicious and mistrustful of the motives and outcomes of research projects (Smith 1999; Stewart et al., 2006). Cruse (2001) further asserted that “many researchers have ridden roughshod over our communities, cultures, practices and beliefs, and we are now in a position to prevent this from continuing” (p.27). The NHMRC (2003) highlighted the importance of acknowledging and understanding the impacts of past research, identifying that “the present and the future are absolutely bound up in the past, and that these cannot be separated from each other” (p.9). While research practices with Indigenous communities have since improved, there is still more work to do to ensure research is not implicitly racist (Bishop, 2007). It is clear, however, that research in Aboriginal contexts has transformed in recent years, where Aboriginal people are becoming “active agents and participants”, rather than “research objects” (Briskman, 2007, p.148).

**Contemporary Research Practices**

Contemporary researchers and academics researching in Aboriginal contexts offer values for ethical practice and highlight possible issues to be considered when conducting research with Aboriginal peoples and communities. There is a burgeoning literature of guidance and counsel in books and journal articles based on researcher experiences of working in the field; illustrating what works and what does not, as well as offering some insights into ethical research practice.

As noted above, the negative legacy of research throughout history lives on in the memory of many Aboriginal peoples today (Gooda, 2007). It is important for researchers to understand this negative history and have an awareness of past research practices which may
Research in Aboriginal Contexts

feature in contemporary research projects (NHMRC, 2003; Prior, 2007). The importance of ‘good’ projects with positive research rationales, agendas and interests was identified. Prior (2007) asserted that research agendas and expected outcomes must be rigid, meaningful and with beneficial tangible outcomes. As noted in the previous chapter, this is because Aboriginal peoples live in substandard conditions as comparable to non-Aboriginal people.

Research needs to be meaningful and beneficial, providing practical change, “undertaking research that will make a difference rather than the clichéd reports sitting on the shelf gathering dust…” (Gooda, 2007, p.2). Furthermore, Gooda (2007) highlighted the importance of conducting required or needed research rather than research which is wasteful or exhaustive of resources. The usefulness of research projects must be determined from the perspective of the community (de Crespigny et al., 2004; Gooda, 2007; Weijer, Goldsand, & Emanuel, 1999; Willis, Pearce & Jenkin, 2005); shifting the focus from the researcher towards the focus of the community (Prior, 2007). Appropriate research processes must be developed collaboratively with communities at an individualistic community-specific, grassroots level (Calma, 2005). Consequently, research rationales for projects that do not address the “continuing social, economic and health disparities” are being questioned by Aboriginal peoples (Prior, 2007, p.163).

Community mistrust of researchers is largely due to the traditional misuse of data collected for the benefits of others (Vicary, 2002). Prior (2007) stated that scientific research has traditionally “support[ed] repressive policies at the expense of the Indigenous peoples” (p.165). Institutions such as universities were also identified as perpetrators of negative research heralding inappropriate agendas and rationales; where institutional competitiveness and outcome-driven research is centralised (Drew, 2006; Gooda, 2007). Howitt (2005) highlighted that university researchers hold beliefs that they have a “…‘right to research’ on
any topic they like” (p.217). Howitt (2005) refuted the legitimacy of such ideas stating “…none of us has a ‘right’ to research” (p.217).

Meaningful relationship building was identified as important for researchers. “The most essential ingredient to proper engagement is the building of respectful relationships based on mutual trust” (Gooda 2007, p.6) and co-operation (Prior, 2007). Furthermore, relationships must be appropriately resourced (de Crespigny et al., 2004) where “the time … [and] cost required to plan and implement research is realistic” (Couzos, Lea, Murray & Culbong, 2005, p.101-102), as sufficient money, people and time is imperative to proper and appropriate engagement (Gooda, 2007).

Briskman (2007), however, stated that engagement between Aboriginal communities and larger governing bodies is based on the premise that Aboriginal communities are deficient in skills, knowledge and order; and further that this allows Aboriginal communities to ‘play catch-up’ to the greater and more developed non-Aboriginal society. The unique traditional culture inherent in Aboriginal communities thus becomes overlooked (Briskman, 2007). Essentially ignorant, misguided and uninformed non-Aboriginal understandings of Aboriginal contexts, including history, peoples, issues, merits, values and achievements additionally create barriers to engagement (Garvey, 2007; Minniecon, Franks & Heffernan, 2007). Bin-Sallik (2006) stated that “engaging with communities requires commitment to communities” (p.7) asserting the need for ongoing commitment “for the long haul” (Prior, 2007, p.166; Vallance & Tchacos, 2001). Gooda (2007) also emphasised that “… saying it and doing it are two different things” (p.6).

A further issue regarding engagement concerns connection, time, follow-through and resources. Minniecon et al. (2007) stated that “…government department officers are well-renowned in isolated Indigenous communities … for ‘flying in and out’ … [with] no regard for community protocols, hence no genuine attempt to experience what life is really like in the
community (p.27). The ‘seagull imperative’ describes the circumstance where a researcher “flies into a community; craps all over everything then leaves the community to tidy up the mess” (Drew, 2006, p.40). This may be due to the practical realities limiting researcher time and resources, or alternately such researchers do not consider follow-through, relationships, or working appropriately with Aboriginal people a priority. This leaves communities disenchanted with and distrusting of researchers, regardless of their intentions (Drew, 2006; Minniecon et al., 2007).

When beginning research relationships with Aboriginal peoples, researchers must immerse themselves in the socio-cultural context of the community to familiarise themselves with the community people, background and perspective (Sonn, 2007; Vallance & Tchacos, 2001). Sonn (2007) advises that ‘hanging out’ and having conversations with Aboriginal peoples is an important initial step to engaging Aboriginal people in research. Bishop (2007) furthermore suggests that the development of rapport should be conducted over an unspecified, yet prolonged period, strengthening the relationship and building trust. Additionally, grapevine yarning and vouching are powerful processes by which networking may respectively enhance or damage the development of relationships (Garvey, 2007). Free, prior and informed consent was also identified as imperative to transparent research process (Calma, 2005) where participants are informed about research progress throughout the life of the project and may withdraw consent at any time without adverse consequences (Weijer et al., 1999).

Community consultation and participation was identified as an important ongoing process between researchers, communities and community leaders (Gooda, 2007; Vallance & Tchacos, 2001). Garvey (2007) suggested the engagement of “cultural guides” or “cultural consultants” (p.108) for advice, particularly when engaging with key stakeholders or those who have had negative experiences with cross-cultural engagement. Garvey (2007) further
stated “it can be very easy to overstep one’s place” or to act inappropriately in a different cultural context (p.47). Melder (2007) supported Garvey’s recommendation, highlighting the importance of engaging a cultural consultant to ensure that interactions between researchers and communities are culturally appropriate. Local community organisations are also identified as important resources to consult with (Couzos et al., 2005).

Researchers leaving communities where relationships have been formed may prove perilous, yet such situations are inevitable. Dudgeon (2000) expressed her experience of the issue where practitioners enter a community and make promises and leave legacies which are not honoured. Such instances are common in relationships where positive engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples has resulted in feelings of personal attachment. Dudgeon (2000) highlighted this let-down as an example of inappropriate and irresponsible conduct; regardless of the good-natured and well-intentioned relationship which has been forged during engagement. Such positive relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities prove to act as a ‘double-edged sword’ upon exit of the community where it is difficult not to make well-intentioned promises, contracts or commitments which are in fact difficult or not possible to honour or fulfil (Dudgeon, 2000). This highlights the need for an understanding of appropriate engagement responsibilities for researchers engaging with Aboriginal communities (Dudgeon, 2000).

Collaboration and partnership between researchers, communities and organisations is essential for culturally appropriate and ethically sound research projects (Couzos et al., 2005; de Crespigny et al., 2004). Researchers must listen to communities and participants as integral to collaborative research, participation and respect (Gooda, 2007; Vallance & Tchacos, 2001). Dunbar and Scrimgeour (2006) further stated that “the actual detail of research should be worked out in collaboration and co-operation with local people” (p.58), where community input to the development of research processes go beyond what Prior (2007) termed the
“tokenistic involvement” of communities which “can compromise the rigor or validity of a methodology” (p.166). Collaboration effectively identifies the objectives of Aboriginal peoples such as “improving health, life and death” (Prior, 2007, p.166). Collaboration is therefore essential in “ensuring that Indigenous interests in research are adequately protected” (Dunbar & Scrimgeour, 2006, p.60).

“Indigenous peoples have the right to full and effective participation in decisions which directly or indirectly affect their lives” (Calma, 2005, p.140), where research processes must allow for full community participation in their design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (Calma, 2005; Gooda, 2007). Prior (2007) also added the management and dissemination phases of research to this list. Empowerment and control in participatory research are also essential, where communities control, drive and direct research projects (Calma, 2005). Couzos et al. (2005) stated that “…‘community-based’ or ‘participatory’ research shifts the balance of control towards those being researched … [as] initiated, driven and implemented by Aboriginal communities” (p.91).

Aboriginal community ownership and acknowledgement of “intellectual and contextual property” in research (Bowrey, 2006; Prior, 2007, p.167; Weijer et al., 1999), as well as permissions to publish (Vallance & Tchacos, 2001) were identified as important. Ownership furthermore involves research dissemination of all results and resources (Weijer et al., 1999). Outcomes and feedback are also important to both researchers and participating communities, where the end outcomes as well as the process by which the outcomes were achieved are greatly important (Santhanam, 2007). Participants are also required to be involved in production of research results, where appropriate community feedback is necessary for research validity (Couzos et al., 2005; Weijer et al., 1999). Results and resources must also be accurate and made accessible physically and in appropriate plain language (Calma, 2005). Outcomes from research must be of relevant benefit and advance
tangible community interests (Santhanam, 2007). Briskman (2007) identified that research is important in promoting community needs such as gaining funding, providing evidence and “to have voices heard which have been previously marginalised” (p.149).

Sharing, mutual learning and reciprocity were identified as fundamental features of research relationships (Bishop, 2007; Gooda, 2007; Vallance & Tchacos, 2001). Skills transfer may include training community members to be research assistants (Vallance & Tchacos, 2001; Weijer et al., 1999) to later become researchers themselves (Prior, 2007); where the community skills capacity is enhanced (Couzos et al., 2005). Waged work, financial reward and employment opportunities are also examples of research mutuality and positive outcomes (Gooda, 2007; Weijer et al., 1999), particularly with reference to positive outcomes for youth (Vallance & Tchacos, 2001).

Researchers must be respectful and flexible, having skills in cross-cultural communication. Researchers must also be aware of community structures and practice cultural appropriateness (Couzos et al., 2005; Gooda, 2007). When engaging in dialogue with Aboriginal people, Bishop (2007) suggested using open conversation and questions in order to receive a more accurate base of understanding from an Aboriginal perspective. Garvey (2007) also asserted that personal self-disclosure is a positive and humane means to overcome relational and cultural barriers. Researchers must be culturally aware, recognising and respecting Aboriginal cultures (Bishop, 2007; Weijer et al., 1999). Further to respecting cultural differences, researchers must not compromise community integrity (Prior, 2007).

Researcher reflexivity is an important tool for culturally appropriate and ethical research (Garvey, 2007). Sonn (2004) highlighted researcher “embeddedness in sociopolitical realities” (p.309) signifying the need for researchers to reflect on their position, role and practice when researching in Aboriginal contexts. Garvey (2007) suggested researchers humble themselves as perpetual novices whose personal competency in ‘Aboriginality’ is
minimal, regardless of the extent of their experience. Reflective practice is important in “[examining] ourselves, our skills, our knowledge and our motives” before engaging (p.6). Bishop (2007) further identified the importance of reflecting on the rationale preceding research relationships.

Researchers must also continually reflect throughout the research process to ensure that their ideas and practices are appropriate (Bishop, 2007). Self-reflection enables the recognition of perhaps unrealised racist biases, beliefs, attitudes, barriers and values important to become conscious of when engaging with Aboriginal people (Garvey, 2007). Sonn (2004) further stated “it requires deconstruction and negotiation of our own identities and positions and the accompanying power and privilege in our work with marginalized [sic] people because this will have implications for how we work” (p.309). Turner (2006) identified that processes of self-interrogation, particularly with reference to the power and privilege intrinsic to specific group memberships is important to recognise before engaging with Aboriginal people. Self-reflection may conversely create a sense of discomfort for non-Aboriginal peoples; such disquiet extending to their capacity for engagement (Radermacher, 2006).

Researcher accountability is fundamental throughout the research process. Vallance and Tchacos (2001) suggested the “establishment of an Aboriginal [Research] Reference group” (p.3). Furthermore, the use of documented ethical protocols, principles and guidelines promote “accountability, responsibility, sustainability, understanding, trust and communication … challenging [dominant researcher] perceptions, expectations, assumptions and behaviour” (Raven, 2006, p.14). Although Dunbar and Scrimgeour (2006) identified that “guidelines provide a poor framework for protection of Indigenous interests and rely too much on researchers ‘doing the right thing’…” (p.56), Raven (2006) stated that “protocols create opportunities to challenge existing expectations, assumptions and behaviour over the use and commercialisation of Indigenous knowledge” (p.15).
Dunbar and Scrimgeour (2006) recognised the “subjective, interpretive process” (p.56) of following research ethical guidelines which are based on “anticipated reciprocal trust … [and] voluntary researcher compliance” (p.56). Consultation must be balanced with setting ethical foundations and structures through which culturally appropriate research processes should occur, as negotiated at the community level (Dunbar & Scrimgeour, 2006). Research guidelines need to “reconceptualise research practice” to guide researchers through ethical processes without being too constrictive (Humphery, 2001, p.201). Although research guidelines cannot be enforced (Humphery, 2000), ethical clearance should be obtained from relevant “Aboriginal Human Research Ethics Committees”, as well as gaining other relevant mainstream ethical clearances required by the authoritative institutions of the research domain (Couzos et al., 2005, p.99).

Ethical values were explicitly identified by researchers largely regarding respect, transparency, accountability, reciprocity, equality, survival and protection, responsibility and voice (Bishop, 2007; Briskman, 2007; Calma, 2006; Gooda, 2007; Prior, 2007; Raven, 2006; Vallance & Tchacos, 2001; Weijer et al., 1999).

**Theories: Understanding the Domain of Research**

Of the many theories which resonate with the literature, neo-colonialism, decolonisation and whiteness will be used to enhance understandings of historical and contemporary research in Aboriginal contexts. The theories will also be used to indicate future approaches for the betterment of research practices. These theories were chosen as they reflect understandings applicable to both historical and contemporary contexts. They also promote appropriate research practices and provide insight into understanding the position of the non-Indigenous researcher relative to Aboriginal communities.
Neo-colonialism versus Decolonisation

Australia’s colonisation was based on *terra nullius*, where Europeans took land, imposed laws and governance, created an economy, introduced populace, the English language and spread diseases. The reproduction of colonialism in contemporary society is called ‘neo-colonialism’, where cultural, political, and economic control is paternalistically imposed by the ‘dominant’ class (Fielder, 1994).

‘Decolonising’ processes redistribute and reclaim power in research (Smith, 1999). Sherwood and Edwards (2006) further stated that “decolonising processes require all individuals to explore their own assumptions and beliefs so that they can be open to other ways of knowing, being, and doing” (p.188). Decolonising research must furthermore educate, reflect on and acknowledge the impact of societal inequities, as well as promote self-determination, self-management and reconciliation (Sherwood & Edwards, 2006; Smith, 1999).

Whiteness

Holt (2006) argued the “interrogation of whiteness as a necessity” (p.4). The term ‘whiteness’ essentially describes “white racial domination and privilege” (Sonn & Green, 2006, p.343). Although whiteness is fluid dependent on changing social contexts (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007), it effectively exists as a discriminatory social force permeating many aspects of everyday life, visible only to those outside its scope (Carey 2002; Green et al., 2007; Green & Sonn, 2006; Leonardo, 2004; Sullivan, 2006). The “unequal and unfair distributions of power” inherent in whiteness (Green & Sonn, 2005, p.479) implies that “white is better, or at least offers more advantages” (Saxton, 2004, p.21) whereby Australia is perceived as the “natural domain of white people”, further marginalising Aboriginal peoples (Saxton, 2004, p.15). Green et al. (2007) further highlighted the usefulness of whiteness as an
agent of social justice promoting decolonising processes, further prompting a critique of researcher and institutional practices.

It is evident that negative Australian history as well as culturally inappropriate and unethical past research practices harbour legacies of poor relations, racial discrimination and inherent unequal power distribution. The application of theories of decolonisation and whiteness for the betterment of research practices within Aboriginal contexts promote education, awareness, reflection and acknowledgement of history, self and practice. Accordingly, as stated by Minniecon et al. (2007), researchers must “[re]consider how we position ourselves … and how we position Indigenous people and communities within the practice of research” (p.31) in the deconstruction of whiteness and the redistribution of power in research relationships.

**Critiquing the Guidelines**

The purpose of this section is to introduce the existing research guidelines, outline their content, and assess their usefulness. Ethical guidelines for researchers conducting research in Aboriginal contexts are created and implemented at either of two levels; these being at the community-specific level, and the broader standardised level. The community-specific guidelines are commonly negotiated at the prospect of outside research entering the community. Larger communities commonly develop and use their own specific established protocols for inbound research, the guidelines and protocols essentially the same for all prospective research projects which are simply adapted to correspond with specific research projects.

It was found that the standout standardised ethical guidelines are those offered by the AIATSIS (2000) *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (see Appendix 1); as well as the NHMRC (2003) *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal*
and Torres Strait Islander Health Research (see Appendix 2). These research guidelines are generally regarded as the most comprehensive guidelines available and are accepted to be effective and suitable for most research encounters. These guidelines are respectively preferred by many researchers, participants, fellow institutions such as the Australian Psychological Society (APS) and the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA), and WA universities.

Ethical guidelines are subscribed to by different institutions dependant on the nature of the organisation and the domain of research they focus on. Such varying research domains can include health, education, law, science and culture. Institutions such as the APS and the NAILSMA supplement their own guidelines with a recommendation to consult the accepted established standardised ethics guidelines. The APS (2003) guidelines stated “members conducting research should follow the current NHMRC Guidelines” (p.6) and follow the human research ethics policies of the APS regarding other ethical matters (APS, 2003). The NAILSMA (2007) attached the AIATSIS (2000) guidelines to their own document as an appendix. The APS (2003) and the NAILSMA (2007) guidelines begin with information specific to their research domains acting as a preface to the attached standardised ethics guidelines. Such prefaces inform researchers of the historical background to the research domain and grounds researchers in the relevant ideological context for using their respective standardised ethics guidelines.

The Batchelor Institute based in the Northern Territory however offers standalone guidelines in the form of protocols and procedures without reference to the AIATSIS (2000) or NHMRC (2003) guidelines. The Batchelor Institute also has its own ‘Research and Ethics Committee’ which assesses research proposals and also monitors research projects until the conclusion of the research.

The following evaluation and critique of the AIATSIS (2000) and NHMRC (2003) guidelines intends to focus on the strengths and flaws of the documents. The essential principles of the guidelines will be identified and the content will be assessed by: applicability to research contexts, document accessibility, guideline development and transparency. The enforceability of research guidelines will subsequently be questioned.

**AIATSIS (2000) Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies**

*Content*

The 17 page AIATSIS (2000) guidelines document is divided into a one page introduction, three pages outlining the AIATSIS ‘principles of ethical research’ with accompanying explanations, 11 pages containing advice regarding the implementation of the principles for research projects, and a final page of recommended reading references. The introduction prefaces the document outlining the importance of community participation, process understanding, and sharing research results. The introduction also emphasises the value of respect for self-determination, culture and heritage; and promotes meaningful engagement and reciprocity.

The AIATSIS principles of ethical research are divided into 3 partitions, as seen in Table 2 (see p.30). The guidelines offer points explaining each principle. Furthermore, the principles are accompanied by practical recommendations and suggestions for appropriate application in research projects; however these have been omitted from Table 2.
Table 2: AIATSIS Guidelines Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Explanatory Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultation, negotiation</td>
<td>Consultation, negotiation and free and informed consent are the foundations for research with or about Indigenous peoples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; mutual understanding</td>
<td>The responsibility for consultation and negotiation is ongoing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultation and negotiation should achieve mutual understanding about the proposed research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect, recognition &amp; involvement</td>
<td>Indigenous knowledge systems and processes must be respected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There must be recognition of the diversity and uniqueness of peoples as well as of individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The intellectual and cultural property rights of Indigenous peoples must be respected and preserved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indigenous researchers, individuals and communities should be involved in research as collaborators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits, outcomes &amp; agreements</td>
<td>The use of, and access to, research results should be agreed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A researched community should benefit from, and not be disadvantaged by, the research project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The negotiation of outcomes should include results specific to the needs of the researched community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiation should result in a formal agreement for the conduct of a research project, based on good faith and free and informed consent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(AIATSIS, 2000, pp.3-5)
Applicability

The AIATSIS (2000) guidelines offer thorough, real-world advice for research projects which coincide with the offered principles of ethical research. The suggested principles are easily understood and may be applied to research projects straightforwardly when using the AIATSIS (2000) guidelines.

Accessibility

Many experienced researchers and research institutions are aware of and work under the counsel of the AIATSIS (2000) guidelines, but novice researchers and much of the general public are unaware of their existence. In this research project, the AIATSIS (2000) guidelines were only consulted when informed by research supervisors of the comprehensiveness of this resource. The AIATSIS (2000) guidelines are easily physically accessible via the AIATSIS website under: ‘research’ > ‘publications’ > (http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research_program/publications); or even by a simple ‘Google search’ for ‘AIATSIS guidelines’. The guidelines may be sourced by those who are aware of its existence, have access to a computer with an internet connection and have an elementary ability to navigate a computer and webpage. The guidelines are literarily accessible as they are written simply in plain English. The principles and applications may be comprehensible to anyone who can read and understand fairly plain English statements.

Development

According to the AIATSIS (2000) Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies, “the [AIATSIS] Council initiated a review of the 1985 Guidelines. The Institute’s Ethics Committee, together with the Research Section staff of the Institute held two workshops in 1999 to develop the new Guidelines, which were then redrafted by the research
staff” (p.1). This shows that throughout the redevelopment of the AIATSIS (2000) guidelines, there was a lack of consultation with grassroots community members who recurrently form the ‘samples’ of research participants.

Transparency

Information regarding the development of the AIATSIS (2000) guidelines is stated in the introduction of the document. The guidelines are accessible from the AIATSIS website and the institution is highly regarded. However, the AIATSIS is “…a Commonwealth statutory authority within The Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) portfolio” (AIATSIS, 2005) signifying that the AIATSIS is funded by and accountable to the Australian Federal Government. There may not be any direct or explicit implications for the AIATSIS (2000) Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies; however the AIATSIS may be positioned by their accountability to the DIISR. Furthermore, the document may be restricted or censored in what it is able to express as government departments are regularly conducting research with Aboriginal communities. It would therefore be against the interests of the AIATSIS to ‘upset’ their funding body as this may affect their future financial support.

NHMRC (2003) Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research

Content

The 27 page NHMRC (2003) guidelines document is divided into five pages of background information, 14 pages describing in detail the six NHMRC values and ethics with complementary explanations; as well as appendices outlining the development of the guidelines and a suggestion for their application in research proposals.
The background introduces the guidelines and discusses the importance of understanding research contexts. The background section further highlights the necessity for ethical relationships between researchers and communities and also the need for integrating the guidelines with the development of ethical research relationships.

The ethical values which are offered by the NHMRC’s six principles underpinning the guidelines are represented below in: Figure 1. Furthermore, Table 3 (see p.34) highlights the sub-elements; however the offered ‘demonstration’ and ‘Allied National Statement requirements’ sections in the guidelines have been omitted.

The NHMRC’s (2003) Appendix 1 outlined the development of the guidelines, as reflected in the ‘development’ section below. Appendix 2 suggests an application of the guidelines as reflected in the ‘applicability’ section below.

