



WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this document contains images or names of people who have since passed away.

MURRI WAY!

Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Reconstruct Social Welfare Practice

Robyn Lynn, Rosamund Thorpe and Debra Miles
with
Christine Cutts, Anne Butcher and Linda Ford



CSR

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

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ISLANDERS RECONSTRUCT SOCIAL
WELFARE PRACTICE**

***Robyn Lynn, Rosamund Thorpe
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CSR

Centre for Social Research
James Cook University

CSR

Centre for Social Research
Peter Veth, *Research Co-ordinator*
James Cook University
Townsville Qld 4811
Australia

First Published in 1998

© Robyn Lynn

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Murri Way: Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders
reconstruct social welfare practice

Bibliography

ISBN 1 876055 37 5.

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3. Aborigines. Australian – Queensland – Social life and customs.
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362.849915

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'MURRI WAY!' - ABORIGINES AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS RECONSTRUCT SOCIAL WELFARE PRACTICE

Report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping styles in Social Welfare Practice in North Queensland

Robyn Lynn, Rosamund Thorpe, Debra Miles

with

Christine Cutts, Anne Butcher, Linda Ford

1998

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping styles in Social Welfare practice was a collaborative research project funded by a large Australian Research Council grant. Members of the research team were Robyn Lynn, Rosamund Thorpe, Christine Cutts, Anne Butcher, Linda Ford and Debra Miles. The research team was assisted by an advisory group which included Liz Wilson, Mary Horope, Jenny Pryor and Dana Ober. The latter also included a representative of the Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Participation, Research and Development, James Cook University.

Acknowledgments

There are many people who have helped with the preparation of this book. The research advisory group and research team wish to thank and acknowledge those people who made a contribution to this Project.

Aboriginal people:

Philip Obah, Margaret Smallwood, Judith Ryan, Errol West, Vanessa Stevens.

Torres Strait Islander people:

Ba Bisai, Martin Nakata, David Captain, Genua Hore.

Non-Aboriginal people:

Glen Dawes, Greta Galloway, Peter Jones.

Participants in the Project

Participants in the project were offered the opportunity to be identified as contributors to the project. The following list is of the names and profiles of those people who wish to be acknowledged as sharing their knowledge and experience with the project team.

Aborigines

Maurice Bowman, originally from Woorabinda, was at the time of the project the administrator at the Aboriginal and Islander Aged and Disabled Centre, Townsville. In this role, which he held for 16 months, Maurice was responsible for the operation of the centre. The centre provides respite services to Aboriginal and Islander persons. The age of residents ranged from 5 years to 90 years. Prior to this position, Maurice worked for the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Association for six years, and Legal Aid in Maryborough for one year where he did 12 months training. Maurice's training has been done on the job and he believes that he doesn't 'need a piece of paper to work with Murriss'. Training is continued through inservice workshops with organisations, such as Yalgabindi.

Diane Lemson was the Aboriginal community worker with Jupiter Mossman Aboriginal Community Centre in Charters Towers. Diane described her role as a 'jack of all trades'. She had, at the time of the project, been at this agency for four and a half years and she has worked within the areas of legal aid, child care, family services and social security. Diane is not originally from Charters Towers but has lived in the town for a number of years.

Noel Gertz began working with the College of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in 1977 and he has worked throughout Queensland. Noel has completed a Diploma of Teaching Technical and Further Education, and two years of teaching at Cairns TAFE. At the time of the project Noel was an Executive officer in the Aboriginal employment and education development unit of Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) in Townsville. In this managerial role, Noel was responsible for the operation of the unit, and also enjoyed the opportunity to be involved with the day-to-day activities of the unit, such as answering the phone, making coffee and so on.

Delena Oui worked for the Kootana Women's Centre on Palm Island. In this position her main aim was to try to bring families together; not separate them. Delena's training has been inservice and, prior to commencing the job, she had undertaken a four-day workshop on sexual abuse and AIDS. This training has assisted Delena to recognise the signs of sexual abuse when working with children.

Torres Strait Islanders

Angie Akee has been employed in various welfare agencies over a number of years. When the project began Angie was employed by the Townsville City Council as the Aboriginal Liaison worker. During this time, she was also the chairperson of the regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and worked voluntarily with the women's group at Magani Malu Kes.

Will Bero worked in the Department of Employment, Education and Youth Affairs.

Raba Solomon works as a community education counsellor at Heatley State High School. Raba's training has been on the job. In addition, she has also completed a training course in Reality Therapy.