**Figure 1: NHMRC values and ethics**

(NHMRC, 2003, p.9)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles</th>
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<td>Commitment to cultural distinctiveness</td>
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<td>Spirit &amp; Integrity</td>
<td>Motivation and action</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intent and process</td>
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(NHMRC, 2003, pp.10-20)
Applicability

The NHMRC (2003) guidelines’ Appendix 2 stated that the use of the suggested values and ethics allows researchers the opportunity to develop an “ethically defensible” research process for use in research proposals (NHMRC, 2003, p.23). Furthermore, Appendix 2 stated that consultation facilitates community engagement and participation. The varying levels at which research is conducted: local, regional or national, has implications for negotiating such community engagement and participation. Aboriginal community controlled organisations and elected Community Councils may be beneficial points of contact by which community engagement and participation may be initiated. However, “in other communities some or all of those structures are not present” (NHMRC, 2003, p.23). The aforementioned suggestions offered by Appendix 2 are significant and informative, but the NHMRC guidelines document provides little in terms of supporting examples and the function and application of the NHMRC values and ethics in everyday research contexts.

Accessibility

The NHMRC (2003) guidelines appeared accessible to a broad variety of people. The NHMRC website states that they offer options for enhanced accessibility in audio formats, as well as catering for colour blindness, visual acuity, epilepsy, and also peripheral compatibility. However these options were un-locatable. The NHMRC (2003) guidelines did not appear to be written in plain English, much of the document presented in a ‘high-English’ tone, at times unclear and consequently inaccessible to many readers.

The NHMRC (2003) guidelines were physically accessible from the NHMRC website, but due to the large size of the organisation the relevant guidelines appear difficult to source. Those who have access to a computer with internet and have an ability to navigate these tools may locate the document by clicking the tabs: research > publications > search;
then typing in relevant keywords such as ‘Aboriginal + research + guidelines’. Alternately, the guidelines may be sourced from clicking the tabs: research > publications > find > indigenous. Note here that the document is not found under ‘Aboriginal’, or ‘Torres Strait Islander’, a potentially confusing approach. The guidelines are found fourth on the list of ‘indigenous’ documents in a small font size, or at: (http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e52syn.htm) for those typing the web address. A basic ‘Google’ search may also help locate the document.

To find the document, researchers must be aware of its existence. There is an awareness of the NHMRC (2003) guidelines amongst experienced researchers and research institutions, particularly in health-research contexts. The NHMRC (2003) guidelines however may not be well-known to communities, particularly those who are participants in health-related research as it may not be in the interests of unethical researchers for their participants to be aware of their rights and researcher responsibilities.

Development

The development of the NHMRC (2003) guidelines, as stated in its Appendix 1, show the NHMRC enrolled informed professionals such as Aboriginal researchers, AHEC members, stakeholders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, Melbourne University researchers, and other people from a wide range of stakeholder interests to begin developing the foundations of the guidelines. Subsequently, “…a Working Party of researchers, Aboriginal community controlled health sector representatives, Human Research Ethics Committee representatives and policy makers was formed” (NHMRC, 2003, p.21). The Working Group provided a framework for the NHMRC guidelines draft, followed by public consultation in which 56 responding submissions were acknowledged and contributed to the revised NHMRC guidelines document (NHMRC, 2003). Although the NHMRC
website states: “…the NHMRC is keen to ensure that the Australian community has the best opportunity to participate in developing NHMRC reports” (NHMRC, 2008), the development of the NHMRC (2003) research guidelines appear to only demonstrate community contribution at a small, tokenistic, late stage in the guidelines development offering those who were aware of the public consultation to ‘tinker’ with the already devised document.

_Transparency_

As the NHMRC is funded by the Federal Government Department of Health and Aged Care, the guidelines may be limited in what they recommend. Issues of transparency become apparent particularly as the NHMRC do not state their association with the Federal Government in their ‘about’ section on their website, only displaying a small ‘Australian Government’ shield on the top left corner of the page. The Federal Government commissions many research projects related to Aboriginal peoples and as a consequence may have vested interests restricting the content of the guidelines offered by the NHMRC, the organisation whom they support via finding and resources.

_Enforceability_

Neither the AIATSIS (2000), nor the NHMRC (2003) guidelines can be enforced by any regulatory authority, instead relying on “…researchers ‘doing the right thing’…” (Dunbar & Scrimgeour, 2006, p.56). Institutions such as universities may enforce ethical guidelines used by researchers and students associated with their institution via deprivation of funding or grades, but the lack of guideline enforceability exists for all other researchers. Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval of a research project may require consultation with guidelines such as those offered by the AIATSIS or the NHMRC. However, those researchers seeking such guidelines are generally well-intentioned and will comply with such
guidelines regardless of their enforcement. The researchers representing ulterior interests or researchers with agendas may, however, manipulate parts of the AIATSIS (2000) or NHMRC (2003) guidelines for their personal benefit and to exploit communities. There is consequently a lack of researcher accountability to institutions such as the AIATSIS or the NHMRC regarding researchers with vested interests who are only accountable to their wage paying funding bodies who resource the research.

**Commonalities**

Common subjects identified throughout the guidelines are engagement, consultation, collaboration, participation, negotiation, accountability, power, control, rationale, effectiveness, ownership, acknowledgement, feedback, benefit, vested interests, relevance, outcomes, timing, interpersonal skills, cultural awareness, homogenisation awareness, respect for culture, awareness of sensitivity, data interpretation, values and principles, trustworthiness, transparency, and respect.

**Research Rationale**

There is a lack of literature asking grassroots Aboriginal communities as participants about their experiences, values, beliefs and insights regarding research and researchers. Negative Australian research history illustrates accounts of unethical, culturally inappropriate, paternalistic research practices. Contemporary academic researchers have offered their experiences of researching in Aboriginal contexts as reflective insights. Research guidelines are developed using experienced researchers and reference groups. There is consequently an identifiable need for researchers to take a step back and purposefully ask grassroots Aboriginal communities about their research experiences, as well as their values, beliefs and insights regarding research. There is also a need for researchers to find out what grassroots
Aboriginal communities think about researchers and in particular non-Indigenous researchers conducting research in Aboriginal contexts. With consideration for the aforementioned critique of the existing standardised guidelines, researchers must ask grassroots Aboriginal communities what research guidelines they are aware of and what they think of them.

**Research Aims**

In this research project I asked participants in Broome and Fitzroy Crossing WA about their thoughts, experiences and insights regarding research, researchers and the existing ethical guidelines.

With an aim to improve current research practices, in this research project I explored participants’ past experiences of research to establish a historical context and baseline data. Furthermore, participants were asked to share their thoughts regarding researchers, researcher background and group-membership; particularly with reference to perceived issues and benefits of non-Aboriginal researchers. To promote cultural awareness and best-practice, I asked participants if there were any cultural protocols of which researchers should be aware. Participants were also asked about their awareness of existing research guidelines, which guidelines they may be familiar with, and what their thoughts were regarding them. Participants were asked to share their recommendations for researchers and research projects, and were further offered an opportunity for open discussion. I finally asked participants to provide this research with feedback for reflection and if necessary, process redevelopment (see Appendix 3).
Hypothesis

I anticipate that participants will reaffirm much of the information offered by the AIATSIS (2000) and the NHMRC (2003) guidelines, yet I expect responses will provide information specific to the Kimberley, based on research history specific to that area. I also predict that the only benefits of non-Aboriginal researchers conducting research with Aboriginal peoples will be skills and experience. However, this is only due to an under-representation of Aboriginal researchers. Issues of non-Aboriginal people conducting research with Aboriginal peoples will perceivably be cultural issues, the imposition of irrelevant research agendas, as well as negative historical issues. Perhaps Torres Strait Islander and international researchers with whom participants can identify with will be preferred due to poor non-Indigenous relations and negative Australian history. It is also anticipated that participants will not be very aware of existing research guidelines.
Chapter 3: Method

Design

A qualitative approach was adopted in this research (Punch, 2004; Silverman, 2005). The nature of this project required an ethical and culturally appropriate process and methodology which reflects the principles offered in the accepted guidelines, particularly those offered by the AIATSIS and the NHMRC. The project method also reflects consultation and collaboration between researchers and participating communities. This participatory research project is a collaboration between the researcher, the UNDA Fremantle-based supervisors, and Nulungu. The research used the journals, texts and guidelines as outlined in the literature review as foundations for the project design. Community consultation followed as the development of a research relationship ensued. Initial consultation interviews with academic staff at Nulungu enabled appropriate design of the project, consolidated the research process, and defined the expected outcomes of the project.

The project was developed using a combination of evidence-based practice and values based practice. The research project was designed by first consulting the literature which consisted of journal articles, texts and the existing protocols and guidelines. The main guidelines employed were the AIATSIS (2000) and the NHMRC (2003) guidelines, supplemented with the APS (2003), the Batchelor Institute (2005), and the NAILSMA (2007) guidelines.

The project was designed with inbuilt flexibility allowing the research process to be reinformed and adapted as required by research situations. This supported opportunities for researcher reflection regarding participant feedback to reinform culturally appropriate and ethical best-practice. At the guidance of Lyn Henderson-Yates, a Community Reference Group was created featuring six members: four from Nulungu and two other community...
members. All documentation such as consent forms, information sheets, and interview questions were scrutinised and approved by available members of the project’s Community Reference Group for suitability, clarity, cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Ethics Approval

Ethical clearance was granted for the initial project. An ethical amendment was submitted to the HREC supplementing the original ethics proposal. The HREC subsequently approved the amendment, approving ethics for this project.

Participants

As featured in Punch (2004) a “purposive sample” (p.193) was selected. Appropriate and available participants were accessed by the community cultural consultant Joe Edgar with the assistance of other supervisors and stakeholders. Fifteen participants were sourced and recruited. Snowballing was also used, as instigated by participants. Participants received an introductory letter and information sheet (see Appendix 4). Participant recruitment was an ongoing negotiation throughout the project. Participants were above 18 years old. Nine male and six female participants were engaged in the research. Participants held a number of different roles in the community such as grassroots community members, community service providers, researchers and organisational CEOs. All are members of a community in the Kimberley.

All participants had past experiences or familiarity of some sort with research or researchers. Participant research experiences were in roles as researchers and/or participants. Participant research experiences consisted of private self-research such as genealogical and ancestral research, as participants in external research projects, and in past employment as researchers or on research committees. Six participants were involved in research both
privately as well as in researching roles, two of which were also members of research committees. Five participants were past researchers solely for employment purposes, and four participants were involved in research as participants of external projects.

Four participants were unaware of ethical research guidelines at all. Five participants were aware but were unsure of their content or felt indifferent to them. One participant was aware of existing standardised guidelines and thought they were ‘good’.

**Research Context**

The Kimberley region is in the north of Western Australia. It covers an area of about 420,000 km², with a population of around 34,000 (KLC, 2007). Approximately 50% of the population are Aboriginal people of which 75% are estimated to be long-term residents of more than 5 years (KLC, 2007). Aboriginal residents of the Kimberley under the age of 14 comprise almost 26% of the population, where 57% are under 25 years old (KLC, 2007).

**Materials**

Semi-structured conversational interviews were used. Interview questions (see Appendix 3) were devised from literature review principles, consultation with Nulungu, supervisor advice as well as the interest of the researcher. Due to the conversational nature of the interviews, the interview ‘questions’ served as topic guides to facilitate discussion in interviews. Informed consent was gained before interviews. All questions were asked in interviews when appropriate. Supplementary probing questions were also asked. Prompts and minimal encouragers were used as appropriate, such as ‘yes’, ‘uh-huh’, ‘ok’ and ‘go on’. A digital voice recorder was used to record the interviews for later transcription. Notes were taken in interviews where recording was refused or unsuitable.
Resourcing

The project was allocated $5000 funding from a donation to the UNDA School of Arts and Sciences, Fremantle; for research of this nature. The funds resourced the expensive nature of this research project, largely consumed by flight and vehicular travel expenses. Unfortunately, the budget did not allow for researchers or participants to be paid for contributing to this research project.

Process

After consultation with Henderson-Yates, two trips to Broome were planned. The first trip was for immersion in the Broome community, to be introduced in-person to the Nulungu team, to engage a community cultural consultant and meet potential participants. The second trip was devoted to data collection as well as further establishing and consolidating relationships.

The first trip was planned for June 6th 2008 until June 11th 2008. All flights, on-campus student accommodation at UNDA Broome, and mountain-bike transportation were arranged. Upon arrival in Broome, the first task was to meet with Henderson-Yates to discuss the research project processes, later complemented by a following meeting with Edgar, the project’s community cultural consultant. The initial consultation determined what could be realistically achieved within the project restraints, and for the finer research details to be determined such as refining data-collection procedures, process design and logistics. The initial trip also allowed for introductions to most team members at Nulungu; and an orientation to the Broome geography, societal structures and local organisations.

The second trip from July 7th 2008 until July 20th 2008 allowed a fortnight of data-collection. The intermediate time between trips allowed the community cultural consultant to select appropriate participants available for participation in the project. Flights and
accommodation were again arranged, but for this trip transportation was upgraded from a mountain-bike to a four-wheel-drive. The first task was to meet with the team at Nulungu again to ensure that the project processes were still appropriate and to revise practical components. Researchers wore clean casual clothing at interviews to show respect and professionalism without imposing authority or condescendence. Researchers also conducted themselves warmly, openly and attentive to participants without falseness. Such conduct continued beyond the data-collection stage and was maintained throughout the project.

**Ethical Considerations**

The following ethical considerations involved in the design of the research were determined via consultation with the accepted guidelines, supervisors and Nulungu. Confidentiality and participant anonymity as stated in the plain language statement (see Appendix 5) and consent form (see Appendix 6) had implications for research stakeholders including community cultural consultants, supervisors and Community Reference Group members. Communities such as Broome and Fitzroy Crossing are relatively small where such aforementioned involved stakeholders may know participants and be able to identify them by their responses. Furthermore, the anticipated attendance of the community cultural consultant in several interviews may also have had implications for confidentiality, but professionalism neutralised any adverse effects arising from this.

The research methods had to be examined to ensure they were not appropriative, where opportunities for reciprocity warranted that the research gave something back to the community. In addition to informing the development of research protocols for Nulungu, the research subsequently rose participant consciousness of their rights in research as well as some potential research issues, promoted thought and reflection on research experiences and practices, and increased participant awareness of the standardised ethical research guidelines.
Chapter 4: Results

The trip supported the recording of 9 interviews in Broome and 5 in Fitzroy Crossing. The community cultural consultant was absent from six of the interviews for community political reasons and timing issues. As stated at the front of this document, participants had a choice to be acknowledged by name as a contributor to this research project. The following participants will be referenced by name in this chapter for direct quotes used:

- Andrew Amor (Amor, 2008).
- Steve Kinnane (Kinnane, 2008).
- Tom Lawford (Lawford, 2008).
- Wes Morris (Morris, 2008).

The other eleven contributing participants wished to remain anonymous and so a code will be used in place of their name for direct quotes. Participants will not be specifically cited as contributing ideas or themes. This will ensure that individual participants are not solely credited with concepts at the exclusion of other participants.

The concepts elicited from participant responses are interconnected. This sense of inherent relation of values, principles, experiences and recommendations offered by participants must be remembered when reading the results in this linear format. An account of a collective story as told to the researcher by participants is presented in this chapter. To promote participant voice and honour the co-constructed nature of this results chapter, many informative and illustrative quotes have been selected. All quotes have been purposely woven into the body text to achieve a flowing narrative-like account, yet are italicised to highlight centrality, voice and agency.
A Results ‘Quick Reference’ Table (see p.49) has been created to act as a road map reference to better understand the results.

Data Analysis

The interviews were analysed using ‘thematic analysis’, as consistent with Miles and Huberman (1994), drawing out themes and sub-themes from the interview transcriptions and organising these into categorical groups. The interviews were transcribed for the intention of thematic data analysis. When typing the interview transcriptions, “umms” or “errs” etcetera were omitted. Furthermore, supplementary information was included in square brackets, examples such as physical actions, innuendos which were not apparent in standalone text, and interruptions in interviews. Also, inflected or emphasised terms were italicised. Grammatical errors in speech were not corrected, but all words were typed in full regardless of whether they were or were not rounded off. Such decisions were made to respect participant representation, yet maintaining the integrity, meaning and voice in the transcribed data.

Notes were taken during interviews where participants did not want to be recorded. Transcriptions were re-created from notes and fed back to the community cultural consultant for corroborative verification. After all transcriptions were completed, they were sent to participants for their approval before any data analysis. This allowed participants to edit spelling errors, correct misheard terms or phrases, and remove sensitive material from the record.
Table 4: Results ‘Quick Reference’ Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Negative History &amp; Background Understandings</td>
<td>Negative history &amp; contemporary perceptions</td>
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<td>Extractive research inferring appropriation &amp; loss of IP</td>
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<td>Wariness of researchers, manipulation &amp; conspiracy</td>
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<td>Vulnerable participants, unethical researchers, ‘feathers’ &amp; competition</td>
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History

Negative History and Background Understandings

Researchers have been researching in Aboriginal contexts since the outset of colonisation. Throughout history Aboriginal peoples have been subjected to many researchers and research projects continuing still today, culminating in the belief that "we’re always being studied" (Participant 2) and that “Aboriginal people are the most researched people in the world” (Participant 3b; Participant 6)

Negative history and contemporary perceptions

A largely represented theme described past researchers and unethical research practices. The theme further expresses the effects of negative past research interactions shaping many contemporary negative perceptions of research and researchers. “The root problem is that we are in a postcolonial environment, and when we’re talking about a postcolonial environment in the Kimberley, we’re talking about … our old people living around here who can still recall seeing the first White people…” (Morris, 2008). This extended beyond the roles of research and researchers to colonisation and cultural relations; memories which are still fresh in the minds of many Aboriginal people. “Sometimes people get, not frightened, but they’re thinking ‘what’s this Gardia [non-Aboriginal person] doing here?’ They’re thinking about them old days when Gardia used to come take kids away…” (Lawford, 2008).

Negative past research is remembered particularly for its anthropological foundations “you’ve got the non-Indigenous researcher who says ‘I’m boss cocky expert, I’m an anthropologist, I study people and then I go back to Canberra and you never get to see the research’…” (Kinnane, 2008), where Aboriginal peoples were positioned as ‘the other’; studied as exotic objects of fascination. “Remember the researchers back in the 1950’s
when that research was used against Aboriginal people; all the old anthropological studies and those sorts of things, and that's still in people's minds, they still think that stuff” (Participant 3a). This was attributed to cultural clashes and non-Aboriginal ethnocentric views of superiority over Aboriginal peoples, where “non-Indigenous researchers did operate within that notion of documenting ‘the other’ or ‘the occidental approach’; the ‘Western approach’ was to see ‘the other’ as this almost fetishised separate entity” (Kinnane, 2008). In addition to orientalising Aboriginal peoples from non-Aboriginal society, research further portrayed Aboriginal peoples as ‘of lesser status’ than non-Aboriginal people, one participant stating “in past research, we [Indigenous Australians] were put down as nomads, hunter-gatherers, ogres; and slowly we’ve come up from that a little you know, instead of being fauna and flora…” (Participant 6).

Extractive research inferring appropriation and loss of IP

A legacy of past research is a perception of research as an extractive process. “People are becoming a bit more aware of intellectual knowledge and what they’re giving up; the extractive process…” (Participant 10). Participant responses showed that many understand research to be an extractive and appropriative practice where sharing intellectual property (IP) inferred the loss of that information.

Wariness of researchers, manipulation and conspiracy

“There’s a bit of wariness that you’re a non-Indigenous person” (Participant 3a). The overall wariness and suspicion of researchers was identified to be interrelated with issues of culture and history, lingering in living memory “the worst sort of practices … are obviously imbedded in a lot of Indigenous minds” (Participant 3b). The practices of non-Indigenous researchers in history are today regarded as unethical, where “people have taken,
you know, everything from artefacts to people’s skeletons or heads in the name of research and science, so clearly that’s not on; … for a time there was a complete abrogation of responsibility by non-Indigenous researchers” (Kinnane, 2008). Unethical research practices and research that is used against Aboriginal peoples continues today, where from such practices stem fears of data manipulation and conspiracy theories of research serving the agenda of authoritative institutions or government departments to the disadvantage of Aboriginal peoples, as reflected in history.

**Vulnerable participants, unethical researchers, ‘feathers’ and competition**

The vulnerability of participants was a theme that emerged from participant responses when discussing negative research history. “You do get your unethical researchers who come in and then use what they find to their advantage, which disadvantages Aboriginal people” (Participant 3a). There were concerns that unethical, exploitative and deviant researchers were common and that a lack of research regulations positioned Aboriginal participants as vulnerable and unaware of their rights, responsibilities or the impacts of research. “Back in the 80’s and 70’s, particularly in the Kimberley, there was a whole lot of research being done, some unethically. … Those researchers probably weren’t as ethically orientated as we are today; just the simple things like informed consent was not obtained in some of those cases. … Some people that may remember those days are pretty wary of research going on” (Amor, 2008).

Researchers were, and frequently still are conducting research for purposes of self gain or for the benefit of an institution. Recurrently research is being conducted for PhD, Masters or Honours awards to benefit and propel the researcher’s own career. This ‘gaining of feathers’ practice was identified as negative due to the exploitative self-serving benefit of researchers at the expense of Aboriginal contribution, one participant stating “I get a bit
annoyed with people doing research and then just getting a few more initials on their names and then you don’t hear much about it” (Participant 10).

Competition between institutions was further identified as negative research practice where participants are used as pawns to glorify an institution. One participant identified that this was a lack of research transparency, satirising “…‘don’t tell them that you’re going to do this, right, because then other universities or other things will know’; that competition stuff, right?” (Participant 3b).

Understanding: history, context, politics and kinship

Participants highlighted the importance of researchers gaining a background understanding of the research context and climate, where before conducting any research “they should be familiar with the subject that they’re working on” (Participant 6). There are evident implications for research projects dependant on the context in which the research is being conducted and the perspective of participants where “it’s only courteous that you understand a bit about the background of someone that’s being researched” (Participant 1).

One participant offered an example emphasising the importance of understanding the background context to research, stating “Aboriginal people are less than 2% of the population of the overall Australia. In Sydney they’re a minority; in the Kimberley they make up half of the population…” (Participant 8). This participant further recommends that “here with working with the people, you have to be aware of the right way to work … and how to conduct yourself” (Participant 8). Essential understandings of context for researchers include an awareness of Australia’s history, past research encounters, cultural relations, cultural awareness, a basic understanding of community politics, and an awareness of kinship protocols. If researchers have a basic understanding of the research context “that’ll save conflict if you go out on the field, you know, preparing beforehand” (Participant 8).
Research in Aboriginal Contexts

Front-End

Rationales, Agendas and Vested Interests

A strong concept emanating from interviews was that of research initiation and the foundations on which projects are built. “Sometimes it’s a bit hard figuring out the relevance of it, when you’re on the ground” (Participant 3a). Participants spoke of rationales, significance, and the relevance of research projects.

Research rationales, agendas and relevance

Participants stated that the research rationale underpinning the project was an important factor to reflect on when designing a project. “Does that person want to find out the good things that can help him or herself, or that person is just sort of going on a witch-hunt?” (Participant 6). The motives justifying a research project asks ‘for whose benefit is the research?’ where agendas or vested interests were further identified as important considerations. This is illustrated by one participant stating “the researcher is doing it for one thing only outside the fact that they might care about the subject, is that they might do it to get their honours or they’ve got to do it so they get paid by whoever’s persuading them to do it… or they need those credits…” (Participant 3b). This participant identifies that despite a researcher’s possible interest in a project, they nevertheless have alternate interests of personal gain. This may affect the research rationale, with implications for the project design, processes and outcomes.

Participants stressed the importance of ‘questioning the relevance of projects’, reminding researchers that data-collection is a sensitive procedure. Participants further stated that the research must be helpful at an individual level and community level, whilst also fulfilling the goals of the researcher. One participant illustrated this emphasising “making it
relevant in terms of say ‘how does that actually help me by me talking to you and giving you my IP and telling you my ideas? How’s that going to benefit me?’; because people in the community don’t necessarily understand that whole ‘research is there to sort of change policy and shape policies and shape the way things are done at the much higher level’, people don’t connect with that a lot of the time. They’re worried about ‘how’s my community going to be better?’ or ‘how’s my life going to be better?’ … and how that research connects back into the grassroots level” (Participant 3a).

Another participant further pursued notions of the ‘research transaction’ at an individual level. This reminds researchers of the everyday conditions many Aboriginal people live in. The participant illustrated this stating “they’re going to be worried about ‘how do I get food on the table?’, right; they don’t see this as this, … we all know how long Government policy takes to get implemented; see people don’t see the big-picture about it” (Participant 3b).

Preconceived ideas and prescriptive projects

Participants identified that researchers with preconceived ideas of participants, the subject area, or the community were negative barriers in research projects. Furthermore, research which is too prescriptive denies opportunities for collaboration and consultation between communities and researchers.

Research which is “not going to pre-propose anything, … an open thing” (Participant 3b) was identified as positive, giving communities the opportunity to design research which is meaningful and relevant to the community's requirements. Participants also stated that researchers needed positive attitudes towards participants, the community and the research project to conduct effective, unbiased research.
Balanced projects: researching positives and negatives

Some participants shared their concern that research projects generally focus on negative topics such as social issues or deficiencies and that not enough research was conducted on positive topics or investigating what works well in communities. “It’s not always about what’s going wrong in communities, that’s the thing; there are some things that are working really well in communities, … there are some good things that happen in communities and if you portray the community to only have negative things going on, then that may prevent you from doing other research in that community…” (Amor, 2008). This emphasises that the consequence of continual negative research will result in communities declining to participate in future research projects affecting samples and the validity of results.

Effective research, positive change and genuine issues

Participants identified that good projects are effective in producing a positive outcome. Research often has limited funding, few appropriately skilled personnel and strict, short timelines. Participants said they would be more inclined to be involved with a project which maximised the use of resources to produce effective outcomes and positive change. One participant reflected this stating “it’s gotta be worthwhile research” (Participant 8); and another reflected “knowing that it’s not a waste of resource or time or people’s energy; that from the research something’s going to happen out of it, something is going to make changes, … there is something coming out that people are going to genuinely take notice of” (Participant 1).

Another participant went further to state that “if you get good information to better the situation what you’re in, then it’s good research. If its research that’s going to be left up there and nobody’s going to touch it, you know, then 100 years later someone comes along
and they go ‘gee, they’ve been talking about this thing then’, you know, that’s when they say you know, history repeats itself” (Participant 6). This highlights the importance of researching worthwhile topics and genuine issues which are active and meaningful to both the community as well as the researcher.

Proactive, positive research

A topic which was largely represented in interviews was the importance of proactive, positive research with beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders. Participants expressed the importance of research “…being more proactive, rather than reactive” (Participant 1), and “if you do something, it’s gotta make something happen for the benefit of people” (Participant 6).

Additionally, participants expressed their dislike for negative research or projects which are detrimental to participants or wider Aboriginal communities, one participant stating “you don’t have to look anywhere for negative stuff for us” (Participant 6). This was further reflected when participants conveyed their dislike of researchers using data against participants. One participant stated “if it’s used against them, the information, that really fires people up” (Participant 10). Participants also shared their dislike of judgemental researchers; despite stating that overall this was not a common experience when participating in research.

Individualistic research

Participants stated that research processes and guidelines need to be negotiated at an individualistic, community-specific level as opposed to imposing a universal standardised approach on community research. One participant suggested researchers “use the way people know; [ask] ‘how do you conduct things in the community?’” (Participant 2). This individualised approach to research is fostered by collaboration and consultation in the project
design. This also ensures that the project is culturally relevant to participants and other stakeholders.

**Relationships**

Relationship building is a fundamental process which must occur prior to the design, negotiation, or implementation of research. A participant identified that “…relationship building; … universities … aren’t very good at [it], they don’t put the investment into that, … and the research is poorer for it I reckon” (Participant 10). Relationship building involves engagement between the researcher and community, as well as the development of the relationship as an ongoing process. This also facilitates networking with local people and organisations supporting research logistics such as participant recruitment.

**Engagement**

The relationship development, ‘front-end’ or ‘legwork’ phase of the research was identified as an essential precursor to good research. “If you want good quality research or information, then you need to do the legwork” (Amor, 2008). Furthermore, “there has to be an investment in the relationship building before you can actually get to question one, before you can start to sit down with someone and say ‘right I’m comfortable answering that question’” (Participant 10). Participants linked relationship building with research quality advising that “…to get quality answers off the research process, you need to have a very strong front-end to it, front-end process; and that’s where there’s never been an investment” (Participant 10).

Participants were inconclusive when advising an appropriate length of time to be spent on relationship building, most stating “it can take researchers months to build relationships” (Kinnane, 2008), and “sometimes as a researcher you might want to spend
ages building a relationship and in some other areas you might want to work with well set-up foundational relationships that are already there” (Kinnane, 2008) when working with Aboriginal organisations or community cultural consultants.

Participants emphasised the importance of spending time with participants in comfortable everyday situations, stating “I think there’s a process that needs to occur before: ‘hi, I’m coming up, I’m doing this, this is what I’m doing, and before you even agree, I’m also coming up for one week or two weeks, and in the first week I’m going to come around and have a cup of tea and get to know you before I interview you’…” (Participant 3b), and “you need to have that time to sit down, have a yarn, socialise; ... people get to trust you, you give it a bit, go away and come back again sort of thing; ... it could be a month long, year long process” (Participant 3a).

Participants also spoke of the relationship lasting as an ongoing process throughout the life of the research and even beyond stating “[Researchers] come and talk to you and they go away with certain information and you never see them again you know…” (Participant 14). It was identified that the continuation of established relationships was an important part of the research process as “there’s no follow up, there’s a lot of... what do you call it? ‘k-noodling’ or whatever the word is, ... at the beginning there’s a lot of all of that, but when it’s gone, all we can see is the dust” (Participant 3b). Participants felt that “having an ongoing relationship with the community is very important” (Participant 14), and that “people become connected to a researcher you know and they feel a little offended if that researcher don’t keep some semblance of contact with them” (Participant 10).

Participants observed that “the [researchers] that get the best information are the ones that have been doing research there for 20-25 years” (Participant 3a) further highlighting the practical significance of maintaining relationships. Participants also suggested that regular contact be continued throughout the project, stating “wherever possible
in a research project, you try to make time to keep people informed; ... every now and then you just try to make sure you give people a call and say ‘this is where it’s at’…” (Kinnane, 2008). This reflects the importance of keeping participants informed throughout the project as well as honouring the ongoing relationship.

Rapport and conversation were also identified as important in research relationships where “it takes ages to build a rapport with people. People think they can just come here and start research and it’s like, well I might be busy or I need to understand what you want or what you’re chasing” (Participant 10).

Seagulls

“Generally in the old days it was one-way … people would come into communities, extract information and leave and … not have any input to the final documentation” (Participant 14). The tradition of the seagull pattern continues today, participants stating “we shouldn’t have to call you, you should call us; you should send us the email saying ‘a copy of my paper is in the mail’. You know what happens? Seagull approach again ‘got what I want, I’m right Jack, I’ve got my honours, I’ve got what I want out of it’…” (Participant 3b).

Socio-cultural immersion

The importance of researchers immersing themselves in the socio-cultural context of the community was identified as an important feature to understanding community perspective, one participant stating “it’s not just always one thing; it’s always the whole mire of things around them” (Participant 3a). Participants also identified that “[the community context is] very hard to understand unless you’re going to sit there for a couple of years and go through it and really immerse yourself in it. … If you’re just coming up here for a couple of weeks to do a bit of a research, or a couple of moths or whatever, you never really get truly
the whole grasp of it” (Participant 3a). This highlights that without an awareness of community perspectives and contexts, understanding and interpreting data will be difficult and inaccurate.

Alternately, participants also warned researchers about staying too long in a community thereby losing neutrality, stating “you can stay too long and be engulfed with the community situation rather than the thing you’re supposed to do; … you’ve got to spend time with the people you’re working with … but like I said you don’t want to spend too long” (Participant 6).

Networking was identified as a useful process when researching as it allows researchers to “find out who the local people are, find out who the traditional owners are, find out someone who can be a person of contact or a consultant to go around and introduce people” (Participant 6). Furthermore, vouching was highlighted as a useful tool by which relationships could be effectively established. Vouching promotes the development of relationships which are based on the existing positive relationships of others. This transfers to create a sense of trust in a fresh relationship. This process of vouching is reflected in this project’s method.

**Dialogue**

Dialogue was identified as a key concept encompassing consultation, engaging a community consultant, and networking with community members and organisations.

**Consultation**

Consultation and asking questions was strongly reflected in participant responses as an important element of working collaboratively between researchers and participants. Consultation in research contexts involves working in collaborative relationships to “speak to
the local people themselves about their concerns” (Morris, 2008), as well as their ideas, insights, values, goals and cultural protocols. Participants asserted that “the main thing before you do anything, you normally ask. Ask if it’s ok to do such, ask if it’s ok to do that; and ask if you’re being too demanding” (Participant 6). This suggests that consultation is to be genuine and meaningful, and not a drain on time and other resources.

Engaging a community cultural consultant

The need for researchers to engage a community cultural consultant to guide, advise, interpret, translate or liaise with community members was represented overwhelmingly in participant responses, despite this project’s community cultural consultant being present for only half the interviews to visually prompt the theme. Participants advised that “non-Indigenous people should never go into an Indigenous community on their own…” (Amor, 2008), however “it’s ok if you’ve got an Aboriginal person with you and an Aboriginal person from within that community itself” (Participant 1). It is important to “engage with someone from that community, preferably someone who’s well known and respected, and have them as a community consultant…” (Amor, 2008) as “…if they [participants] can identify that you’re with someone that they know, that always adds to it, the fact you can actually conduct research more relaxed and probably gather more relevant type information from the people you’re searching” (Amor, 2008).

A community cultural consultant may advise researchers of “how you do your research, or where do you go” (Participant 2), and so “if you’re going to be working with Aboriginal people, it might be wise to bring an Aboriginal person on as part of your team” (Participant 8).

An identified drawback of engaging a community cultural consultant in research projects is the lack of participant anonymity, particularly if the community cultural consultant
attends interviews. The presence of a community cultural consultant could perceivably restrict free-flowing responses from participants and also prevent certain disclosures of information due to cultural, political, kinship, age or gender reasons. This was reflected in the statement “people will often make the assumption that if it’s an Indigenous person who’s from the community, that’s the ideal researchers; but sometimes communities will make the decision that that causes too much humbug and trouble and they also will make the decision that they like the idea of someone who’s professional, they’re being paid for what to do and they’re being directed” (Kinnane, 2008).

Community organisations

Participants advise researchers to become familiar with community organisations and other local resources as they are specialist organisations specific to the area, they may have an interest in the research project, and subsequently “they might chuck some more dollars towards your project to make it better, or they might say ‘that’s already been done’…” (Participant 8). In particular, contacting the local media outlets for support, resources, and research publicity was noted as beneficial; one participant advising “putting an ad [advertisement] in the paper, talking on the radio, sending it through the networks that this paper is going to happen, and this is where it’s going to go…” (Participant 3b).

Process

Time and Timing

Time and timing issues are commonplace in research projects. Time limitations such as short timelines and deadlines are features of most research projects. Timing issues are problems for both researchers and participants as most people are very busy; however many researchers do not consider this. This was identified by a participant stating “people just pick
their days and come in and say ‘ok we want you to do this and you do that and seeya later and we’ll see you in a months time or two weeks time’; … that model of delivery is not working within communities…” (Amor, 2008). Other factors such as law, ceremony, ‘sorry-business’, and aspects of everyday life are common in community life, but may be obstacles for researchers where even the best-laid plans can come undone without forewarning. “Quite often when you go to a small community, because of a number of reasons, cultural issues, people are just not there; it can be difficult to actually interview enough people in that community to say ‘well I think this is representative of the community’…” (Amor, 2008).

Researchers may use techniques of ‘researcher opportunism’ to counteract timing issues and everyday life obstacles, yet such practices must however be exercised with care and balance. Techniques such as ‘piggy-backing’ on the tail of a pre-arranged community gathering for example is an efficient way a researcher may advertise a research project or network with potential participants; however this must be negotiated specifically with communities as opinions of the technique’s appropriateness differ between people. ‘Snowballing’ may be regarded as a safer opportunistic process by which appropriate participants may be sourced.

Collaboration, Partnership and Negotiation

Participants asserted that researchers working in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples is an essential aspect of good research practice. The establishment of a research partnership where the researcher and the community are equally and meaningfully involved is paramount to the success of a mutually beneficial research project. Both the researcher and the community must participate equally and meaningfully in all aspects of the research; namely the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a project. Researchers must also work with participants during fieldwork.
Research must be a vehicle for Aboriginal voice not only in the aforementioned design and execution of research processes, but also in the final documentation arising from the project. The researcher must accordingly listen and attend to such contributions by Aboriginal communities during the research process.

**Negotiation**

The negotiation of boundaries, roles and the status of all partners involved in research must be established in corroboration with the appropriate guidelines and protocols relevant to the research project. This negotiation must occur at the outset of the research project, one participant stating “that’s really what it’s about, it’s about negotiating a relationship; … it gives people boundaries; they know what their rights are and what their role is in a process” (Kinnane, 2008).

**Power and Control**

Power and control emerged as interrelated themes ranging from participant empowerment and disempowerment to research responsibility, choice, and freedoms. Participants expressed their desire to have control over research in their communities stating “we want to have control over what happens to us and our community, we want to be able to be the people that drive some of this stuff” (Amor, 2008), and also “it’s about community focus, … saying ‘you tell us what your needs are’, … a community driven initiative” (Amor, 2008).

Concepts of self-determination featured in many interviews; however it was generally identified as implicit to ideas of a project that is community directed and community driven.
Informed Consent, Understandings and Awareness

Participants identified that being informed of the entire research project rationale, processes and outcomes is integral to ethical research practices. Participants must have a full and clear understanding of the expected impacts that the research may have on them and their community. “Most people are ok with some research being done as long as they are fully informed about the process…” (Amor, 2008). Researchers must also be conscious of assumptions and inferences inherent to research processes which participants may not fully be aware of or understand. One participant illustrated this stating “a lot of the time it’s assumed that ‘I’m coming to do the research and people know what that means’; and a lot of the time that’s not the case when you’re out in a community” (Participant 3a).

The expected consequences and implications of the research must be outlined to participants, such as “what’s the ramifications of that person answering questions?” (Participant 3a) or “what are you going to do with that knowledge?” (Participant 10).

Furthermore, researchers must inform participants that there may be unforeseen or uncontrollable implications or consequences by participating in research. “You’ve got to be very careful about the way you treat some of the information you gather because it can have very serious consequences; … how you treat information and in particular what you publish is got to be very carefully looked at because it can cause a lot of damage to individuals and unfortunately families may cop some backlash from it” (Amor, 2008).

A further issue which participants identified was that of secondary-sourcing information after publishing, asking “…‘where’s this information or this intellectual property going to go?’…” (Participant 3b). If participant contributions are published and are in the ‘public domain’, they may be referenced or cited in other publications which they did not consent to. “Once that research is written … who else is going to have access to that information?” (Morris, 2008). Furthermore, “[participants] engage with a researcher
thinking it was going to be one thing, and it turned out to be another; … it turns up being used somewhere else without going back to check with people” (Kinnane, 2008). The issue remains that “knowledge that you create for one project, you often will negotiate that and that’s fine; but often it can end up with people finding that info used in ways people didn’t agree to and that’s not fine” (Kinnane, 2008), and “it can have irreparable damage for further research” (Amor, 2008).

Another point raised was that of ‘actual’ free consent obtained without pressure or external influence. This was raised with reference to participants consenting to participate in research pressured by an unspoken social obligation to honour a relationship; a situation which is commonly oblivious to researchers. A participant explained this stating “…it’s a bit like an Aboriginal person saying ‘yes’ going ‘mmm’, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they’re saying ‘yes’ to participation or being in it; it’s more they’re doing it for cultural relationships and friendships and relationships we have, so us agreeing to do your interview for example was based on relationships, nothing to do with you” (Participant 3b). This elicited the issue of free consent in this project and the impact that the community cultural consultant had during participant recruitment, oblivious to the researcher due to not understanding the nature of such relationships.

Language

Themes arose from interviews on the topic of language, where ‘standard English’ is not always the first language of Aboriginal peoples. Participants advised researchers to “…‘speak down’ if they speak English; people don’t understand what they’re talking about. You know, cut it down, cut your English down a little bit…” (Lawford, 2008). This features in interview situations where “…quite often people will say to you ‘oh yeah, yeah, yeah’ and have no idea what you’re talking about because they don’t want to be rude to you, they don’t
understand you, [they won’t say] ‘please repeat it’ or ‘say it simpler’… they’ll keep saying ‘yeah, yeah, yeah’ so you think oh yeah they understand what I’m talking about so you keep [talking], and really no one knows what you’re talking about” (Participant 3a).

Literacy issues were also raised with reference to potential participants who may not be highly educated or may have issues reading and understanding written documents. The issue of understanding meaning was raised, participants recommending the use of examples in interviews “…analogy, that’s right, if you use examples or any of that sort of stuff, most Aboriginal people they understand” (Participant 6), and also “always say ‘do you understand the question?’; sometimes with the English language it can mean two different things” (Participant 6). As a consequence, participants encouraged the use of plain language when asking questions or negotiating research processes, particularly in written forms or letters.

One participant further identified that researchers needed to ensure that the use of plain language to promote understanding and clear conversation must not be implemented in patronising ways, stating “another thing is how they speak to Aboriginal people, like you get other mob people want to talk like… they think they’re dumb, but people aren’t dumb…” (Lawford, 2008).

Expectations, let-down, promises and follow-through

Participants stated that incongruity between the reality of research processes and the expectations of participants and communities leads to let-down. Participants stated the importance of follow-through by researchers, a non-verbatim quote from notes taken in an interview reflects the experience of a research participant, stating “We’ve been waiting 10 years for some research and it’s still not ready. Non-Aboriginal people will move mountains like a giant Boab tree from up here to Perth, but not finish a report which we contributed to,
as promised” (Participant 9). This point was further expanded upon highlighting the danger of researchers making promises which may be out of the control of researchers.

Advertising research

“You need to give people plenty of warning that you’re coming; all the better that most of the community are aware of it” (Amor, 2008). Participants advised that the advertising of research was essential “you can’t just rock-up somewhere and expect it to take place, you need to give notice, you need to get permission” (Participant 8). Participants asserted that researchers needed to advertise research projects to warn the community of soon arriving researchers so they are aware and may prepare for participation directly or in supporting roles. “[Research] should be introduced into the community properly; that way people will be well aware that this research is to be taken out, and that you are going to come and interview them…” (Participant 2).

Appropriate Researchers

When participants were asked about the significance of a researcher’s background, responses were overwhelmingly in support of a skilled researcher as opposed to the specificity of the researcher’s background. “I think today it doesn’t matter if you’re Aboriginal or not, it’s how you conduct yourself as a human person; if you show respect, and are aware of certain ways to work and speak to people” (Participant 8). Participants recommend that researchers be skilled and hard-workers, and that the research projects are ‘good’. Participants stated that “[a researcher’s background] shouldn’t really matter as long as they have the skills to do it” (Participant 3a) and that “if you’ve got a good project, that will override what nationality you are” (Participant 8).
Some participants suggested that the nature of the research dictates the appropriate researcher for the project, stating “you may want someone who is an outsider who you can tell your story to … and potentially be anonymous or share your concerns … and not feel that it’s fodder for someone to create gossip or see the need for payback or anything like that” (Kinnane, 2008).

Participants also noted that non-Aboriginal researchers may be as appropriate or relevant for certain research projects as Aboriginal or Indigenous researchers due to cultural differences between diverse Aboriginal groups, as well as sensitivities in research projects. One participant stated “[Indigenous researchers] have to adhere to the same power-sharing relationships as a non-Indigenous researcher and sometimes for communities it’s easier to be able to deal with someone who’s separate from those community issues in dealing with things such as for instance child sexual abuse, domestic violence, alcohol abuse [etcetera] …” (Kinnane, 2008).

**Interpersonal skills and cross-cultural competency**

Participants stated that a researcher’s interpersonal skills and in particular communication skills were important assets when working collaboratively and consulting with communities. A participant asserted that such skills further enhance data elicitation in research settings stating “[if] you make them [participants] feel comfortable then you’ll probably get good information out” (Participant 8).

Participants also expressed the importance of a researcher’s non-verbal communication skills and body language in interviews. Furthermore, participants recommended that interviewers need to consider their personal appearance when conducting research with Aboriginal peoples. Examples of suitable personal presentation for researchers can include smart, modest and sensible clothing for both men and women; respectful
cleanliness and hygiene; and appropriate personal features such as tidy, neat hairstyles and conservative body-piercings.

*Flexibility of researcher*

Researchers need to be flexible as “there’s things that happen every day that affects the community and people within the community that might affect the way that research is being done” (Participant 14), and furthermore that when “working with Aboriginal people you’ve got to expect the unexpected. You can be scheduled to go on a particular week, and a funeral has to happen because an unexpected death took place; you’ve gotta be flexible, so please be conscious of your timeframe … working with Aboriginal people you have to be flexible” (Participant 8). The above quotes emphasise the need for researchers to be flexible in their approach to research, but also highlights the importance of project adaptability and flexibility in project variables such as timelines and funding.

Researchers also need to accommodate participants at the individual level. An example from this project may be when encountering interview recording issues. Two participants in this project did not want to be recorded, so notes were taken in these cases. Also, one participant wanted to rehearse the interview prior to recording to increase confidence and comfortableness with questions, to prepare discussion topics, and better articulate responses. Also, some participants asked for the recorder to be switched off in order to disclose information which they did not want formally on the record which allowed the researcher to better understand participant responses.

Participants also stated that researchers needed to be ‘open’ during projects, particularly throughout relationship building and data-collection stages. Participants highlighted the importance of self-disclosure revealing personal information such as sharing details about family, interests and hobbies, ethnic background and football tips. This ‘freeing
Research in Aboriginal Contexts

of information’ promotes healthy interaction and enhances communication between researchers and participants. Furthermore, a number of participants spoke about the importance of researchers ‘putting themselves into the research’ demonstrating their interest in the research domain, the community and participants; as well as showing humanness and heart.

_Cultural awareness and cross-cultural competency_

Participants spoke about the importance of researchers being culturally aware and having an “awareness of how to conduct themselves appropriately” (Participant 8). Participants warn non-Aboriginal researchers to “tread lightly as a non-Aboriginal person” (Participant 5). Cultural awareness and its importance are discussed in further detail below.

_Awareness_

_Cultural Awareness_

The need for researchers to be culturally aware was strongly represented in interviews. Participants identified aspects of cultural awareness including the homogenisation of Aboriginal peoples, recognising culture, identifying sensitivities, interpretation issues, and the representation of Aboriginal peoples.

_Homogenisation, diversity and levels_

Researchers must be aware of homogenisation in research as “…every region is different, … not all Aboriginal people are the same in their protocols…” (Participant 5). Researchers must “understand the different areas and not think like generically across the Kimberley…” (Participant 10). One participant acknowledged that despite the differences between Aboriginal groups, there are similarities and connections between them, stating
“they’ve got their own stories too, and they’ve got their own creator too, they’ve got their own song-lines; but sometimes our song-lines interweave amongst each other…” (Participant 6).

Several participants stated that Aboriginal peoples are diverse, identifying examples of ‘difference blindness’ in many research projects. The implications of diversity on research protocols indicates that Aboriginal researchers must still follow proper research practices, one participant stating “I would have to go through the same protocols as a non-Indigenous researcher even if I was doing research in the country my ancestors belong to; I would have to go through the same process of going through elders, so I don’t even think it’s a process of Indigenous [versus] non-Indigenous, it’s about respect for difference” (Kinnane, 2008).

Aboriginal diversity accounts for an issue inherent in standardised research guidelines, one participant stating “I don’t think anyone’s ever locked on to any standard framework because it’s sort of inconsistent with the diversity of Aboriginal culture” (Participant 10).

Participants identified “there’s different levels of Aboriginal people” (Participant 8), where levels of acculturation determine the retention of traditional culture in Aboriginal participants. One participant offered an example stating “…with me, I’m not a ‘traditional’, traditional person so I take questions as they come and it doesn’t really worry me; but then again … you know I can’t paint everyone with the same brush…” (Participant 5). This highlights the differing levels of acculturation, or different levels by which individual Aboriginal people practice traditional culture. Researchers must have an awareness of this as such ‘levels’ have implications for research design, processes and outcomes.

**Recognise, acknowledge and respect culture**

Participants asserted the importance of researchers recognising, acknowledging and respecting Aboriginal culture, traditions and law practices. Participants also stressed the
importance of researchers going through the correct ‘channels’ or social structures at the outset of the research. Examples of social structures include getting permission from Traditional Owners and consulting with community Elders, as illustrated by the following participants stating “if they want to work correctly with Aboriginal people, they should go through cultural bosses” (Participant 8) and “go to the administrators or you approach the chairperson of the community before you … even step foot on the area” (Participant 14).

Sensitivities and taboos

Participants advise that there are certain boundaries in research that non-Aboriginal researchers must be aware of relating to sensitive ‘no-go areas’ which must be respected. Such areas include law or cultural practices, topics which are cultural taboos, disturbing sacred-sites, or photographing places of cultural significance such as “waterholes… [or] swamps” (Participant 11). Participants stated that “a lot of cultural things shouldn’t be researched by non-Indigenous researchers. If there is a need, and I don’t think there is a need to have to document cultural practices and law and that sort of thing; then that should be done by Aboriginal people … because I mean it’s their culture … so they’re the best people who know about it and know what they want to put out there to the public arena and what they want kept just to themselves” (Participant 3a). Participants additionally recommend that “…it’s really good to have questions beforehand on paper so they can read it before research or an interview is being done. They can cross-off things or maybe tell you before-hand ‘well I can’t really answer this because it’s not my job’…” (Participant 5). Furthermore, participants identified that there may be topics that are not explicitly related to culture per se which participants may not want to talk about. An example of this is “people don’t like old days, what they talk about some times, it’s emotional for people, those stories…” (Lawford, 2008).
Kinship protocols and gender issues

Participants identified that kinship protocols and gender issues which transcend cultural backgrounds may affect research projects where “sometimes you can’t put certain people together in the same place, kinship protocols that need to be observed” (Participant 14). An example of this may be that a participant cannot be a part of a focus-group if their in-law of the opposite sex is present. Also, “you’ll find that males may not want to talk to females, whether they’re Indigenous or not Indigenous, and vice versa…” (Amor, 2008). There are implications regarding kinship protocols and gender issues for researchers, and further considerations when engaging a community cultural consultant. One participant recommended engaging two community cultural consultants, one of each sex.

Interpretation and representation

Participants identified that there are cultural implications between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people regarding differences in data interpretation. “It’s harder in trying to explain … meaning or something of that context or structure to a non-Indigenous person if they’re not familiar with Aboriginal language in that area” (Participant 1). Translating an Aboriginal language into Australian English can be difficult, and moreover non-Aboriginal researchers may misinterpret the meaning of dialogue due to differing cultural perspectives and experiences, one participant stating “…the language is really important … because you’ve got to be clear on language; what people may say, it might be completely different to what the English language is, … so that’s why you check and re-check all the time…” (Participant 6). It is essential to check back with participants to ensure that interpretations are correct as the consequence of data misinterpretation may lead to the misrepresentation of participants.
Participants argued that representation was an important topic of consideration, one participant identifying the importance of “getting a good sample representative of the community” (Amor, 2008) stating “…it’s not necessarily just doing the research on councils, because quite often they’re not representative of the community; … quite often, the more dysfunctional a community is, the more disparity you’ll see between what the council says and what the community says” (Amor, 2008).

**Reflexivity**

**Self-reflection**

Participants recommended researchers reflect upon personal beliefs, research rationale, research history, research motives and vested interests. Although themes of self-reflection and self-interrogation regarding power and privilege were not explicitly articulated during interviews, the subject was inferred in many participant responses. Furthermore, participants identified that reflections of historical relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples may be confronting, one participant stating “you’ll probably get an insight and in some areas you’ll feel very bitter for what your ancestors have done to us” (Participant 6). The theme of reflection was an important topic as researchers may be positioned and understood by a community in ways not identifiable by researchers. Such constructions may impact on the research design and processes in communities. Reflection is also important for researchers to ensure that the research process and practices continually honour the research guidelines, as well as agreements negotiated with the community.

**Politics, aligning and neutrality**

Participants identified that researchers need to reflect on and be aware of community political systems. Politics may affect research when recruiting participants and community
Participants however highlighted that generally, non-Aboriginal researchers have perceived neutrality when working with different Aboriginal groups as their non-Aboriginality transcends many cultural conventions. “It’s being able to travel between everybody, it’s a good thing if you can” (Participant 6). Nevertheless, participants stressed the importance of engaging Aboriginal community cultural consultants, stating “[non-Aboriginal researchers] give you a really good independent sort of view without being coloured by politics or anything; but they still need an Aboriginal person, woman or man, to help them…” (Participant 10).

**Humble novices**

Participants stressed the importance of researcher humility, where researchers are humble novices. One participant warns “don’t become an expert overnight; just because you’ve lived with them for a few years, doesn’t mean you’re an expert. A lot of people fall into that trap because they’ve been accepted into the community…” (Participant 6).

**Back-End**

**Ownership, IP, Acknowledgement and Commercialisation**

Participants spoke about ownership referring to the overall project, as well as the research process, resulting outcomes and generated resources. The subject of ownership has a poor history which impacts on contemporary research, one participant stating “with Indigenous knowledges there is a reticence to leap into such projects, and rightly so, because in the past people have lost ownership of things, or they’ve found their knowledge...
appropriated” (Kinnane, 2008). The participant recommends researchers reflect on issues of ownership in research and suggests “being very honest about, well who really owns this? Who is it for? Who benefits from this research?” (Kinnane, 2008).

Similar themes regarding ownership rights emerged in the form of copyright issues, IP rights, the right to recall information from projects, issues of reproducing information in other documents, as well as a lack co-authorship and acknowledgement in publications. Participants stated “this was people’s knowledge, it’s ultimately up to them how they want to use it” (Kinnane, 2008) as well as “a lot of researchers try to become authorities on their own without recognition of the input and … contribution of the people that they are working with” (Participant 14). Participants also identified that “you don’t see enough co-authorship of documents where … generally it’s the non-Aboriginal person is the author of the document when most of the knowledge of the book has come form an Aboriginal person…” (Participant 10).

Participants also identified issues regarding the attribution of information, stating for example “…they might attribute those 3 stories to one person creating a perception that this person has taken over someone else’s story you know and knowledge, so you’ve got to be very careful about who you attribute knowledge to” (Participant 10). This theme corresponded with issues such as the commercialisation of knowledge, as well as disclosure rights. Participants identified that knowledge and information belongs to specific people which should be shared or disclosed by the appropriate person. Participants stated “even if he is saying the right thing, he’s not the person to say it” (Participant 6), “even though it may be the truth or even though it might be bullshit” (Participant 3b). There are obvious implications for this in research where participants may not be able to answer certain questions or speak on certain topics. Furthermore, a participant extended this theme discussing ‘rights to research’ identifying that it may not be appropriate for researchers to explore or publish information of
a particular topic, stating “it’s the same as any Indigenous researchers working in communities that are not their own … researching issues that they don’t have an ability or a perceived right to speak about…” (Kinnane, 2008).

Outcomes

Outcomes in research were strongly represented subjects in participant responses. Outcomes varied from the individual participatory-level to community-level benefits, asking “well what are we going to get out of it at the end?” (Participant 3a). Themes on topics of outcomes also specified practical or tangible outcomes such as “it wouldn’t hurt too to pay participants” (Participant 8), to philosophical or symbolic benefits such as “if my little talk with you now helps you to be a good researcher, and then you go on up and I see your name in the paper and I can say ‘oh, that young fella he was listening, you know, he did his bit’, that’s reward for me” (Participant 6).

Feeding-back

Participants highlighted the importance of researchers feeding-back data, resources and results, stating “…I think it is important that people who do participate get to use that research that’s done. …I’ve been involved in heaps of research and never seen the results of it” (Participant 3a). This theme was implemented in this project, returning the results as a resource to participants as well as Nulunga, where “it would be good to see your paper at the end putting out to people and really getting to researchers” (Participant 8).

Participants recommended researchers check-back collected research data with participants to verify that the collected information is represented appropriately. The process of double-checking data also allows for spelling errors to be edited and shares control of project data with participants. Double-checking is essential for transparent research practice,
one participant further commenting “sometimes Aboriginal people tell you stories just to get rid of you. That’s why you have to double check all the time … there’s a bit of cunningness there…” (Participant 6).

Participants stated that the accessibility of data and resources to participants and the wider public must be negotiated in both a physical and literary sense. Research participants must be able to access and understand the results and outcomes of the research they have contributed to, and moreover the outcomes of a research project must be made available to the wider public to ensure that research is useful and beneficially contributes to society. One participant reflects “I think research is such an important … thing, but I’ve also found that you can write all the wonderful things on paper, but not many people are going to sit down and read that paper…” (Participant 5).

Community benefit

Participants stated that research must be of benefit to the community promoting usefulness and ensuring significant community participation. “If you really want to have a successful research project, you’ve got to do something that will stay and benefit the community so the researcher can tick off but also the community; and you’ll find if you do that you’ll have more people wanting to be a part of it” (Participant 8).

Participants also felt that research must be relevant to community needs which promote outcomes to advance community interests, as discerned by the community. One participant illustrated this with an example stating “…‘oh they need to research where they can get better water from, this water’s not right here, maybe we need someone to come out and research so there’s better water quality over this area than where we’re getting it from’; so they’re thinking of common stuff on a day to day basis” (Participant 8).
Reciprocity: mutual benefit, learning and sharing

Participants highlighted the importance of reciprocity expressing their dislike of research which was solely for the benefit of researchers or external institutions at the expense of participants. One participant reflected on a past research experience stating “they couldn’t actually tell me how it was going to help me, participating in it, know what I mean? If you’re going to spend a couple of hours of my time, how is that going to help me do what I do?” (Participant 3a). Participants stated that mutual benefit was a vital consideration, asking “if we gave-up knowledge, then how can that knowledge be utilised back in the community?” (Participant 10).

Mutual learning and sharing also arose from interviews in the form of skills transfer and capacity building. Participants identified that skills transfer would be a reciprocal process where participants would have an “opportunity … to get some skills out of it” (Participant 1), and researchers would learn about the research topic from information shared by participants. Working together in this way indicates that the skills transfer is both a research process as well as a research outcome.

From this surfaced themes of financial reward and employment opportunities for participants in research. “If you had the money in the research and you were being paid well, it wouldn’t hurt too to pay participants. It’s good to volunteer but if you’re able to pay that’s another plus in your favour…” (Participant 8). Inherent in responses were issues of perceived standing and respect, one participant stating “they [participants] should be regarded as anyone else who go to a function or conferences; that they be paid a wage like anybody else, a travel fee and that to give this information…” (Participant 2). Participants also spoke of the realities facing many Aboriginal peoples who are commonly participants of research, reminding researchers that “our main thing is ‘how do I get money to feed my family this
week, make my house better, … so why am I talking to a capable researcher or Notre Dame researcher and what is that going to do to make my life better?’…” (Participant 3a).

Participants also said that research outcomes should feature benefits for youth, and positive outcomes for the future. Topics included the educative aspects of being involved in research, as well as training opportunities for young people in research. Participants also encouraged the involvement of youth in research for the betterment of understanding and future relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

Participants also stated that research should not cause harm to participants, the community, or the environment. Participants emphasised that researchers conducting fieldwork must be respectful of the environment and engage an Aboriginal community cultural consultant to advise researchers of environmental protocols. Participants also emphasised that it is integral that researchers clean-up after themselves during fieldwork.

Accountability

Participants recommended the establishment of an overarching institution which holds researchers accountable to ethical practice honouring the established research guidelines. “There has to be some accountability code of conduct” (Participant 3b). Such an institution would be a binding authority regulating, monitoring and reviewing research projects. One participant states “…there’s got to be some principles or codes that you have to adhere to as a part of your mark…” (Participant 3b). Therefore, such an institution would have to have power beyond that of a conventional reference group with the authority to facilitate the accreditation of research projects which are conducted culturally appropriately, ethically, adhere to set research guidelines and are within the boundaries as specifically negotiated between researchers and communities.
Participants outlined their dislike of government departments and institutions duplicating research, stating “people are getting really annoyed with that” (Participant 14) citing the cause as “there’s no liaising between them” (Participant 14). Participants identified a lack of communication between government departments and institutions again supporting the need for “a national database that says: ‘these are all the things that we’re doing’…” (Participant 3b).

**Ethics**

**Ethical Research: Values and Principles**

“I’m very happy to work with non-Indigenous researchers who operate from sound ethical bases and engage with communities in ways which are conducive to both the research and to the communities” (Kinnane, 2008). Participants identified certain values and principles by which research should be conducted, although these were not always articulated explicitly. Participants identified values and principles which position researchers and guide research process, asking researchers to “operate from your own core sense of ‘what’s right’, and what your interviewees or community that you’re dealing with agree with” (Kinnane, 2008). As can be seen above, participants highlight the need for such values and principles to be negotiated between both researchers and communities.

‘Respect’ and ‘acknowledgement’ were the only values explicitly identified in a participant response, asserting “people want respect from other people, respect and acknowledgement, that’s universal I would think; and Indigenous people want to be seen, want to be respected for who they are…” (Participant 14). Other identifiable values and principles implicit to participant responses include accountability, authenticity, commitment, engagement, honesty, neutrality, reflexivity, self-determination, transparency and voice. These values and principles were discussed above supporting other themes.
Validity

The use of a collaborative participatory approach in all aspects of the research ensured that the validity of the design, implementation, monitoring and project outcomes was maximised. Furthermore, the Community Reference Group reviewed all documentation for suitability, clarity, cultural awareness and sensitivity.

After the data analysis, a concise plain-language version of the results was sent to participants for verification (see Appendix 7). Feeding back data and welcoming participant responses reinforced validity, presented participants accurately and honoured ethical and culturally appropriate practice.
Chapter 5: Discussion

With an aim to improve current research practices, I asked participants about their past research experiences, their thoughts regarding researchers with a focus on non-Aboriginal researchers, concepts of cultural awareness, as well as recommendations for research and researchers. I also asked participants about their awareness and thoughts of existing research guidelines as well as further offering opportunities for open discussion and feedback for this research project. In this chapter I will discuss how the results fit the existing body of literature and highlight gaps identified in the literature and research guidelines.

Remarkably, there was high degree of consistency in participant responses throughout interviews. Nevertheless, as presented in the results chapter, voices of participants were evident.

Results Reflecting Literature

The existing literature consists of past accounts of negative research, contemporary research beliefs and best-practices as reflected by researchers and academics, as well as the accepted standardised ethical research guidelines. Much of the results chapter reflects the literature, as apparent in the following combined summary of principles and themes of significance in the literature and results.

Similarities: results and literature review

Australia’s negative research history and continuing legacy today (Gooda, 2007) features overwhelmingly throughout participant responses as well as the literature. Institutional and university agendas and competitiveness were also plainly expressed
throughout most participant responses and stated in the literature (Drew, 2006; Gooda, 2007; Howitt, 2005).

The composition of ‘good’, necessary, positive projects with meaningful, beneficial and tangible outcomes from a community perspective was strongly represented throughout the results and literature (Gooda, 2007; Prior, 2007; Weijer et al., 1999; Willis et al., 2005). Research should thus promote active, positive change (Gooda, 2007) without negative or detrimental effects to participants (Vicary, 2002; Smith, 1999; Prior, 2007).

Meaningful relationship building, proper engagement, respectful relationships (Gooda, 2007), collaboration beyond tokenistic involvement (Calma, 2005; Prior, 2007), cooperation, mutuality, reciprocity and sharing (Bishop, 2007; Couzos et al., 2005; Gooda, 2007; Prior, 2007; Vallance & Tchacos, 2001; Weijer et al., 1999) were well represented themes in interviews and the literature. Also, the appropriate resourcing of research relationships is crucial (Couzos et al., 2005). Networking was highlighted as important for research (Garvey, 2007), including consultation with local community organisations (Couzos et al., 2005) and engaging cultural consultants to ensure cultural appropriateness (Melder, 2007).

Community participation in research design, implementation, management, monitoring, dissemination and evaluation (Calma, 2005; Gooda, 2007; Prior, 2007) was identified, alongside community control and ownership of research (Calma, 2005). Informed consent (Calma, 2005; Weijer et al., 1999) was strongly represented, as well as accurate, accessible outcomes and feedback of results and resources (Calma, 2005; Santhanam, 2007; Weijer et al., 1999) which were also well represented in the results data and literature.

Cultural awareness and cultural appropriateness, recognising and respecting Aboriginal cultures (Bishop, 2007; Couzos et al., 2005; Gooda, 2007; Weijer et al., 1999) and reflective practice (Garvey, 2007; Sonn, 2004) were further highlighted as themes of
importance in participant responses and the literature. The necessity for researcher flexibility and accountability (Raven, 2006; Vallance & Tchacos, 2001) was accompanied by other values and principles for ethical and culturally appropriate research including trustworthiness, transparency and respect (Bishop, 2007; Briskman, 2007; Calma 2006; Gooda, 2007; Prior, 2007; Raven, 2006; Vallance & Tchacos, 2001; Weijer et al., 1999).

Differences: literature review and results:

All principles identified in the literature were represented in some way explicitly or implicitly in participant responses. It is significant that the values, principles and recommended practices from a community-based perspective reflect the ethical guidelines and recommendations from researchers and academics. However, the concepts identified in participant responses which were not reflected in the literature are arguably of greater significance and interest.

Various themes from the results chapter not represented in the guidelines or academic and researcher reflections include: researcher preconceived ideas with prescriptive research projects, an awareness of research duplication, participant anonymity issues when engaging community cultural consultants, cross-cultural interpretation issues when deciphering and understanding the meaning implicit in Aboriginal language, non-verbal communication and body-language in interviews, disclosure issues and rights to disclose or share certain information or stories, appropriate personal presentation and appearance of researchers, recording issues in interviews, sampling issues such as sample size, breadth and depth, environmentally friendly research, participant voice in produced documents and resources, as well as researchers investing interest, self and heart into the research. These issues are discussed in more detail later (also see Appendix 1).
Further Understandings

Additionally, there were a number of issues that emerged from the process that warrant discussion. In terms of this project, “…we’re not reinventing the wheel with regards to things that have already been documented” (Participant 14). In spite of the research findings resulting from this project and the data analysis, this research is significant as a process which in itself is an important outcome. The process of consultation in the research interviews is a vital component in the appropriate development of Nulungu guidelines for researchers. Even if the results precisely mirrored the accepted standardised research guidelines as offered by the AIATSIS or the NHMRC, the process is nevertheless integral in identifying appropriate research techniques as determined by the community members participating in research.

Research initiation

The differing research experiences of participants revealed that there are at least three different ways by which research projects are initiated. The most common of these are top-down imposed research projects by outside groups such as government departments or institutions. There are also the bottom-up projects conceived, designed, driven and controlled by the community; as well as the middle-ground where projects are conducted collaboratively between communities and outside groups. The diverse experiences and insights of participants affected the perspective of their responses to questions asked and further increased the range of the information shared.

Engaging a community cultural consultant

Engaging Edgar as the research community cultural consultant appeared to prompt participants to mention the benefits of his presence. In addition, during the interviews where
Edgar was not present due to timing or political reasons, participants nevertheless stated that it was important for researchers to engage a community member in the roles of cultural guide, consultant, advisor, interpreter and liaison officer. Furthermore, explicitly in the interviews that Edgar did not attend, the participants stated that the presence of someone in such a role may have adverse impacts including issues such as breaching cultural protocols or complicating community politics.

*Past research reflecting historical contexts: Impacts*

Although none of the interview questions asked participants about past research practices, the topic was nevertheless raised by eleven out of fifteen participants. As illustrated in the literature review and represented in participant responses, the negative history of research is entrenched in the paternalistic, inequitable and supremacist colonial ideology of Australian history (NHMRC, 2003). Ideologies from Australian history informing past research practice focussed on documenting ‘the other’ using unethical, culturally inappropriate research practices where people have taken “everything from artefacts to people’s skeletons or heads in the name of research…” (Kinnane, 2008).

There is an evident mistrust of researchers by many Aboriginal people. This is reflected by elements of Australia’s past negative research practices, poor historical relations and oppressive Government policies. Negative research history further lives on in the memory of many Aboriginal peoples, as observable in the potency and extent of discussion regarding history. There was furthermore an overwhelming representation of dislike and distrust of anthropologists. Negative past research and a lack of recognition and acknowledgement of contributed participant IP further leads participants to believe that they are ‘giving’ or ‘losing’ IP, rather than ‘sharing’ it. Negative Australian history requires researchers to understand the impacts of history on participant understandings and perspectives, shaping contemporary
values and attitudes of research and non-Indigenous researchers. This in essence reinforces the importance of the research process as a trust building exercise.

*Contemporary research reflecting contemporary contexts*

The progressive development of research from negative past practices to contemporary standards is illustrated in current research guidelines and reflections. Past research mirrored the beliefs and practices of the time. Yet again, contemporary Australian beliefs of reconciliation, decolonisation and self-determination appear to mirror contemporary research, but this identified parallel is both a positive and negative observation. Despite movements towards self-determination and reconciliation, the Howard Government imposed the paternalistic Northern Territory Emergency Response ‘blanket’ Intervention suspending the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*\(^3\) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). Abysmal disparity in living standards including poor health, education, housing, law and welfare continue (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007). Many Aboriginal communities face threats of closure due to ‘unviability’ or ‘disorder’ (King, 2006; Strutt, 2008). The respective neo-colonial enactments and inactions by governing authorities reflect the dissonance between their philosophies and their actual practices.

Accordingly this disparity between philosophy and practice is paralleled in contemporary research practice, where guideline principles consistent with reconciliation, decolonisation and self-determination promoting culturally appropriate ethical research are seldom implemented in the effective collaborative and participatory process required (Humphrey, 2000; Minniecon et al., 2007). Despite research guidelines based on ethics, values and principled practice; evidence in participant responses and the literature suggests that many researchers are not ‘walking the talk’, or researchers do not truly understand what

Research in Aboriginal Contexts

is being presented in research guidelines (Minniecon et al., 2007). There are further issues regarding possible differing perspectives from which guidelines are interpreted, or different definitions or understandings of concepts presented in research guidelines. A lack of grassroots community-consultation in the development of the guidelines may indicate that they do not truly represent community and participant needs. Nonetheless, there is a gap between the beliefs in research guideline principles and their effective implementation into research contexts.

**Theoretical Implications**

The power, privilege and authority inherent in notions of contemporary whiteness are ongoing legacies of colonialism (Green & Sonn, 2005). Australia’s recent negative colonial history as described in the background chapter highlights the power, privilege and authority assumed by non-Aboriginal Australians. Past negative research practices identified in the literature review and results chapter embodying colonial beliefs and practices again describe themes of power, privilege and authority afforded to non-Aboriginal researchers. The same themes are reproduced in contemporary neo-colonial practices identified in the background chapter such as the Northern Territory Emergency Response Intervention. The recognition, understanding and acknowledgment of colonialism and neo-colonialism therefore promote the imperative for decolonising research.

The challenge for non-Indigenous researchers researching in Aboriginal contexts is to examine their whiteness as the legacy of colonisation and understand what whiteness brings to the research relationship. Non-Indigenous researchers must gain an awareness of negative Australian history and culturally inappropriate and unethical past research, and negative past relationships. Non-Indigenous researchers must use whiteness as a framework to appreciate the impacts of power inequities and barriers to engagement inherent in whiteness.
This must be enacted via meaningful reflection to deconstruct power, privilege and authority. Non-Indigenous researchers must reflect on the societal inequities, racial discrimination and unequal power distribution privileging non-Indigenous Australians (Sherwood & Edwards, 2006; Smith, 1999). Non-Indigenous researchers must also interrogate the significance of power inequities inherent in the roles of non-Indigenous researchers, past research, as well as contemporary research practices (Holt, 2006; Smith, 1999).

Acknowledging and reflecting on whiteness allows non-Indigenous researchers to better understand and implement culturally appropriate and ethical research practices described in the literature review and results chapter, as well as ethical research guidelines (Green & Sonn, 2005). Understanding colonialism, neo-colonialism and decolonising practice allows non-Indigenous researchers to identify ways that they may relinquish their power, privilege and authority. Only when researchers internalise, understand and appreciate whiteness may they then have the capacity to truly embrace participatory decolonising research.

**Improving Research Guidelines**

It is clear from participant responses that research institutions such as the AIATSIS and the NHMRC must increase public awareness of the existence of their research guidelines, and better inform the public of where and how to access the documents. Furthermore, research guidelines must revise the language featured in the documents to use clearer and plainer language accessible to more people from different backgrounds. Researchers should additionally be required to provide all research participants with copies of the guidelines if participants are not fully informed of the requirements and responsibilities of all parties involved.
Research guidelines must state clearly that ethical values and principles which they promote must be followed by all researchers conducting research in Aboriginal contexts, not just non-Aboriginal or non-Indigenous researchers, as is commonly thought. “Whatever protocols are put in place, they apply to whoever the researcher is be they Indigenous or non-Indigenous … it’s about respect for difference and respect for different ownership of knowledge” (Kinnane, 2008). The guidelines will only then in effect recognise and acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal peoples.

Negotiation of research guidelines and project processes must be flexible and equitable. “Protocols have to be flexible to allow those many parties who work in research to work out what they consider to be an equitable, productive and respectful relationship” (Kinnane, 2008). Such negotiation and flexibility allows research to be achieved appropriate to community requirements. Homogeneity issues must be promoted in guidelines acknowledging the diversity of Aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, the nature of standardised guidelines does not promote Aboriginal diversity. This is consistent with recommendations by Minniecon et al. (2007) for the purposeful consideration of culturally appropriate processes specific to communities.

The guidelines should discourage researchers from pursuing prescriptive research projects based on preconceived ideas which may be irrelevant to participant needs. If research is imposed on communities, its necessity and relevance must be questioned. Project significance must also be assessed from a community perspective (de Crespigny et al., 2004). The rationales for research must be considered in the context of community life described the background chapter.

Guidelines must unequivocally instruct non-Indigenous researchers to meaningfully reflect on whiteness and the implications of power, privilege and authority in research partnerships. Reflective practice must be conducted as an imperative for deconstructing
whiteness. This honours decolonising research and promotes the redistribution of power, choice and ownership as an enactment of just process and culturally appropriate ethical research.

Additional recommended research guideline amendments arising from this research are included in Appendix 9.

Limitations

The limitations in this research project essentially include time, resources and cross-cultural communication issues. The project feasibility was constrained by factors such as the time restrictions of the researcher, participants, supervisors and the Honours deadline. Furthermore, the project had to be within the boundaries of the original ethical clearance, had to fulfil the requirements for an Honours programme, and needed to be useful, meaningful and valuable.

The inherent issue of the collaborative participatory project design, implementation, monitoring and outcomes was balancing the depth of collaboration and community-lead project development with working autonomously as per the requirements of the honours research process. This was further reflected when feeling as a researcher to appear needy or incompetent when working collaboratively with busy, in-demand people; where this research project is not the most important thing in the busy lives and schedules of participants and supervisors.

A further limitation within this research is my whiteness. The acknowledgement of negative past and current research practices in conducting background research and a literature review, preliminary discussions with supervisors, the presence of the community cultural consultant as well as vouching from Nulungu allowed me to participate in a collaborative research project and understand power and privilege.
Reflection

Reflexive practice is an essential part of the research process as identified in the literature review (AIATSIS, 2000; NHMRC, 2003; Smith, 1999; Sonn, 2004; Sonn, 2007). A reflection is offered in Appendix 8 to re-consider this research project’s processes in light of the findings to determine what would be revised to improve this research project if I knew then what I know now.
Conclusion

In this research I asked participants about their thoughts, experiences and insights of research, researchers and existing ethical guidelines. I asked participants about the perceived issues and benefits of non-Aboriginal researchers and what cultural protocols researchers should be aware of. I asked participants about their awareness of and familiarity with existing research guidelines, and overall participant recommendations for researchers and research projects. The aim of the research was to use the data to inform the policy development of Nulungu, and to produce a guidelines resource for researchers conducting research in Aboriginal contexts, focusing on the Kimberley, WA.

The significance of this research project as a resource is reflected in positive participant feedback: “if you don’t do things like this, then you’ll never know what the protocols are” (Participant 5), and “we’d find that helpful because next time researchers come we can say ‘oh, we don’t like the way you do things sorry – have you read this best practice thing?’…” (Participant 3a). Participants furthermore assumed joint ownership in the resource, stating: “I think this is an excellent topic and let’s hope we can improve researchers when they come out on the Kimberleys…” (Participant 8).

Negative Australian research history illustrates accounts of culturally inappropriate unethical, paternalistic research practices which have resulted in Aboriginal transgenerational trauma and a ‘thick skin’ towards engagement (Garvey, 2007). Consequently, Aboriginal peoples are generally suspicious and mistrusting of researcher motives and project outcomes and implications (Smith 1999; Stewart et al., 2006).

The content of ethical research guidelines offered by organisations such as the AIATSIS and the NHMRC is accurate and relevant for researchers. However the accessibility of research guidelines to grassroots community members is poor. Community awareness of
the existence and content of guidelines is also poor. Guideline enforceability and researcher accountability were issues identified by participants and the literature, where “guidelines provide a poor framework for protection of Indigenous interests and rely too much on researchers ‘doing the right thing’…” (Dunbar & Scrimgeour, 2006, p.56).

Aboriginal communities require respect and to be engaged as partners in research, where researchers must invest commitment and heart to projects. Collaborative research practice must be based on sound ethical values as negotiated by communities and researchers. The engagement of community cultural consultants is integral in the appropriate implementation of research values and principles.

Despite the resonance between research guidelines, academic and researcher reflections and participant responses, Aboriginal peoples are nonetheless wary of research and researchers attributable to the legacy of Australian history and the role of past negative research (Stewart et al., 2006). “The present and the future are absolutely bound up in the past” (NHMRC, 2003, p.9), thereby presenting an imperative for reconciliation with regards to past research practices in addition to reconciling the negative exploits of Australian history.

The purpose of research must shift towards community benefit, where ‘good’ research must become the research imperative rather than serving the interests of others or aspirations for academic currency (Drew, 2006).

The current Northern Territory Emergency Response Intervention, the looming threat of Aboriginal communities being closed, accompanied by the continuing abysmal disparity in living standards amongst Australians offers little encouragement for Aboriginal communities to trust researchers, in particular non-Aboriginal researchers.

Reflective and principled research must be practiced to acknowledge and understand whiteness to promote the redistribution of power, promote choice and provide opportunities for ownership of research processes and outcomes; thus ensuring research is culturally
appropriate, ethical and just. Researchers thereby shift from positions of power and control in research, to partners in research relationships and agents of social justice. Practices of imposed, paternalistic, prescriptive research must shift to reflect cultural appropriateness, ethical values, decolonisation and reconciliatory ideology. “Until this situation changes, even with the best will in the world, policies of ‘direct engagement’ with Aboriginal peoples are unlikely to succeed” (Calma, 2006, p.89). The challenge for current researchers and research institutions is to enact reflective principled practice rather than think about it, write about it, yet not act upon it.

Finally, it has been identified that further research is required to consult with more communities in the West-Kimberley, as well as communities in the East-Kimberley, WA. Further research will complement data found in this research project. Also, further research should be conducted in partnership with communities allowing a longer engagement period than in this project to elicit more detailed data, with prospects for focus-groups and multiple interviews to encourage deeper reflections.
Reference List:


Couzos, S., Lea, T., Murray, R., Culbong, M. (2005). ‘We are not just participants – we are in charge’: The NACCHO ear trial and the process for Aboriginal community-controlled health research. *Ethnicity and Health, 10*(2), pp.91-111.


Dodson, M. (1997, January). *Democracy, the media and human rights.* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice commissioner address to the public lecture session: diplomacy training program, Manila, Philippines.


Reconciliation WA. (n.d.). *Western Australia’s other history: a short guide.* Perth: Reconciliation WA.


Appendices:

Appendix 1:
AIATSIS Guidelines
A I A T S I S

The Australian Institute of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

Guidelines for Ethical Research in
Indigenous Studies

May 2000
INTRODUCTION

It is essential that Indigenous peoples be participants in any research project that concerns them, sharing an understanding of the aims and methods of the research, and sharing the results of this work. The principles of the Institute’s *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* are founded on respect for Indigenous peoples’ inherent right to self-determination, and to control and maintain their culture and heritage. The Institute considers that these principles are not only a matter of ethical research practice but of human rights.

Ms Erica-Irene Daes, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the United Nations Working Group of Indigenous Populations, remarked that:

Heritage can never be alienated, surrendered or sold, except for conditional use. Sharing therefore creates a relationship between the givers and receivers of knowledge. The givers retain the authority to ensure that knowledge is used properly and the receivers continue to recognize and repay the gift.

At every stage, research with and about Indigenous peoples must be founded on a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the researcher and the Indigenous people.

It is important that the Institute’s *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* embody the best standards of ethical research and human rights. To this end, the Institute’s Council initiated a review of the 1985 Guidelines. The Institute’s Ethics Committee, together with the Research Section staff of the Institute held two workshops in 1999 to develop the new *Guidelines*, which were then redrafted by the research staff.

In compiling the *Guidelines* consideration was given to recent significant research in this area, including, the Australian Research Council, Commissioned Report No. 59, *Research of Interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, prepared by the Institute; *Our Culture: Our Future, Report on Australian Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual property Rights*, prepared by Terri Janke of Michael Frankel and Company, for the Institute and ATSIC; and the recent National Health and Medical Research Council, ‘National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans’.

These *Guidelines* are primarily intended for research sponsored by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. However, the Institute recognises that it has responsibility as a leading institution in Australian Indigenous studies and recognises that its ethical guidelines inform all research in this area.

The *Guidelines* include a statement of the principles of ethical research in Indigenous studies, followed by an explanation of each principle, accompanied by some practical applications.

These practical points are not intended to be directive but are recommendations and suggestions to achieve the best standards of ethical research.
PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL RESEARCH

A. Consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding

1. Consultation, negotiation and free and informed consent are the foundations for research with or about Indigenous peoples.

Researchers must accept a degree of Indigenous community input into and control of the research process. This also recognises the obligation on researchers to give something back to the community.

It is ethical practice in any research on Indigenous issues to include consultation with those who may be directly affected by the research or research outcomes whether or not the research involves fieldwork.

2. The responsibility for consultation and negotiation is ongoing.

Consultation and negotiation is a continuous two-way process. Ongoing consultation is necessary to ensure free and informed consent for the proposed research, and of maintaining that consent.

Research projects should be staged to allow continuing opportunities for consideration of the research by the community.

3. Consultation and negotiation should achieve mutual understanding about the proposed research.

Consultation involves an honest exchange of information about aims, methods, and potential outcomes (for all parties). Consultation should not be considered as merely an opportunity for researchers to tell the community what they, the researchers, may want.

Being properly and fully informed about the aims and methods of a research project, its implications and potential outcomes, allows groups to decide for themselves whether to oppose or to embrace the project.

B. Respect, recognition and involvement

4. Indigenous knowledge systems and processes must be respected.

Acknowledging and respecting Indigenous knowledge systems and processes is not only a matter of courtesy but also recognition that such knowledge can make a significant contribution to the research process.

Researchers must respect the cultural property rights of Indigenous peoples in relation to knowledge, ideas, cultural expressions and cultural materials.

5. There must be recognition of the diversity and uniqueness of peoples as well as of individuals.

Research in Indigenous studies must show an appreciation of the diversity of Indigenous peoples, who have different languages, cultures, histories and perspectives.
It is also important to recognise the diversity of individuals and groups within those communities.

6. The intellectual and cultural property rights of Indigenous peoples must be respected and preserved.

Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights are part of the heritage that exists in the cultural practices, resources and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples, and that are passed on by them in expressing their cultural identity.

Indigenous intellectual property is not static and extends to things that may be created based on that heritage.²

It is a fundamental principle of research to acknowledge the sources of information and those who have contributed to the research.

7. Indigenous researchers, individuals and communities should be involved in research as collaborators.

Indigenous communities and individuals have a right to be involved in any research project focussed upon them and their culture.

Participants have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

Research on Indigenous issues should also incorporate Indigenous perspectives and this is often most effectively achieved by facilitating more direct involvement in the research.

C. Benefits, outcomes and agreement

8. The use of, and access to, research results should be agreed.

Indigenous peoples make a significant contribution to research by providing knowledge, resources or access to data. That contribution should be acknowledged by providing access to research results and negotiating rights in the research at an early stage.

The community’s expectations, the planned outcomes, and access to research results should be in agreement.

9. A researched community should benefit from, and not be disadvantaged by, the research project.

Research in Indigenous studies should benefit Indigenous peoples at a local level, and more generally.

A reciprocal benefit should accrue for their allowing researchers often intimate access to their personal and community knowledge.

10. The negotiation of outcomes should include results specific to the needs of the researched community.

Among the tangible benefits that a community should be able to expect from a research project is the provision of research results in a form that is useful and accessible.
11. Negotiation should result in a formal agreement for the conduct of a research project, based on good faith and free and informed consent.

The aim of the negotiation process is to come to a clear understanding, which results in a formal agreement (preferably written), about research intentions, methods and potential results.

The establishment of agreements and protocols between Indigenous peoples and researchers is an important development in Indigenous studies.\(^3\)

Good faith negotiations are those that have involved a full and frank disclosure of all available information and that were entered into with an honest view to reaching an agreement.

Free and informed consent means that agreement must be obtained free of duress or pressure and fully cognisant of the details, and risks of the proposed research. Informed consent of the people as a group, as well as individuals within that group, is important.

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL RESEARCH

NOTE. In the following section, the Principles and explanations are repeated in the left-hand column. The right-hand column contains advice about their implementation. The various points will not necessarily apply in all cases.
1. Consultation, negotiation and free and informed consent are the foundations for research with or about Indigenous peoples

Researchers must accept a degree of Indigenous community input into and control of the research process. This also recognises the obligation on researchers to give something back to the community.

It is ethical practice in any research on Indigenous issues to include consultation with people who may be directly affected by the research or research outcomes whether or not the research involves fieldwork.

Research concerning Indigenous peoples should be carried out with appropriate consultation about the aims and objectives and meaningful negotiation of processes, outcomes and involvement. Relevant communities and individuals should be involved at all stages of the research process, from formulating projects and methods to determining research outcomes and interpreting results.

To facilitate appropriate consultation, negotiation and free and informed consent:

- Identify appropriate individuals and communities who should be consulted about your research project. There is almost always someone to speak for a particular place or area. For more general research, identify and consult individuals or communities who have made an important contribution in relation to your topic.
- Allow appropriate individuals for the area/topic to be identified from within the community.
- Identify community, regional or other Indigenous umbrella organisations.
- Identify any written research protocols or other protocols that you will need to follow.
- Observe appropriate community behavioural norms and protocols.
- Identify potential political issues that may be affected by your research or the outcomes of the research.
- Communicate with relevant individuals and organisations by appropriate means. Face-to-face meetings are always desirable. The budgetary and funding implications of such visits should be considered.
- Introductions to the relevant individuals and communities should clearly identify the researchers and any other participants, any institutional affiliation and key stakeholders, and sources of financial support.
- From the outset, objectives should be clear, while maintaining flexibility and a willingness to modify your goals and ways of working.

Also:

- Consider any permits or permissions that may be required from Indigenous organisations and from State or Territory or local authorities.
- Consult ethical guidelines or codes of ethics of the appropriate professional body or association.
2. The responsibility for consultation and negotiation is ongoing.

Consultation and negotiation is a continuous two-way process. Ongoing consultation is necessary to ensure free and informed consent for the proposed research, and of maintaining that consent.

Research projects should be staged to allow continuing opportunities for consideration of the research by the community.

Community representatives, individual participants and the wider Indigenous community may need time to consider a proposed research project and to discuss its implications, both before it begins and at various stages of the project:

- Phase your research according to community as well as research needs.
- Hold preliminary meeting/s to discuss the proposed research and reach agreements.
- If necessary, re-formulate a new outline of the research proposal, and provide new materials generated from the discussions to the community for review.
- Ensure that all potentially interested individuals are present at preliminary meetings and/or are informed of the scope of the proposed research.
- Explain research methods and processes to individuals, and at community meetings where appropriate, and reach agreement on their cultural appropriateness.
- Reach agreement on how the research should proceed, including processes and timing for informing representatives of the community of the progress of the research and reporting any interim results.
- Report during the project in accordance with any agreement.
- If necessary, consult further about any unforeseen matters that might affect the research process.
- Be willing to renegotiate objectives, where required, in light of new factors and considerations.
- Make provision for a final meeting to consider the results of the research. Further consultation may also be required about details of reports and any publications.
- Obtain (do not assume) invitations to visit the community for the time necessary to conduct the research and to report upon results.
3. Consultation and negotiation should achieve mutual understanding about the proposed research.

Consultation involves an honest exchange of information about aims, methods, and potential outcomes (for all parties). Consultation should not be considered as merely an opportunity for researchers to tell the community what they, the researchers, may want.

Being properly and fully informed about the aims and methods of a research project, its implications and potential outcomes, allows groups to decide for themselves whether to oppose or to embrace the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obtaining agreement to conduct research with or about Indigenous peoples involves fully informing the community about the proposal, discussing the research and negotiating how the research is to proceed:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Identify the appropriate communities or individuals to be consulted before discussing research aims, methods and outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Clearly define and explain the purpose and nature of the study.</td>
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<td>- Explain methods of collecting information clearly and comprehensively, including how and where the information is to be kept.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Agree on the way of conducting the research, including timing and phasing of the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- In order for research to be conducted appropriately and sensitively, discuss relevant cultural and political circumstances.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Be clear about what kind of community or individual participation is sought.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Clearly identify what participation in the study may entail for the community and individual participants.</td>
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<td>- Provide an honest assessment of the risks or potential adverse impacts of the research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Explain, but do not overstate, the potential benefits of the study.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Explain the potential usefulness of the research to Indigenous peoples in general.</td>
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</table>

**Remember:**

- Provide sufficient time for discussion and consideration of proposals.
- Be willing to modify the scope, aims and methods of the proposed research.
- Allow time in the research project for continual review, feedback and discussion.
4. Indigenous knowledge systems and processes must be respected.

Acknowledging and respecting Indigenous knowledge systems and processes is not only a matter of courtesy but also recognition that such knowledge can make a significant contribution to the research process.

Researchers must respect the cultural property rights of Indigenous peoples in relation to knowledge, ideas, cultural expressions and cultural materials.

Where the knowledge of an individual or a group forms the basis of or contributes significantly to research, the importance of that contribution should be reflected in the reporting of research:

- Recognise the value of Indigenous perspectives and their contribution to the research.
- Research that has Indigenous experiences as its subject matter should reflect those perspectives and understandings.
- Take into account and respect the knowledge and experiences of Indigenous peoples.
- Incorporate relevant Indigenous knowledge, learning and research processes into all stages of research including project design and methodology.
- Ensure research design and methods protect the privacy, integrity and well-being of participants.
- Respect Indigenous peoples’ right to maintain the secrecy of Indigenous knowledge and practices.
5. There must be recognition of the diversity and uniqueness of peoples as well as of individuals

Research in Indigenous studies must show an appreciation of the diversity of Indigenous peoples, who have different languages, cultures, histories and perspectives.

It is also important to recognise the diversity of individuals and groups within those communities.

Researchers should recognise the diversity of Indigenous individual groups and communities and the implications in planning carrying out and reporting their research.

- When extrapolating from research, do not generalise from understandings of one Indigenous community to others or to all Indigenous peoples.
- Do not apply stereotypes to communities and individuals when undertaking research.
- Identify diversity within a researched community; for example, on the basis of gender, age, religion, and community interest.
- Do not presume that the view of one group represents the collective view of the community.
- Differentiate between individual group and collective rights, responsibilities and ownership.
- Undertake research only if it does not conflict with individuals’ rights, wishes or freedom.
- Respect individual rights to participate in research and in the disposal of research material.
6. **The intellectual and cultural property rights of Indigenous peoples should be respected and preserved.**

Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights are part of the heritage that exists in the cultural practices, resources and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples, and that are passed on by them in expressing their cultural identity.

Indigenous intellectual property is not static and extends to things that may be created based on that heritage.²

*It is a fundamental principle of research to acknowledge the sources of information and those who have contributed to the research.*

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**Continuing Indigenous ownership of the cultural and intellectual property rights in the materials on which the research is based should be recognised and acknowledged in the design of a research project:**

- Identify appropriate persons—traditional owners, custodians, elders, etc—who are responsible for the knowledge sought or the practices to be studied. They must be involved and give informed consent to the research and any resulting publications.

- Allow the Indigenous owners of knowledge to determine the intellectual property that they are contributing to the research.

- Recognise that the knowledge and resources Indigenous peoples bring to the project remains their intellectual property.

- Negotiate by prior agreement joint ownership or allocation of the results of the project.

- Agree in writing on the apportionment of intellectual property rights.

- Agree about the involvement of individuals contributing to the research project in the interpretation of the results and the preparation of any publications or other outcomes.

- Agree about identification or otherwise of individuals involved in the research, and whether those who took part in research should be acknowledged in any publication.

- Informed consent and community participation, where obtained, should be referred to in any research publication.

- Information obtained from Indigenous peoples (including any flora or fauna identified or studied with the assistance of Indigenous peoples) should be acknowledged in any publication or report.

- Consider whether joint authorship with community members is appropriate; that is, where the contribution has been significant.

- Show or distribute restricted material only with the express permission from those who provided, or are responsible for it.
7. **Indigenous researchers, individuals and communities should be involved in research as collaborators.**

Indigenous communities and individuals have a right to be involved in any research project focussed upon them and their culture.

Participants have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

Research on Indigenous issues should also incorporate Indigenous perspectives and this is often most effectively achieved by facilitating more direct involvement in the research.

Researchers should facilitate direct involvement of Indigenous researchers and community members in their research:

- Recognise the specialist knowledge of particular community members and their potential contribution to the research endeavour, and involve such persons wherever possible and appropriate.
- Encourage and support community members to be involved in the research as collaborators, advisers or assistants.
- Acknowledge that Indigenous culture may be transmitted orally and value contributions made in this way.
- Be prepared to pay those contributing to the research.
- Recognise that certain cultural information is owned and may need to be paid for.
- Do not to raise unrealistic expectations about benefits of the research to the community, and any personal advantages to be gained through involvement.
8. The use of, and access to, research results should be agreed.

*Indigenous peoples make a significant contribution to research by providing knowledge, resources or access to data. That contribution should be acknowledged by providing access to research results and negotiating rights in the research at an early stage.*

The community’s expectations, the planned outcomes, and access to research results should be in agreement.

*The rights to, the forms and presentation of, individual or community use of, and access to, research results should be agreed:*

- Agree at the outset on the ownership of research results, including institutional ownership of data, individual rights of researchers and Indigenous participants, and collective rights of Indigenous community groups.

- Agree when and how results of research will be fed back to and discussed with relevant individual community members and/or appropriate community organisations.

- Make clear the level of community control over access to, and use of, any research results, including print, pictorial, audio and video and digital materials.

- Report research results to the community before publication and before discussion with the media.

- Negotiate with the community any discussion with the media of the research project and its results.

- Make the research results available to the community in accessible formats.

- Agree on the disposition and storage of results of research, including primary data.

- Discuss thoroughly matters of confidentiality and agreed restrictions on use of information.

- Explain fully any limits on confidentiality, for example, where field notes or research data might be subpoenaed for legal proceedings.
<table>
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<th>9. A researched community should benefit from, and not be disadvantaged by, the research project.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Research in Indigenous studies should benefit Indigenous peoples at a local level, and more generally.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>A reciprocal benefit should accrue for their allowing researchers often intimate access to their personal and community knowledge.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>There should be benefits to the community for participation in research:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Discuss openly and negotiate with the community any potential benefits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Do not overstate benefits to the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide to Indigenous participants and community all the relevant information to weigh potential benefits against any possible risks or disadvantages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Incorporate into the project any local research needs where possible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Aim to make the benefits to the community or individual participants proportionate to the demands of their participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where the benefits are not general, for example, employment opportunity or financial compensation, allocate benefits in cooperation with the group and the individual participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pay adequate financial compensation to participants, particularly where significant time is given outside normal personal or community commitments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensure that a community or individual is aware of the right to withdraw from the research at any time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where conflict has arisen, or has the potential to arise, or where support for the project is withdrawn, be prepared to discontinue or modify the research, at least until such conflict or lack of support is resolved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure that payments or financial benefits accruing to the participants are considered by an ethical review panel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do not create or contribute to circumstances where exploitation of an economic, cultural or sexual nature can occur.</td>
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</table>
The negotiation of outcomes should include results specific to the needs of the researched community.

Among the tangible benefits that a community should be able to expect from a research project is the provision of research results in a form that is useful and accessible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchers should be aware that research outcomes of interest to Indigenous peoples, and any community that is directly involved, may differ from those envisaged by the researcher:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ascertain, during early consultations, the research needs of the community, if any, and opportunities for collaboration in research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Incorporate into the research project research outcomes specific to the needs of the researched community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognise the broad range of educational backgrounds and experience of Indigenous peoples and produce materials in accessible forms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make all research reports and publications available to communities and individuals involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide to the Indigenous community the results of research in an accessible form, prior to publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide an opportunity to discuss the significance of the results for the community with representatives and participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be willing to make results known to appropriate local, state or territory, and national authorities if requested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be prepared to assist in the formulation of proposals for further research or related action by the Indigenous community and local Indigenous organisations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Negotiation should result in a formal agreement for the conduct of a research project, based on good faith and free and informed consent.

The aim of the negotiation process is to come to a clear understanding, which results in a formal agreement (preferably written), about research intentions, methods and potential results.

The establishment of agreements and protocols between Indigenous peoples and researchers is an important development in Indigenous studies.

Good faith negotiations are those that have involved a full and frank disclosure of all available information and that were entered into with an honest view to reaching an agreement.

Free and informed consent means that agreement must be obtained free of duress or pressure and fully cognisant of the details, and risks of the proposed research. Informed consent of the people as a group, as well as individuals within that group, is important.

Where practical, a written agreement (a ‘protocol’, or ‘memorandum of understanding’ or ‘contract’) should be the end result of the consultation and negotiation, to protect the community and the researcher and to clarify the understandings that have been reached. Such agreements may have legal implications and consideration should be given to whether independent legal advice is required.

- Base the agreement on good faith negotiations and free and informed consent.
- Identify who should enter into the agreement, and on whose behalf the agreement is being made.
- Determine what information is to be included in the agreement, based on discussions and negotiations. (The agreement should reflect the mutually agreed aims, processes and outcomes, community participation and collaboration and intellectual property rights.)
- Recognise in the agreement that an individual or a community has the right to withdraw from a research project.
- Include in the agreement processes for resolving conflict, such as mediation by an outside party.
- Refer to any specific community protocols in the agreement.
- For successful implementation of the agreement, continue consultation and negotiation and, where necessary, re-formulate the agreement.

Also:

- Consider requirements of proposed funding agencies in relation to written evidence of community support or of a negotiated agreement (for example, those required for funding under the AIATSIS Grants Program).
REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING


ATSIC. 1997. Protocols for undertaking research relating to, involving and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Canberra (reprinted: AIATSIS 1999: Appendix 2B)


ENDNOTES

2 Janke 1999: xvii.
3 For examples of research agreements used by Indigenous organisations, governments and funding agencies, and developed by researchers and Indigenous community members, see AIATSIS 1999: Chapter 4: ‘The Ethics of Research’, and Appendix 3: ‘Ethics guidelines, sample protocols’.
5 ‘Heritage protection, intellectual property rights, and ownership of cultural material should not be considered to be lost by those individuals and communities who are able to demonstrate a traditional claim to that cultural heritage’ (ATSIC 1997:3).
6 ‘Any person who trespasses on indigenous land risks endangering not only themselves, but also the traditional land owners who have the obligation to protect the sacredness and integrity of their country’ (ATSIC 1997:2).
7 ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have distinctive languages, customs, spirituality, perspectives and understandings, deriving from their cultures and histories. Research that has indigenous experience as its subject matter must reflect those perspectives and understandings’ (ATSIC 1997:2).
8 Janke 1999: xvii.
9 For examples of research agreements used by Indigenous organisations, governments and funding agencies, and developed by researchers and Indigenous community members, see AIATSIS 1999: Chapter 4: ‘The Ethics of Research’, and Appendix 3: ‘Ethics guidelines, sample protocols’.
Appendix 2:

NHMRC Guidelines
Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research
Values and Ethics:
Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Health Research

Endorsed by Council at its 148th Session on 5 June 2003

NHMRC
National Health &
Medical Research Council
This document replaces “Guidelines on Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research” (issued in 1991).
# CONTENTS

1: **Background**  
1.1 Introduction  
1.2 Context  
1.3 The approach to writing these guidelines  
1.3.1 Ethical relationships  
1.3.2 Integrating written guidelines with development of ethical relationships

2: **The guidelines**  
2.1 Coverage  
2.2 Values and Ethics in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research  
2.2.1 Reciprocity  
2.2.2 Respect  
2.2.3 Equality  
2.2.4 Responsibility  
2.2.5 Survival and protection  
2.2.6 Spirit and integrity

Appendix 1: **The development of the guidelines**

Appendix 2: **Suggested application of the guidelines**  
Supporting the Guidelines  
The research process  
Community engagement and participation  
The role of Human Research Ethics Committees
1. BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the previous two triennia (1994–6 and 1997–9), the previous Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC) reviewed and revised the NHMRC Statement on Human Experimentation and Supplementary Notes (1992). These were the guidelines on the ethics of health research for the whole community, to provide protection to all Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. That review led to the issuing in 1999 of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (the National Statement).

When revising the National Statement, AHEC was informed, both in submissions and in personal representations at public forums, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, researchers and health organisations still saw a clear need for a separate, complementary set of guidelines covering research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. They also heard that the 1991 Interim Guidelines on Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Health Research (the Interim Guidelines) were in need of review and updating. In response to that feedback AHEC undertook to follow up the new National Statement by reviewing the 1991 Interim Guidelines over the course of AHEC’s three-year term, which finished in mid-2003.

It is noteworthy that the Interim Guidelines took a number of years to develop. Three major meetings facilitated by the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation and/or the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) were held over the last years of the 1980s. These meetings involved a wide range of stakeholders and led eventually to the current 1991 Interim Guidelines, which have had a high degree of community ownership.

Much has changed since the development of the Interim Guidelines. New collaborative partnerships involving research institutes and the community, including the Aboriginal community controlled health sector, have emerged. There are now more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved in research as researchers. The level of interest in research as a way to contribute to the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples has grown and with it the level of NHMRC funding. However, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and organisations remain mistrustful of the enterprise of research itself.

1.2 CONTEXT

How people see the world is generally informed by their own experiences, values, norms and learning. From the earliest periods of colonisation, ill-formed perceptions and assumptions about the values and ways of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and social organisation have emerged from the comparison of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world to the spiritual, social, political and economic perspectives of European colonisers. Colonists judged the civility and worthiness of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and societies by the degree to which they perceived it conforming to European customs and norms. Not surprisingly the early observers knew nothing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and cultures. The substantial errors of judgement that followed have had a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ever since.

Non-Aboriginal society has, however, increasingly improved its knowledge of the ways and life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Gradually, decision-makers started to recognise that Aboriginal people held cultural values and principles that provided the basis for orderly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies. Clearly, however, much remains to be done to ensure the genuine recognition of the fundamental values and principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures within Australian society and its institutions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies have sustained enormous impacts over the past two centuries, to which their cultures have responded. For long periods both an official and popular view was that this change essentially involved the disconnection of contemporary Aboriginal existence from the values and integrity of traditional or historic society. However, on the contrary, contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies draw their strength and existence from the body of knowledge, values and wisdom that has emerged from the interaction of tradition and history.

When making judgements about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Australia and its public institutions must acknowledge the history, and bridge the difference in cultural outlooks to find a fair, respectful and ethical way forward. These Guidelines are designed to help fulfil these obligations.

This document does not use the term Indigenous. While this term has been used recently, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples prefer terms that better reflect their cultural identity such as Nyoongar, Koori, Murri, Ngaanyatjarra, Nunga and Palawa. This is about more than just language. It is a reflection of real cultural diversity. The use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in these guidelines is intended to encapsulate this diversity.

A key concept is the notion of community. In these Guidelines community is recognised as a complex notion that can be invoked in relation to cultural groups, geographic groups or communities of interest.

### 1.3 The Approach to Writing These Guidelines

#### 1.3.1 Ethical relationships

The construction of ethical relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on the one hand and the research community on the other must take into account the principles and values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

In resorting to the past to determine the future course of action in new situations one must look for the principles involved.¹

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¹ E T Durie, *Ethics and Values*, Te Oru Ranahau Maori Research and Development Conference, 1998
1. Introduction

Values underpin what we perceive, believe, value and do. In the research context, to ignore the reality of inter-cultural difference is to live with outdated notions of scientific investigation. It is also likely to hamper the conduct of research, and limit the capacity of research to improve human development and wellbeing. Contemporary writing about science recognises this.

To ‘misrecognise or fail to recognise (cultural difference) can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone [or a group] in a false, distorted and reduced model of being’… Research cannot be ‘difference-blind’.2

Research relationships are also influenced by what is not said. ‘Problems emerge if we do not recognise that values operate in the everyday world from undeclared evaluations and judgements about other people, their behaviours and practices’.3

Within the research process, failing to understand difference in values and culture may be a reckless act that jeopardises both the ethics and quality of research. However, to do better is not always straightforward. Working with difference in a research context takes time, care, patience and the building of robust relationships.

Research involves groupings of people in a collaborative exercise. The soundness of trust among its stakeholders is essential to a successful and ethical outcome. Trust has to function at all levels of the research enterprise — between participant and researcher, between research partners and sponsors, between researchers, institutions and the scientific community and lastly, and perhaps most importantly, with the wider community. Where trust persists, research can be sustained.

Unethical behaviour need not always be a glaring act or infraction. It often includes subtle or only sub-consciously intended encroachments on values and principles. Yet these can significantly erode trust. Similarly, it is often through many small personal interactions that trust is built. Researchers need to consider, as an integral part of the research enterprise, that trust and ethical behaviour are not just about rules but also about discretion and judgement — both complex and challenging matters.

Eliminating ‘difference-blindness’ in relationships is made more complex by the trivialisation of values and principles in contemporary society. Advocates who talk about values and cultural difference are often told they are being too political or are adopting an ‘ideologically correct’ view. Token gestures worsen this situation by exposing the debate to dismissive labelling.

‘Difference blindness’ in research can occur not only in research focused specifically on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples but also in the way researchers consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within more generalised research questions, policy and institutions. The outcome of generalised research may be of general or specific benefit or harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It is important that researchers are prompted to ask whether their general research could contribute to the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

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Researchers should consider the application of their general research for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the implications of cultural difference for its conduct.

1.3.2 Integrating written guidelines with the development of ethical relationships

The responsibility for maintaining trust and ethical standards cannot depend solely on rules or guidelines. Trustworthiness of both research and researchers is a product of engagement between people. It involves transparent and honest dealing with values and principles, the elimination of ‘difference blindness’ and a subtlety of judgement required to eliminate prejudice and maintain respect and human dignity.

These guidelines are based on the importance of trust, recognition and values. The guidelines move away from a sole reliance on the quasi-legal consideration of compliance with rules. They promote a more flexible approach that encourages research to reposition itself to incorporate alternative perspectives, and exercise nuanced judgement as to its ethical implications.

Ethical research requires not only the limiting of inappropriate behaviour, but also that researchers develop an awareness of the settings that may lead unintentionally to imprudent or untrustworthy behaviours.

The review of the literature undertaken in the development of these guidelines reiterates continuing concerns from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples about poor consultation, lack of communication and infringement of deeply held values arising from cross-cultural insensitivity — despite researchers’ compliance with the legal requirements of ethical guidelines.

It is possible for researchers to ‘meet’ rule-based requirements without engaging fully with the implications of difference and values relevant to their research. The approach advanced in these guidelines is more demanding of researchers as it seeks to move from compliance to trust.

The challenge of balancing rules and ethical behaviour is not new. The 1986 National Conference on Research Priorities in Aboriginal Health exhibited all of the hallmarks of lack of trust and difference-blindness. Yet participants courageously moved the debate forward by recommending the creation of a set of ethical standards for research in Aboriginal health. The subsequent national workshop (Tallimba workshop 1987) produced a set of proposals that implicitly reflected a desire to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ cultures and value base, and not surprisingly sought to do so in a prescriptive process.

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4 For example in Lovelace v Ontario, in giving expression to the right to equality under section 15(1) of the Canadian Constitution, the Canadian Supreme Court focused on the fundamental value of human dignity.

Explicitly, the 1987 workshop proposals indicated a lack of trust both of researchers and of self-regulation of ethical behaviour. Importantly, however, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples left open the opportunity for researchers and research institutions to demonstrate trustworthiness by example. It is clear that some researchers have been able to satisfy communities as to their trustworthiness. Some, however, have not.

The evolution of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the research community has taken a number of twists and turns since 1986, ‘oscillating between taking concrete steps towards actually changing research practice and placing too great a reliance on written guidelines and positive rhetoric’. However, concerns persist in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about the ethical qualities of the research enterprise. Adding emphasis is yet other work reinforcing the importance of trust, integrity and recognition in building partnerships that ‘can withstand some difficulties’.

Is it possible to reconcile the interests of research and researchers with the values, expectations and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities? The evidence suggests that it is. Several different models have been used successfully to build trust and recognition of cultural values and principles while advancing the objectives of the research enterprise. Some models have placed greater reliance on participatory processes. Some have established innovative institutional arrangements with the ongoing involvement of communities ensuring integrity in the research enterprise. Yet others have resorted to legal agreements that codify substance and definition as a means of ensuing ethical behaviour. Other models promote Aboriginal community control over the research process, with Aboriginal people leading and implementing the research activity.

A common feature across these models is the explicit recognition and commitment to respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values and principles. The models also promote local relationships to ensure that the nuances of judgement and practice necessary to promote trustworthiness and trust are created and maintained. They also illustrate important aspects of accountability and transparency in standards, processes and structures.

9 For example see Henderson R et al. 2002.
11 For example see Tiwi Health Board and Menzies School of Health Research, *Legal Agreement between Tiwi Health Board and the Menzies School of Health Research*, Northern Territory, 1998.
2. THE GUIDELINES

2.1 COVERAGE

The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans is the authoritative statement on research involving humans. These guidelines are, in addition to the National Statement, the authoritative statement on health research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. They have the same status and authority as the National Statement. That status and authority derive from the requirement of the National Health & Medical Research Council Act 1992 that Council issue ethical guidelines for the conduct of medical research involving humans as developed by the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC). This means that for health research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples both the National Statement and these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific guidelines apply.

The National Statement sets out basic principles (paragraphs 1.1–1.21) and guidance specific to types of participants and types of research. Types of participants considered are children and young people (paragraphs 4.1–4.4), people with mental or intellectual disabilities (paragraphs 5.1–5.4), people highly dependent on medical care (paragraphs 6.1–6.10), people in dependent or unequal relationships (paragraphs 7.1–7.3) and collectivities (paragraphs 8.1–8.2). Types of research considered are use of ionising radiation (paragraph 10), assisted reproductive technology (paragraph 11), clinical trials (paragraphs 12.1–12.13), innovative therapy (paragraph 13), epidemiological research (paragraphs 14.1–14.13), use of human tissue (paragraphs 15.1–15.9), genetic research (paragraphs 16.1–16.16) and research involving deception (paragraphs 17.1–17.2).

A proposal involving, for example, research with Aboriginal children must consider both the protection afforded children under the National Statement and these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guidelines. Likewise, a proposal for epidemiological research must consider both the relevant section in the National Statement and these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guidelines.

To help identify the connections between the National Statement and these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guidelines, related National Statement basic principles are listed under the heading for each of the values identified in the guidelines.

The NHMRC requires all institutions or organisations that receive NHMRC funding for research to establish a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and to subject all research involving humans to ethical review.

Research involving human participation is subject to a variety of legal regulation at federal, state and territory levels. Researchers need to conform to relevant legal requirements, and HRECs need to be satisfied that the conduct of research that they approve is lawful. In the event that both the legal requirement and an ethical guideline apply, the legal requirement will prevail, although they will normally be
consistent. Where the guidelines prescribe a standard that exceeds that required by law researchers should apply this higher standard.

2.2 **VALUES AND ETHICS IN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HEALTH RESEARCH**

These guidelines provide guidance to researchers in the conception, design, and conduct of research, as well as to HRECs, including Aboriginal specific HRECs or sub-committees. Researchers, communities, other stakeholders and HRECs should consider proposals for research in the light of the proposal’s attention to the values and requirements detailed below.

These guidelines are not intended to reduce the capacity of health departments to meet their statutory responsibilities for public health protection, including disease surveillance and investigation of outbreaks of infectious disease. However, the values expressed in these guidelines should inform those activities. Health departments should consider seeking HREC review of reports based on these activities that are intended for publication. When health departments are conducting research related to public health programs and strategies that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it is intended that these guidelines be used.

These guidelines are likewise not intended to limit inappropriately the capacity of government departments, statutory bodies and health service organisations to collect and analyse data from routine collections such as birth, morbidity and mortality records. However, the values expressed in these guidelines should inform those activities. Where others seek access to these data for the purpose of research, then it is intended that these guidelines be used.

The guidelines articulate the meaning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of each of the six values identified and agreed upon at a workshop held in Ballarat in June 2002 to direct the drafting of these guidelines. The guidelines then drew out the implications of each value for research, and how researchers and research proposals might demonstrate engagement and consistency with each value. The participants in the Ballarat workshop saw this as an appropriate way to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values are at the heart of ethical assessment.

The six values that lie at the heart of these guidelines are:

- Spirit and Integrity
- Reciprocity
- Respect
- Equality
- Survival and Protection
- Responsibility

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13 The process followed in developing these guidelines is described in Appendix 1.
They can be represented in diagrammatic form:

**Diagram 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples values relevant to health research ethics**

Discussions during the development of these guidelines emphasised the relationship of these values over time and their importance to Aboriginal identity. Of particular importance to Aboriginal participants was the nature of Spirit and Integrity as outlined in the diagram, working over time to bind together the other five values to each other.

The understanding that the present and the future are absolutely bound up in the past, and that these cannot be separated from each other when discussing issues where key values are at stake, is shown in the diagram by indicating that these values are present through time — past, present and future.

The sections which follow detail the meaning which may be accorded to each value in the context of research. Each section includes a series of questions. These are not intended as a compliance checklist but rather as a series of concrete ways in which researchers and research proposals can demonstrate their level of engagement with the values at the heart of these guidelines.

Given that values are complex concepts, it is not surprising that there is an overlap between them in both description and interpretation.
2.2.1 Reciprocity

A mutual obligation exists among members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to achieve an equitable distribution of resources, responsibility and capacity and to achieve cohesion and survival of the social order. This mutual obligation extends to the land, animals and other natural elements and features. In contemporary settings the value of reciprocity continues in various forms, and may vary between locations. Examples include the redistribution of income, benefits from the air, land and sea, and the sharing of other resources such as housing.

In the research context, reciprocity implies inclusion and means recognising partners’ contributions, and ensuring that research outcomes include equitable benefits of value to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or individuals. (Recognition of contribution is discussed below under Respect.) Reciprocity requires the researcher to demonstrate a return (or benefit) to the community that is valued by the community and which contributes to cohesion and survival. It is important to remember that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples may place greater or lesser value on the various returns than researchers. Reciprocity involves exchange although in the context of research this often involves unequal power relationships. In negotiating the conduct of research, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have the right to define the benefits according to their own values and priorities.

Benefits may not take only one form or be immediate. Some benefits may be available to participating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples more generally or to the wider community as well. They must, however, be valued by the participating community. It is also important that unethical inducements in the provision of service are not linked to agreements about research.

The implications of reciprocity extend to all those involved in the potential research enterprise. HRECs can contribute by promoting real rather than superficial engagement between partners to the endeavour. Examples have been cited where an HREC was able to mediate an outcome where mistrust had emerged because of superficial engagement between communities and researchers. The engagement of other stakeholders such as service providers may also help build real engagement focussed on outcomes of benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

*When research involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, researchers and HRECs need to consider how the research proposal demonstrates the value of reciprocity, taking into account the following components:*

- **Inclusion**

  *Inclusion, the basis for mutual obligation, describes the degree of equitable and respectful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their values and cultures in the proposed research.*

- **Benefit**

  *Benefit in this context describes the establishment or enhancement of capacities, opportunities or outcomes that advance the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and that are valued by them.*
Demonstrating reciprocity

Participating communities, researchers and HRECs should consider:

- How the proposed research demonstrates intent to contribute to the advancement of the health and wellbeing of participants and communities.
- Whether the proposal links clearly to community, regional, jurisdictional or international Indigenous health priorities and/or responds to existing or emerging needs articulated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- The nature of benefits for participants or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and whether there is evidence of clear and truthful discussions about the potential benefit of the research proposal prior to approval.
- Whether the researcher has demonstrated willingness to modify research in accordance with participating community values and aspirations.
- Whether the proposed research will enhance the capacity of communities to draw benefit beyond the project, eg through the development of skills and knowledge or through broader social, economic or political strategies at local, jurisdictional, national or even international level.

Allied National Statement requirements\(^{14}\)

**NS 1.14** All research proposals must be so designed as to ensure that any risks of discomfort or harm to participants are balanced by the likely benefit to be gained.

**NS 1.4** Each research protocol must be designed to ensure that respect for the dignity and well being of the participants takes precedence over the expected benefits to knowledge.

### 2.2.2 Respect

Respect for human dignity and worth as a characteristic of relationships between people, and in the way individuals behave, is fundamental to a functioning and moral society. Within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures respect is reinforced by and in turn strengthens dignity. A respectful relationship induces trust and co-operation. Strong culture is a personal and collective framework built on respect and trust that promotes dignity and recognition.

Respectful research relationships acknowledge and affirm the right of people to have different values, norms and aspirations. Those involved in research processes should not be blind to difference.

Also essential to a respectful research relationship is the recognition of the contribution of others and the consequences of research. Contributions to the research enterprise come in a variety of connected forms and all should be respected. The trust, openness

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\(^{14}\) The relevant sections in the National Statement are reproduced in full under these headings. The paragraph numbers are preceded by the initials ‘NS’.
and engagement of participating communities and individuals is as important as the scientific rigour of the investigation. A respectful relationship is fundamental to a sustainable research relationship. Such a relationship will require ongoing attention to cumulative decisions of participating communities and to the engagement of individuals.

The structures and processes for negotiating community involvement vary. Researchers should inform themselves about local structures and seek to engage with these in a spirit of respect and integrity. Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander institutional structures exist, these should be used as the best means of community and institutional engagement by researchers, both in dealing with communities and in seeking HREC approval.

It is critical that respect underlies all aspects of the research process, especially sensitive negotiations such as those related to publication of research findings. Here, sensitivity may arise from tensions between on the one hand, the independence and integrity of research and, on the other, the risk of vilification and exploitation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. In addition researchers should not make the publication of research findings a greater priority than feedback of findings to the community in an appropriate and understandable way.

Respectful relationships require that agreements are made at the outset of any research project which make clear when, how and who will engage in the research process. In this way the value positions of all parties can be equally respected.

When research involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, researchers and HRECs need to consider how the research proposal demonstrates the value of respect, taking into account the following components:

- **Respect of people and their contribution**
  
  Respect acknowledges the individual and collective contribution, interests and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, researchers and other partners in the research process.

- **Minimising difference blindness**
  
  Respectful research relationships acknowledge and affirm the right of people to have different values, norms and aspirations. Those involved in research should recognise and minimise the effect of difference blindness through all stages of the research process.

- **Consequences of research**
  
  Researchers need to understand that research has consequences for themselves and others, the importance of which may not be immediately apparent. This should be taken into account through all stages of the research process.

**Demonstrating respect**

Participating communities, researchers and HRECs should consider:

- Whether the proposal responds to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities, including the way decisions are made.
2. The Guidelines

- How the proposal acknowledges the individual and collective contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- How the researchers propose to minimise the effects of difference blindness on and in the research process.
- How the research proposal engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ knowledge and experience.
- Whether appropriate agreements have been negotiated about ownership and rights of access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ intellectual and cultural property.
- Whether the processes of reaching agreement demonstrate engagement with the values and processes of participating communities.
- Whether the participating communities have expressed satisfaction with the research agreement and decision making processes.
- Whether in reaching agreement with participating communities all relevant issues including management of data, publication arrangements and the protection of individual and community identity have been adequately addressed.

Allied National Statement requirements

**NS 1.2** When conducting research involving humans, the guiding ethical principle for researchers is respect for persons which is expressed as regard for the welfare, rights, beliefs, perceptions, customs and cultural heritage, both individual and collective, of persons involved in research.

**NS 1.7** Before research is undertaken, whether involving individuals or collectivities, the consent of the participants must be obtained, except in specific circumstances elsewhere in this Statement [see paragraphs 1.11, 6.9, 14.4, 15.8, 16.13].

The ethical and legal requirements of consent have two aspects: the provision of information and the capacity to make a voluntary choice. To conform with ethical and legal requirements, obtaining consent should involve:

(a) provision to participants, at their level of comprehension, information about the purpose, methods, demands, risks, inconveniences, discomforts and possible outcomes of the research (including the likelihood and form of publication of research results); and

(b) the exercise of voluntary choice to participate.

Where a participant lacks competence to consent, a person with lawful authority to decide for that participant must be provided with that information and exercise that choice.

**NS 1.8** A person may refuse to participate in a research project and need give no reasons nor justification for that decision.

**NS 1.9** Where consent to participate is required, research must be so designed that each participant’s consent is clearly established, whether by a signed form, return of a survey, recorded agreement for interview or other sufficient means.
In some circumstances and some communities, consent is not only a matter of individual agreement, but involves other properly interested parties, such as formally constituted bodies of various kinds, collectivities or community elders. In such cases the researcher needs to obtain the consent of all properly interested parties before beginning the research.

**NS 1.10** The consent of a person to participate in research must not be subject to any coercion or to any inducement or influence which could impair its voluntary character.

**NS 1.12** A participant must be free at any time to withdraw consent to further involvement in the research. If any consequences may arise from such withdrawal, advice must be given to participants about these before consent to involvement in the research is obtained.

### 2.2.3 Equality

One of the values expressed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and cultures is the equal value of people. One of the ways this is reflected is a commitment to distributive fairness and justice. Equality affirms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ right to be different.

Equality as a value may sometimes be taken to mean sameness. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples hold strong beliefs that sameness is not equality. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have sought the elimination of ‘difference blindness’ so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures can be appreciated and respected.

Crude or unsubstantiated assumptions of the value or vitality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and societies have led Australian history in many instances to discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Such assumptions have created significant and longstanding difficulties that have at times been reflected in research practices. The marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures by the dominant society has created myriad inequalities that “pursue them from sphere to sphere in the form of stereotyping, discrimination and disregard.”

International and domestic studies have increasingly revealed a correlation between social and economic inequality and poor health. Research should seek to advance the elimination of inequalities. Equality is also a feature of the fundamental dignity of humanity. To treat people less favourably is not only unethical, but discriminatory.

Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have perceived the benefit as flowing principally to researchers and institutions.

*When research involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, researchers and HRECs need to consider how the research proposal demonstrates the value of equality, taking into account the following components:*

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• **Valuing knowledge and wisdom**

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples value their collective memory and shared experience as a resource and inheritance. Researchers who fail to appreciate or ignore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ knowledge and wisdom may misinterpret data or meaning, may create mistrust, otherwise limit quality or may overlook a potentially important benefit of research.

• **Equality of partners**

> Ethical research processes treat all partners as equal notwithstanding that they may be different. In the absence of equal treatment, trust among research funders, researchers, host institutions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other stakeholders is not possible. Without such trust ethical research is undermined.

• **The distribution of benefit**

> The distribution of benefit stands as a fundamental test of equality. If the research process delivers benefit in greater proportion to one partner in the initiative than other partners, the distribution of benefit may be seen as unequal.

**Demonstrating equality**

Participating communities, researchers and HRECs should consider:

• Whether the ways that participating communities are included in the research processes demonstrate equality.

• Whether the research agreements have the strength necessary to sustain equality.

• Whether participating communities have understood and expressed satisfaction with the proposed research, its potential benefits and their distribution. Researchers therefore have a responsibility to ensure that the information that they provide is understood and usable in decision making by participating communities.

**Allied National Statement requirements**

**NS 1.5** The ethical value of justice requires that, within a population, there is a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of participation in research and, for any research participant, a balance of burdens and benefits. Accordingly, a researcher must:

(a) avoid imposing on particular groups, who are likely to be subject to over researching, an unfair burden of participation in research;

(b) design research so that the selection, recruitment, exclusion and inclusion of research participants is fair; and

(c) not discriminate in the selection and recruitment of actual and future participants by including or excluding them on the grounds of race, age, sex, disability or religious or spiritual beliefs except where the exclusion of inclusion of particular groups is essential to the purpose of the research.
NS 1.6 The proportion of burdens to benefits for any research participant will vary. In clinical research, where patient care is combined with an intent to contribute to knowledge, the risks of participation must be balanced by the possibility of intended benefits for the participants. In other research involving humans that is undertaken solely to contribute to knowledge, the absence of intended benefits to a participant should justly be balanced by the absence of all but minimal risk.

2.2.4 Responsibility

Central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies and cultures is the recognition of core responsibilities. These responsibilities include those to country, kinship bonds, caring for others and the maintenance of harmony and balance within and between the physical and spiritual realms. A key responsibility within this framework is to do no harm, including avoiding having an adverse impact on others’ abilities to comply with their responsibilities. As well, one person’s responsibilities may be shared with others so that they will also be held accountable.

The assignment or inheritance of responsibilities within communities functions to ensure the order and survival of individuals, families and whole communities. Survival includes maintaining the bonds and relationships between people and between them and their environment. It also encompasses responsibilities in respect of spiritual domains. A transparent accountability regime ensures the timely and appropriate discharge of responsibilities.

When engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the research enterprise, researchers carry responsibilities in addition to the science of their inquiry. The nexus between their research and community life brings responsibilities for which they or those of the community with whom they work may be held accountable. Ethical research occurs when harmony between the sets of responsibilities is established, participants are protected, trust is maintained and accountability is clear.

When research involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, researchers and HRECs need to consider how the research proposal demonstrates the value of responsibility, taking into account the following components:

- **Doing no harm**
  There is a clear responsibility for researchers to do no harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals or communities and also to those things that they value.

- **Accountability**
  Researchers and participating communities need to establish processes to ensure researchers’ accountability to individuals, families and communities, particularly in relation to the cultural and social dimensions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life.
Demonstrating responsibility

Participating communities, researchers and HRECs should consider:

- What measures are identified to demonstrate transparency in the exchange of ideas and in negotiations about the purpose, methodology, conduct, dissemination of results and potential outcomes/benefits of research.
- How provision is made for appropriate ongoing advice and review from the participating community, including mechanisms to monitor ethics standards and to minimise the likelihood of any unintended consequences arising from or after the research project.
- What does the proposal say about timely feedback obligations to communities and whether that feedback is relevant to the expressed concerns, values and expectations of research participants and communities.
- How the proposal demonstrates agreed arrangements regarding publication of the research results, including clear provisions relating to joint sign off for publication and the protection of individual and community identity if appropriate.
- Whether there is clarity about the demand on partners created by the proposed research and the potential implications for partners arising from it.

Allied National Statement requirements

NS 1.1 The guiding value for researchers is integrity, which is expressed in a commitment to the search for knowledge, recognised principles of research conduct and in the honest and ethical conduct of research and dissemination and communication of results.

NS 1.3 In research involving humans, the ethical principle of beneficence is expressed in researchers’ responsibility to minimise risks of harm and discomfort to participants in research projects.

NS 1.13 Every research proposal must demonstrate that the research is justifiable in terms of its potential contribution to knowledge, and is based on a thorough study of current literature as well as prior observation, approved previous studies, and where relevant, laboratory and animal studies.

NS 1.18 The results of research (whether publicly or privately funded) and the methods used should normally be published in ways which permit scrutiny and contribute to public knowledge. Normally, research results should be made available to research participants.

NS 1.19 Where personal information about research participants or a collectivity is collected, stored, accessed, used, or disposed of, a researcher must strive to ensure that the privacy, confidentiality and cultural sensitivities of the participants and/or collectivity are respected. Any specific agreements made with the participants or the collectivity are to be fulfilled.
2.2.5 Survival and Protection

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples continue to act to protect their cultures and identity from erosion by colonisation and marginalisation. A particular feature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and these efforts has been the importance of a collective identity. This collective bond reflects and draws strength from the values base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and cultures.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples do not intend to forego the distinctiveness of their cultures. Barriers between research and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have been created for example where some researchers or institutions have ignored or sought to undermine this distinctiveness. The repeated marginalisation in research of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values has reinforced these barriers over time creating a ‘collective memory’ that is an obstacle to research today. Researchers will need to make particular effort to deal with the perception of research held by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as an exploitative exercise. They will need to demonstrate through ethical negotiation, conduct and dissemination of research that they are trustworthy and will not repeat the mistakes of the past.

As noted throughout, the distinctive cultures and community life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples rests at the heart of these guidelines. It is, therefore, essential that researchers engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities collectively, not just with individuals.

When research involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, researchers should describe and HRECs should consider issues of survival and protection including the following components:

- **Importance of values based solidarity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples vigorously oppose the assimilation, integration or subjugation of their values and will defend them against perceived or actual encroachment. Researchers must be aware of the history and the continuing potential for research to encroach on these values.

- **Respect for social cohesion**

  The importance of the personal and collective bond within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and its critical function in their social lives.

- **Commitment to cultural distinctiveness.**

  The cultural distinctiveness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is highly valued by them. Within the scope of these guidelines, researchers must find ways of working that do not diminish the right to the assertion or enjoyment of that distinctiveness.
Demonstrating survival and protection

Participating communities, researchers and HRECs should consider:

- Whether the research project contributes to or erodes the social and cultural bonds among and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.
- What safeguards are in place against the research project contributing to discrimination or derision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals or cultures.
- Whether the proposal respects the intrinsic values based expectations and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities including the balance between collective and individual identity.
- How the proposal contributes to the opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to better advocate for or enjoy their cultural distinctiveness.
- What strategies have been identified to eliminate any threats to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Peoples’ ability to enjoy their cultural distinctiveness.

2.2.6 Spirit and Integrity

This is an overarching value that binds all others into a coherent whole. It has two components. The first is about the continuity between past, current and future generations. The second is about behaviour, which maintains the coherence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and cultures. Any behaviour that diminishes any of the previous five values could not be described as having integrity.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have demonstrated a continuity of values and bonds that has sustained and been sustained by the overarching value of spirit and integrity. This continuity has remained evident in individuals and communities despite changes in physical environment and behaviours. These bonds and values have often been the touchstone for personal or community level action to renew or protect identity, culture and life.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are not homogeneous. However, there are core values and principles that remain common across the cultural spectrum and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples will assert the dignity and worthiness of their particular efforts to protect and uplift their own.

Researchers are perceived as owing an obligation to the spirit and integrity of communities not just to individuals. It is clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will look to see if what is proposed is consistent with their values. However, the responsibility to demonstrate consistency falls to those proposing research.

Community decision making based on shared values is an implicit part of spirit and integrity.
When research involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, researchers should describe and HRECs should consider issues of spirit and integrity including the following:

- **Motivation and action**
  
  *This means that researchers must approach the conduct of research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with respect for the richness and integrity of the cultural inheritance of past, current and future generations, and of the links which bind the generations together.*

- **Intent and process**
  
  *Negotiations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will need to exhibit credibility in intent and process. In many circumstances this will depend not only on being able to demonstrate that the proposal is in keeping with these guidelines, but also on the behaviour and perceived integrity of the proponents of research.*

**Demonstrating spirit and integrity**

Participating communities, researchers and HRECs should consider:

- How the proposed research demonstrates an understanding of and agreement about the relationship between the proposed research and the community’s cultural, spiritual and social cohesion, including workable timeframes.

- Whether the proposal recognises in the conduct and reporting of research the diversity of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People’s cultures, including the mechanisms through which communities may make decisions.

- Whether the proponents of the proposal are able clearly to demonstrate personal integrity, specifically in the development of their proposal.

- Does the proposal demonstrate a commitment to working within the spirit and integrity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples?

**Allied National Statement requirements**

**NS 1.1** The guiding value for researchers is integrity, which is expressed in a commitment to the search for knowledge, to recognised principles of research conduct and in the honest and ethical conduct of research and dissemination and communication of results.

**NS 1.2** When conducting research involving humans, the guiding ethical principle for researchers is respect for persons which is expressed as regard for the welfare, rights, beliefs, perceptions, customs and cultural heritage, both individual and collective, of persons involved in research.
APPENDIX I: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GUIDELINES

In order to revise the Interim Guidelines, AHEC adopted a number of strategies. The first saw Mr Daniel McAullay, an Aboriginal researcher and community research partnership coordinator, and Mr Robert Griew, AHEC member, travel widely and talk to a range of stakeholders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research. In a report prepared for AHEC, they described a continuing level of support for and ownership of the Interim Guidelines, a sense that more was needed to move beyond a kind of superficial compliance mentality and that, in some cases, tension had grown up around the structures to support the guidelines. They also found that researchers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples themselves, while widely aware of the Interim Guidelines, were not as aware of the application of the National Statement to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Secondly, in collaboration with Associate Professor Ian Anderson, head of the VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit at the University of Melbourne, an annotated bibliography of the international literature on the ethics of Aboriginal health research was prepared and published.

Thirldly, AHEC brought together a group of people from a wide range of stakeholder interests in Melbourne in May 2001 for further discussions. Following this meeting, a Working Party of researchers, Aboriginal community controlled health sector representatives, Human Research Ethics Committee representatives and policy makers was formed. This group then organised a two-day workshop in Ballarat, Victoria in June 2002. That workshop attended by representatives from the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and its State/Territory affiliates, researchers, HRECs, government and other Aboriginal participants considered all of the material brought together by the processes to date.

It was recognised by the Working Party and the Ballarat meeting that there were issues that needed to be discussed that did not all fall within the guidelines themselves but included, for example:

- The resourcing, accountabilities and support for Human Research Ethics Committees;
- The relationship of public health surveillance activity within State and Territory Health Departments to their HRECs and to the guidelines;
- Monitoring, follow up and accountability of research projects after the ethics clearance process;


17 McAullay D, Griew R, Anderson I, Ethics of Aboriginal Health Research: An Annotated Bibliography, Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2002.
• Education and promotion of the guidelines among researchers, communities and organisations;

• Resources for the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research more generally, support for community consultation and for the development of research priorities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

• Following from the last point, strong support for the NHMRC Research Agenda Working Group’s (RAWG’s) 2002 Aboriginal health research ‘Roadmap’ exercise.

• Developing the capacity of Aboriginal community controlled health services to undertake their own research and participate directly in research (including the conduct of national studies through their peak body NACCHO), using the significant amount of vital information that they hold and which could contribute to health strategies and better understanding of the role of the Sector in health generally.

• Expansion of efforts to communicate AHEC’s current work on ethical issues to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and others involved in Indigenous health research. This includes work on new privacy legislation, genetic research and the handling of organs and samples taken at autopsy or other health surveys.

As well as deciding to refer these issues separately back to the NHMRC, the Ballarat workshop provided a framework for the draft of these guidelines themselves that were then prepared by the Working Group.

Public consultation on the draft of these guidelines ran until the beginning of January 2003. In response 56 submissions were received from a cross section of interests. The Working Party then reviewed the draft in the light of the submissions received, and has revised it as needed.
APPENDIX 2: SUGGESTED APPLICATION OF THE GUIDELINES

SUPPORTING THE GUIDELINES

AHEC recognises that HRECs need to examine research proposals comprehensively in order to determine whether they comply with the values set out in these guidelines. Consequently, there will be an addition to the Human Research Ethics Handbook to provide further practical measures to inform the application of the values outlined in these guidelines, thereby assisting researchers and HRECs in their use.

An implementation strategy that provides for the orderly, informed and coherent application of these guidelines is also an integral part of the process. The inclusion of relevant stakeholder interests in the preparation and conduct of the implementation strategy will provide additional opportunity to build ownership of the revised guidelines.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Researchers need to put forward a proposal in which each of the following phases of the research process, where relevant, is ethically defensible on the grounds of each of the values of these guidelines:

- Conceptualisation
- Development and approval
- Data collection and management
- Analysis
- Report writing
- Dissemination

Consultation and other strategies that facilitate Aboriginal participation are critical in all phases of this research process.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research may be conducted at a local, regional or national level. The structures and processes for negotiating community engagement and participation will therefore vary. Researchers should therefore inform themselves about appropriate structures and processes and seek to engage with these in a spirit of respect and integrity.

In some jurisdictions, review or approval procedures may have been given regulatory status by government legislation or published policy. These will vary between jurisdictions, however these procedures need to be followed.

Even within local communities, structures and processes may vary. In some communities there is an Aboriginal community controlled health service, which would normally be assumed to speak for the community in terms of its community interests about health research. In some communities these health services conduct their own research and/or lead research collaborations and partnerships. In some communities there is not a community controlled health service. In other communities there are elected Community Councils and/or other clear lines of authority about who would speak on a subject like health research and the community. In other communities
some or all of those structures are not present. There are also national and state based associations of Aboriginal community controlled health services.

Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander institutional structures and processes exist these should be used as the best means of community and institutional engagement by researchers, both in dealing with communities and in seeking HREC approval.

The variety of existing models indicate that national efforts to improve ethical behaviours in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research should allow for different circumstances in different communities, while affirming the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values, community controlled organisations and these guidelines in all cases.

THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEES

The role of HRECs is well established. Their primary function is to ‘protect the welfare and the rights of participants in research’.

The complexity of human involvement in research demands of HRECs the resolution of complex and often competing considerations. The composition of HRECs is intended to establish a broad scope of contribution that enables decision making inclusive of legal, spiritual, professional and lay considerations. Historically, most HRECs had few if any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander members and this unfortunately led to instances where clearance or monitoring of research failed to consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

The historic inability of HRECs to fulfil their function in a way that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples valued led Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to seek initially greater representation on existing HRECs and more recently for separate Aboriginal HRECs.

A number of Aboriginal HRECs have been established with majority Aboriginal membership and with the specific brief of reviewing the ethical quality of research proposals in Aboriginal health. The Aboriginal HRECs proceed uniquely from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander value base and perspective. However, there are not yet sufficient committees with this composition to review all health research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. This means attention needs to be given by non-Aboriginal HRECs to the question of how they will equip themselves to implement these guidelines when they encounter research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Strategies that non-Aboriginal HRECs should consider include:

• referring relevant research proposals to a properly constituted and appropriate Aboriginal HREC for consideration;
• creating an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sub-committee or advisory group;
• expanding membership of their committees to include an appropriate number of members from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; or
• such other processes as will contribute to achievement of the goals of the guidelines.

The implementation phase needs to consider the range of structural and relationship issues necessary to ensure the optimal implementation of these guidelines.

Appendix 3:

*Interview Questions*
**Interview Questions**

Due to the intended conversational nature of the interviews, the interview ‘questions’ as stated below are to serve as a topic guide, if needed. The questions are by no means a list of every question to be asked, but instead are examples of questions which may be asked. Furthermore, not all questions listed will necessarily be asked. They are in that respect, illustrative references.

i  *Forms & admin stuff/s.*

ii  Could you please introduce yourself. I will then introduce myself, and also the aims and features of this interview.

1  Have you ever been involved in a research project before? Please tell me about your experience/s.

2  What do you think about non-Aboriginal people conducting research with Aboriginal peoples?

2a  What are the issues with non-Aboriginal people conducting research with Aboriginal peoples? Are there some topics/ things which should not be researched? What are some examples? Who should research this, if at all? How could this be researched?

2b  Are there any particular benefits of non-Aboriginal people conducting research with Aboriginal peoples? Why?/ What are some examples?
2c Do you think the background of the researcher is important? For example, would research be different if the researcher is from the same group as you, from a different Aboriginal group, perhaps a Torres Strait Islander, a ‘White’ non-Aboriginal Australian, or an international person like a person from Asia or an African/ African-American person?

3 Are there any cultural protocols or guidelines which researchers should be aware of?

3a If you were involved in a research project, what kind of positive things would you like to have happen?

3b If you were involved in a research project, what kind of negative things would you dislike?

4 Are you aware of any research protocols or guidelines which already exist? What protocols or guidelines are you familiar with, and what do you think of them?

5 Is there anything else you would like to add that we may have missed?

6 Please offer me some feedback on how this research interview went so I can try to improve respectful research techniques 😊

iii Thank you for participating in this interview! Do you have any questions? If you have any questions or queries about the project at a later date, please contact me using the number on your ‘information sheet’ or ‘plain language statement’. Thanks.
Appendix 4:
Introductory Letter / Information Sheet
Dear potential participant,

My name is Luke Taaffe. I am a student at Notre Dame University enrolled in the Behavioural Science Honours Programme. As part of my course I need to complete a research project. The research project I intend to undertake will be carried out in collaboration with the University of Notre Dame, Broome.

The research project aims to explore the role/s of non-Aboriginal researchers conducting research in Aboriginal contexts, in particular the Kimberly region of WA. The research will be used at the University of Notre Dame in Broome as a guide for non-Aboriginal researchers conducting research in the Kimberly to make sure that research is done respectfully.

Participants will be asked to share their thoughts and/or experiences regarding non-Aboriginal researchers in tape-recorded interviews with myself and a representative from Notre Dame Broome’s Centre for Indigenous Studies.

Information collected during the interview will be strictly confidential, except where it is not lawful to do so. As a participant, you will be offered a transcript of the interview and I would be grateful if you would comment on whether you believe we have captured your experience.

As this is a community project run through Notre Dame Broome’s Centre for Indigenous Studies, researchers and participants will not be paid for participation in this project.

Before the interview I will ask you to sign a consent form. You may withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. Data collected will be stored securely by the research team for 5 years.
No identifying information will be used throughout this project and the results from the study will be made freely available to all participants.

The sensitive nature of the research may raise some difficult feelings for you. If this happens, the University of Notre Dame will make sure that support is available for you, if you desire it.

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Notre Dame Australia has approved the study.

Lyn Henderson-Yates and Neil Drew from the University of Notre Dame are supervising the project. If you have any queries regarding the research, please contact me directly; or contact Lyn or Neil by phone or by email.

Associate Professor Lynette Henderson-Yates
Ph: 9121 0637
Email: lhenderson-yates@nd.edu.au

Professor Neil Drew
Ph: 9433 0568
Email: ndrew1@nd.edu.au

Thank you for your time, and I hope you will agree to participate in this research project.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Luke Taaffe
Ph: 0400 676 872
Email: ltaaffe@student.nd.edu.au

If participants have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively, to the Provost, The University of Notre Dame Australia, PO Box 1225 Fremantle WA 6959, phone (08) 9433 0846.
Appendix 5:
Plain Language Statement
Plain Language Statement

The research is being conducted by Luke Taaffe, a student of Notre Dame University, in partnership with Notre Dame University staff in Broome.

This project will be supervised by experienced researchers Lyn Henderson-Yates from Notre Dame Broome, and Neil Drew from Notre Dame Fremantle.

The project aims to find out what Aboriginal Kimberley people think about non-Aboriginal researchers doing research with Aboriginal peoples. The project will look at how, when, if, and why this kind of research should be done. The project also allows participants to speak about their good or bad experiences with research or researchers, and also allows participants to offer recommendations or tips for future research.

The interview will have a representative from Notre Dame Broome’s Centre for Indigenous Studies attending.

The information in interviews will be taped on a sound-recorder only if participants are comfortable with this and allow recording.

The information from the interviews will be displayed in an honours research thesis paper, and also used in a set of guidelines for non-Aboriginal researchers to read before researching with Aboriginal people in the Kimberley.

Participants in this project will only be required for one interview which can go for as long (or short) as the participant wishes. Researchers will make sure that participation in this project will have no monetary costs to participants.

As this is a community project run through Notre Dame’s Centre for Indigenous Studies, participants and researchers will not be paid for contributing to the research.
Due to the sensitive nature of the research, the interview may raise some difficult feelings for participants. If this happens, the University of Notre Dame will make sure that support is available for you, if you desire it.

If sensitive cultural information is shared in the interview, the participants have full rights to decide how the information may be used. Researchers also promise that whatever information participants share will be respected.

Before the interview, participants will sign a consent form. Participants may pull-out of the project at any time without penalty. Personal information shared during the interview will be kept confidential, except where illegal. Participants will also be offered a transcript of the interview.

Data collected will be stored securely by the research team for five years. No identifying information will be used and the results from the study will be made freely available to all participants.

The Human Research Ethics Committee of Notre Dame has approved the study.

If you have any queries regarding the research, please contact myself, Lyn Henderson-Yates or Neil Drew directly by phone or by email.

Luke Taaffe
Ph: 0400 676 872
Email: ltaaffe@student.nd.edu.au

Lynette Henderson-Yates
Ph: 9121 0637
Email: lhenderson-yates@nd.edu.au

Neil Drew
Ph: 9433 0568
Email: ndrew1@nd.edu.au

If participants have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively, to the Provost, The University of Notre Dame Australia, PO Box 1225 Fremantle WA 6959, phone (08) 9433 0846.
Appendix 6:

Informed Consent
Informed Consent

Guidelines for research in Aboriginal contexts: UNDA Fremantle & Broome

June / July 2008

I, (participant’s name) ______________________________ hereby agree to being a participant in the above research project.

I understand the Information Sheet which I have read, or have had read to me about this project and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I realise that I may withdraw from the project at any time without penalty.

I understand that all information gathered will be treated as strictly confidential, except where it is not lawful to do so.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not disclosed.

I agree that data collected may be used to create a ‘guidelines resource’ at the University of Notre Dame’s Centre for Indigenous Studies, Broome Campus.

I understand that the conduct relating to this project will be under the direct supervision of Professor Lynette Henderson-Yates, Notre Dame University, Broome Campus.

Signed (participant) : ___________________________  Date : __________

Signed (researcher) : ___________________________  Date : __________

If participants have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively, to the Provost, The University of Notre Dame Australia, PO Box 1225 Fremantle WA 6959, phone (08) 9433 0846.
Appendix 7:

Participant Brief Results & Supplementary Consent
Hi, this is Luke Taaffe from Notre Dame University.

I interviewed you in July regarding your thoughts and experiences of non-Aboriginal researchers and research guidelines.

A more comprehensive version of the research results is currently being refined; so in the mean time, a brief copy of the results in Word format is attached to this email.

Also, as an outcome of the research findings, some participants commented that researchers rarely formally acknowledge participants in reports. Consequently, you have the option to be properly acknowledged by name as a contributor to the research, and referenced by name for any quotes taken from interview transcriptions. However, this is purely optional. Written consent is required, so a letter with a supplementary consent form and stamped reply envelope is in the post; it should arrive early next week. If you wish to be acknowledged and/or referenced in the research, the form simply needs filling out and sending back.

The collated information will be forwarded to Nulungu: Notre Dame Broome’s Centre for Indigenous Studies, in late October; so please post forms back ASAP, thanks.

If you need to contact me, please call me any time on: 0400 676 872.

Thank you again for your time and contribution.

Cheers,

**Brief Results**

**History**
- Negative research history has lead to negative perceptions of researchers and contemporary barriers to research.
- The extractive nature of research infers that contributing data is lost when shared in research interviews.
- Participants are wary of researchers, in particular non-Indigenous researchers due to negative research history with participant fears of data manipulation.
- Many participants are vulnerable to unethical researchers who are exploitative and deviant. Many researchers work for their own benefit to increase their own status or to glorify the institution they work for.
- Researchers need to gain a background understanding of the context they are to research in. Researchers must have an awareness of community politics and the implications this has on research logistics. Researchers also need to understand negative research history which many people remember.

**Relationship**
- Engagement is an important factor in research. Relationships and front-end legwork are important for positive research.
- Relationships are ongoing processes by which researchers need to commit to communities, ensuring their practice is not resonant of a seagull.
- Researchers must immerse themselves in the socio-cultural context of communities and gain rapport with community members. Two-way conversations further promote understanding and awareness.
• Vouching allows researchers to initially meet community people, and further networking is important for researchers to identify potential participants and become familiar with local organisations.

**Dialogue**

• Community consultation and asking questions is important for appropriate, informed practice.
• Engaging a community cultural consultant is important for guiding and advising researchers, translating language, interpreting meaning and liaising with community people. However, the presence of a community cultural consultant threatens participant anonymity and may prevent free-flowing disclosure of information.
• Local community organisations and resources such as local media organisations may be helpful to talk to.

**Informed understanding**

• It is essential that participants have a full understanding and are informed of research processes and outcomes. Researchers must ensure participants are aware of possible underlying assumptions.
• Researchers must ensure participants are aware of the expected implications and consequences of participating in the research project.
• Researchers must also ensure that participants are aware that unforeseen and uncontrollable implications to research may arise as a consequence of participating in the research project. Also, participants must be aware of issues such as secondary-sourcing in future documents.
• Researchers must ensure that participant consent is given freely and not pressured via obligation or relationships.

• Language is an issue as Standard English may not always be appropriate. Plain language is best for use in research. However, researchers must make sure they do not patronise participants.

• Researchers must ensure they do not create false expectations or make promises which may let participants down. Researchers must ensure that they follow-through with what they say.

• It is important to advertise research projects so the community is aware of researchers, and may prepare.

**Collaboration & partnership**

• Collaboration and partnership are important in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a research project. It is also important to work collaboratively during fieldwork.

• Participant involvement must be equal and meaningful. Researchers must listen and reports must contain participant voice.

**Negotiation**

• Negotiation is essential in establishing boundaries, status and roles in research.

**Accountability**

• There is a need for accountability in research. A binding authority regulating, monitoring and reviewing research must go beyond the reference group and hold researchers accountable, perhaps via a research accreditation system.
• Research duplication is annoying and a waste of time, money and resources. Government departments and institutions must improve communication to minimise the duplication of research.

**Power & control**

• The role of power and control in research includes empowerment, responsibility, choice and freedom in research.

• Self-determination must be considered, inspiring community directed and driven projects.

**Rationales & agendas**

• Projects should be balanced, researching both positives and negatives.

• Research should be effective, promoting positive change.

• Projects should research meaningful, worthwhile, genuine issues.

• Research should be proactive.

• Research should not be negative or detrimental, and data should not be used against participants.

• Researchers should be non-judgemental.

• Research should be individualistic, community-specific projects.

**Ownership**

• Communities should have an ownership of research processes and outcomes.

• Researchers must respect ownership rights including: copyright, intellectual property, rights to recall information and rights to reproduce information.

• Researchers should embrace co-authorship and opportunities to acknowledge participants and contributors.
• Researchers must be aware of issues regarding the commercialisation of information and knowledge. Disclosure rights must be observed where participants must be the right person to share a certain story or information.

Outcomes

• It is essential to feed-back research data, results and resources to participants.
• Researchers must check back with participants to confirm information such as spelling to safeguard against misrepresentation.
• Data which is fed-back to participants and resources which are produced from research results must be physically and literarily accessible to participants as well as the general public.
• Research should benefit the community. Such benefit must be relevant to and in the interests of the community, as determined by the community.
• Research should foster mutual learning, sharing and reciprocity. This may include: capacity building, skills transfer, and pay or employment opportunities for participants.
• Research should promote positive outcomes such as education for youth and positive future relationships.
• Research should not harm the environment, and researchers need to clean-up after fieldwork.

Time & timing

• Time may impact on research. People are very busy. Everyday life also intervenes including cultural responsibilities such as ceremony and sorry-business which will halt research.
• It is sometimes appropriate for researchers to be opportunistic and employ ‘piggy-backing’ and snowballing techniques for efficient process. This must be negotiated with the community cultural consultant.

**Skilled researcher**

• Researchers should put their heart, interest and self into the research.

• Researchers must be skilled, hard-workers. This transcends a researcher’s ethnic background.

• Researchers must have good communication and interpersonal skills. Researchers must also have a good attitude and be culturally aware.

• Researchers must be aware of their body language and non-verbal communication. Researchers must also show appropriate respectful personal presentation and appearance.

• Researchers must be flexible and accommodate for project adaptability.

• Researchers may encounter recording issues which must be negotiated with participants.

• Researchers must be open and be willing to share information as in basic self disclosure. This promotes the freeing of information.

**Cultural awareness**

• Researchers must be aware of homogenisation issues and the diversity of Aboriginal peoples.

• Researchers must recognise, acknowledge and respect Aboriginal traditions, culture, law, Traditional Owners and Elders.

• There are sensitive ‘no-go’ areas which are taboo. This may include topics of culture, sacred-sites and law. Researchers must also always ask permission to take photographs.

• Researchers must be aware of gender issues and kinship protocols.
• Researchers must be aware of issues in data interpretation. Aboriginal languages may have meanings that non-Aboriginal researchers may not understand. This may misrepresent participants in not checked. Researchers must also be aware of their sample to ensure that the size breadth and depth are appropriate.

**Reflexivity**

• Researchers must be ‘humble novices’.

• Researchers must have an awareness of community politics and the implications of aligning with certain groups, impacting the engagement of cultural guides. However, non-Aboriginal researchers have a certain amount of neutrality in communities.

• Self-reflection is important for researchers on topics of research rationale, relevance, motives, agendas and vested interests.

• Researchers must not begin research with preconceived ideas or with a too prescriptive outlook.

**Ethical practice: values & principles**

• Identifiable values and principles conducive to ethical research are: trustworthiness, authenticity, transparency, neutrality, respect, accountability, self-determination, reflexivity, engagement, commitment and voice.
Supplementary Consent Form: Participant Acknowledgement

Research Project
Guidelines for research in Aboriginal contexts: UNDA Fremantle & Broome
September 2008

I, (participant’s name) ____________________________________________ am a participant in the above research project.

I wish to be acknowledged by name as a contributor to this research project. [ ]

(Please tick)

I wish to be acknowledged by name for direct quotes from my interview. [ ]

(Please tick)

I understand and agree that this may feature in a ‘guidelines resource’ at Nulungu: The University of Notre Dame’s Centre for Indigenous Studies, Broome Campus.

I understand that the conduct relating to this project will be under the direct supervision of Professor Lynette Henderson-Yates, Notre Dame University, Broome Campus.

Signed (participant) : __________________________ Date : __________

Signed (researcher) : __________________________ Date : __________

If participants have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively, to the Provost, The University of Notre Dame Australia, PO Box 1225 Fremantle WA 6959, phone (08) 9433 0846.
Appendix 8:

Reflections: Process Addendum
Reflections: Process Addendum

Reflexive practice is an essential part of the research. This research project was designed honouring the existing accepted research guidelines, working in partnership with Nulungu: UNDA Broome’s CIS, and also the engaged community cultural consultant. Everyday life such as other research, funerals and holidays prevented some processes from transpiring as projected in the proposed research method. This highlighted a disparity between research ideals versus the realities of process implementation. The aim of this reflection is to re-consider this research project’s processes in light of the findings to determine what would be revised to improve this research project if I knew then what I know now.

Realities

Although an aim for the initial trip was to be introduced to possible participants, this was very limited due to timing and logistical issues. The first trip allowed me to become familiarised with the research setting, meet with Nulungu: UNDA Broome’s CIS staff and explore local resources and services. However, busy community life and events obscured opportunities to meet with and engage prospective participants. Although appropriate engagement was not permissible during the first trip, NAIDOC week celebrations allowed me to be introduced by the community cultural consultant to many community members, as well as taste many different authentic Kimberley cuisines.

Engagement and free consent

An issue arose in participant responses regarding the differing ways by which participants and researchers defined concepts. This highlighted issues of ‘interpretation’ when analysing participant data and project feedback. An example of this identified in this research
project is ‘engagement and relationships’. The guidelines offered by the Batchelor Institute (2005) warned researchers to “be cautious about researcher claims to have consulted fully with relevant community people” (p.1); in this research referring to levels of consultation.

Piggy-backing on the pre-existing relationship between UNDA Broome, the people working at Nulungu: UNDA Broome’s CIS, the community cultural consultant and the project participants was seen as a benefit for the researcher. “It can take researchers months to build relationships to get to just this point but you’ve been able to come in and do this work and get results and as you said generate a lot of material very quickly…” (Kinnane, 2008), and also “sometimes as a researcher you might want to spend ages building a relationship and in some other areas you might want to work with well set-up foundational relationships that are already there, so that’s where I think these things can work well for people’s mutual benefit” (Kinnane, 2008). However, some participants identified this as a negative aspect of the process stating that: “the reason we’re here today is based on relationships, we could have said ‘sorry, we don’t like your questions, see you later’ and that’s our prerogative…” (Participant 3b). This reflected the need for researchers to ask and negotiate the research process specifically with participants. Although I believed the established relationship through Nulungu: UNDA Broome’s CIS was adequate, this was seen as not the case by others. Issues were identified regarding free consent, where such relationships put pressure on participants to honour friendship and reciprocity. However, the unrealised consequence of social contracts in this relationship pressures participants; the acquiring of consent therefore was not necessarily given freely.

Continually reinforcing process

In this project I asked for feedback to reinforce the process, promoting and improving appropriate and respectful research techniques. The feedback offered by participants was
further reflected on to assess its position relating to the guidelines, its implementability, and
moreover its representation amongst other participant feedback and accepted research
guidelines. The community cultural consultant and I furthermore had to gauge whether the
feedback was a desire specific to the individual participant, or an overall matter for adaptation
in the project process.

Some research processes were subsequently adapted to correspond with the feedback
from participants. An example of this is demonstrated from the first participant when asked to
provide project feedback, stating: “Just one little thing, as something that might be handy, is
actually having a copy of your interview questions prior to…[pause] I was a little bit
struggling…” (Participant 1). Subsequently, participants were given the list of interview
questions prior to the interview with time to make notes or ask questions. This feedback
which in hindsight seems like an obvious procedure was inferred, yet not stated in the
AIATSIS (2000) guidelines principle ‘consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding’
and the NHMRC (2003) guidelines values ‘equality’ and ‘respect’, although did not feature in
guidelines’ ‘demonstrating’ sub-section. Participant feedback allowed the process to develop
towards benefiting participants and the research process, and consequently this feedback
enriched the data with more critical and well thought-out responses.

**Flexibility**

It was important to be flexible in the project especially when conducting interviews.
In one interview it was difficult to speak with a busy participant. The participant joined an
interview midway through and offered their responses to the remaining questions. The
participant also had to leave the interview prematurely when receiving a telephone call. The
need for the interviewer to ‘go with the flow’ allowed the project to gain from what this
participant was able to offer in their limited availability, despite the participant only
presenting a slice of their experience and insights into the subject.

A further example of a need for flexibility is interviews comfortableness. When some
participants stated they did not feel wholly comfortable with being interviewed, although still
expressed a desire to contribute, participants rehearsed a ‘mock-interview’ with the
interviewer which was an off-record trial-run of the interview questions and the participant
responses. Some participants also made notes to plan for anticipated responses. Participants
stated that they felt more comfortable about being interviewed after having been offered the
flexibility to read the questions beforehand, make notes and refine responses.

**Interview intensity**

Some participant responses to questions felt heated during interviews. During the
interviews, I recognised a few subtle nuanced criticisms from participants directed at the
project and myself. Such topics included: on whose terms the research was conducted, on
whose time did the interviews take place, the lack of monetary payment or recompense for
participation, and the lack of depth in my community engagement. I attributed this to
participants feeling fed-up with research and researchers.

**Transparency issues**

It was stated at the outset of the project and is included in information sheets and
consent forms that data collected in the research project is to be added into the policy
development of Nulungu: UNDA Broome’s CIS. I found out midway through the interviews
that the data may feature in a ‘cultural awareness package’ which is being produced and sold
by Nulungu: UNDA Broome’s CIS. However the arising issue is that participants did not
explicitly consent to their information being a part of this package. Furthermore, the prospect
of this package being sold contravenes participant responses and existing research guidelines as participants were not paid for contributing to this project. This infers a lack of transparency and the further exploitation of Aboriginal participants by researchers. Either produced documents from this project must not feature in the sold version of the package, or the issue must be re-evaluated with all participants and other stakeholders present at the negotiating table.

Further consultations

As recommended by participants and the research guidelines, I engaged in seeking consultation with primary local Kimberley organisations such as the Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC), the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), and the Kimberley Aboriginal Law And Culture Centre (KALACC). Due to the busyness of the organisations, only KALACC were able to participate. Telephone and email contact with the KLRC and the KLC soon petered and proved to be ineffectual due to the limited time of these organisations.

Unrealised negativity

One participant elicited an important unrealised negative drawback of this research, stating: “…even with best practice in anything in life, if you understand best practice, what you do if you’re a deviant, right, you can manipulate that best practice to get what you want…” (Participant 3b). This participant identified that by identifying best-practice research guidelines for use in Kimberley research, those researchers who are corrupted by negative objectives or agendas may manipulate the best-practice guidelines for use to fulfil their own goals at the disadvantage of Aboriginal communities.
Ethical clearance

This research project was granted HREC ethical clearance, yet however was not submitted for any specific Aboriginal HREC ethical clearance. Despite monitoring from Nulungu: UNDA Broome’s CIS, this research should have been submitted for such clearance, as recommended by the Batchelor Institute Guidelines (2005).
Initial Project: What Was ‘Wrong’ With It?

This section finally aims to reflect on the issues inherent in the initial research project. The initial project Men’s Business: The everyday lived experience of Aboriginal men in Perth WA, aimed to gain an understanding of what it means to be an Indigenous Australian man as told by participants in the Perth area of WA. As identifiable from participant responses, the project would have had limited success due to its prescriptive and imposed nature. The project was designed by myself and supervisors under the guidance of an Aboriginal support reference group, as opposed to being designed in partnership with local Perth Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal organisations.

The anticipated benefits of the research, to gain awareness and understanding are important and very interesting topics to be researched. The research could have helped the general community and service providers, amongst others to gain an insight into aspects of Aboriginal male lived experience and identity. This is of particular interest as a consequence of negative history, as well as the contemporary adverse impacts of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Intervention. However, it is arguable that the tangible benefits are minimal for Aboriginal peoples in a broader context living in current conditions with health, education and employment inequalities, to name a few. The research resources should perhaps instead be used to promote more meaningful and important issues with effective outcomes.

There are issues with rights-to-research, where the sensitivity of the project would not warrant a young, inexperienced non-Aboriginal researcher to research Aboriginal male lived experience and constructions of self. Even in a time of reconciliation, my whiteness would nevertheless rouse mistrust and negative memories of past research practices.

Despite the aforementioned issues with the initial research project, a strong relationship built on meaningful engagement over a prolonged period of time may have
overcome many of the identified limitations and setbacks of the project. However, researchers in their honours year are not usually experienced, have minimal research skills, and the programme does not foster the required timeline or resources imperative to appropriate engagement processes.

The initial project is interesting and useful; it has beneficial outcomes and can certainly realistically be a viable project for the future if the initial engagement processes are meaningfully and genuinely honoured. The research should be conducted by appropriate and experienced Aboriginal researchers, or by non-Aboriginal researchers collaboratively with appropriate Aboriginal co-researchers honouring the research guidelines and negotiated partnerships with communities. Despite my disappointment in April, advice from Mike Wright to conduct this research project allowed me to understand that the honours programme does not foster the appropriate processes required for the initial project.
Appendix 9:
Additional Recommendations
Additional Recommendations:

Additional recommended research guideline amendments arising from this research include:

- There must be an increased awareness of research duplication, particularly in light of limited resources as well as the natural aversion to time-wasting and repetitiveness.

- Guidelines must also add a warning of compromised participant anonymity when engaging community cultural consultants.

- Although language issues are represented in research guidelines, cross-cultural interpretation issues when deciphering and understanding the meaning implicit in Aboriginal language and non-verbal communication and body-language in interviews are not identified.

- Disclosure issues and rights to disclose or share certain information or stories were highlighted as important in participant responses and should be included in research guidelines to promote research validity.

- Guidelines must clearly and frankly state standards and examples of appropriate personal presentation for researcher appearance. Inappropriate researcher presentation is common, disrespectful and an impediment to engagement.

- Guidelines must promote sensitivity to participants regarding recording issues in interviews. Participants may find recording during research to be inappropriate. Researchers
must also be prepared and willing to be flexible and work with participants to accommodate mutual requirements.

• Sampling issues such as sample size, breadth and depth must be explicitly considered in guidelines; as well as alerting researchers to the anticipated social, political, cultural and background contexts in which research participants may be involved.

• Research guidelines must promote respectful, environmentally friendly research, particularly during fieldwork. Research guidelines must further uphold the premise: ‘do no harm’.

• Research guidelines must instruct researchers to alert participants to secondary-sourcing issues. Participants may consent to be involved in one project, but it is possible that they will be cited and possibly misrepresented in a secondary project. Although this was identified as adverse, this is an uncontrollable aspect of participating in research. Researchers and guidelines therefore have a responsibility to inform participants of this possible ramification.

• Participant voice must feature in produced documents and resources to promote authenticity, authorship and authority in produced documents. The research guidelines also may benefit from implementing this recommendation.

• Researchers must invest their interest, self and heart into the research to authentically engage with communities and participants, as well as promote cultural appropriateness, values and ethics offered in research guidelines.
A need for research accountability where guidelines “rely too much on researchers ‘doing the right thing’…” (Dunbar & Scrimgeour, 2006, p.56), coupled with the lack of research guidelines enforceability leads this research project to recommend the establishment of an Aboriginal research authority, similar to that recommended by the HREOC (2008) in a report advocating for a National Indigenous Representative Body. The HREOC (2008) recommends that such a body should feature a “research coordination arm” (p.5) with the power and resources to “commission community-based research or coordinate with existing Indigenous research centres. It could also build links between Indigenous researchers, policy developers and service providers to share skills and knowledge” (HREOC, 2008, p.5). The development of a binding authoritative body should further enforce culturally appropriate ethical research practice in a similar style to the close monitoring of research by the Batchelor Institute. This body should also offer an accreditation system or the capacity for authoritative peer review emphasising the legitimacy of a report which becomes accredited with approval.