Louisa Passi is from the Eastern islands and has worked for the Department of Social Security for a number of years, initially as a typist and then as a welfare worker. During the time at Department of Social Security (DSS) Louisa did not receive any formal training and, therefore, she learnt on the job, having to 'sink or swim'. At the time of this project, Louisa worked as an administrative officer with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Support Centre where the same training approach has been applied. Louisa would like to receive training but she has had to learn the hard way, without any formal training.

Agnes Tapim is a senior resource officer with the Department of Health and Family Services. She has partially completed a welfare degree and received further inservice training.

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1.

‘This is Not the Way We Help Our People’

... I would ask them if they wanted a cup of tea and I might sit out the front with them and have a smoke and a laugh and a talk. (Diane)

Introduction

Statistics show that a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders face, on a daily basis, problems that are emotionally and physically stressful to themselves, their families and communities. These problems include issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, assault and injury, delinquency, incarceration, alcoholism, unemployment and poverty. At present there are serious questions about the ability of non-indigenous services to effectively respond to these people and their issues. The crucial questions have become ‘what kind of help?’ and ‘who controls the process of intervention?’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social welfare workers claim a significant role in providing appropriate help to individuals within their communities who are suffering the effects of these problems – a form of help which has for sometime been devalued, ignored and discounted by the non-indigenous services and social welfare educators.

Since the introduction in the 80s of a tertiary education policy that has actively sought to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to seek education and training in tertiary institutions, there have been increasing numbers of people seeking to undertake studies in social welfare courses. However the curricula of these courses strongly reflects the models and value base of western society – a model which reflects a ‘needs of strangers’ approach rather than a needs of one’s neighbours approach (Ife 1995:16).

This is not the way we help our people

At James Cook University, Townsville, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have commented on the discrepancy they

see existing between the available literature on helping and their experience of helping styles that are used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social welfare workers. Preliminary research in 1989 and 1990, which involved small group interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander welfare workers, highlighted the need to gather data systematically on Aboriginal and Islander helping styles.

The implications of cultural differences, including communication styles, for social welfare practice have undergone some examination, but usually from the perspective of cross-cultural interaction. This work has often focused on the majority counsellor-minority client relationship. However, little has been said about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander styles of helping within their own cultural communities. This situation exists despite widespread agreement that the welfare needs of Aboriginal and Islander individuals and communities are often best met through indigenous workers.

Specific training in social welfare practice skills may be gained in a formal sense through participation in tertiary education programs or in a less formal way, through 'inhouse' agency training and professional development programs. In either case, training is likely to be based on non-indigenous models of helping developed within, and pertaining to, the dominant culture (e.g. Egan 1986).

Compton and Galaway (1984:347) identify two major elements of help, (i) what is given, and (ii) how it is given and used. Both of these elements will be subject to cultural influence. Given the significant differences which have been identified between indigenous and non-indigenous communication styles, it is reasonable to assume that similar differences may exist with regard to helping styles.

Consequently, it is important that those tertiary institutions and social welfare agencies who are involved in the training of Aboriginal and Islander welfare workers be aware of these differences and, therefore, be able to incorporate that awareness into the provision of culturally- appropriate education and training.

An increasing body of thought has noted the culturally-bound nature of social welfare practice and questioned the appropriateness of its Western, liberal value base for use with, or by, other cultures (Midgley 1981, NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission 1986; Pease 1990).

Social welfare training, formal or informal, which fails to address students' cultural resources and everyday material experiences (Nakata & Muspratt 1994) may in fact be reinforcing aspects of cultural domination and contributing to the subtle destruction of indigenous culture (Lynn & Pye 1990; Chambers & Pettman 1986).

It is within this context we sought to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to identify and document their perceptions of the helping styles they use in social welfare practice in North Queensland.

As women working in an academic institution we each had an implicit consciousness about culture that informed our approach to education and daily practice. We all had interests in Aboriginal and Islander issues and anti-racist practice together with principles and practices that recognised and sought to share power with Indigenous peoples.

Representing culture

Culture is a term that is commonly used and associated within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society with the survival of 'Murri ways' as different from the ways of white Australia. Unfortunately, it has also degenerated into simplistic tokens of 'high culture' – that of art, craft, music and dance. In recent years there has been much debate about what constitutes Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture (Rowse 1993). This debate has included claims of essentialism and reductionism of Aboriginal culture and the use of culture as a means of reviving and politicising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Keefe 1988; Pettman 1992).

Our research group had a diversity of views about culture and its relationship to the helping process. Each member of the team carried their own notions, experiences and meanings of what constituted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. However, we were primarily concerned with its use as a social category that differentiated the characteristics of social groups of human beings from each other. At the same time we also recognised it as a dynamic process of continual renewal that reflected "...the fluid, negotiable and transitory quality of corporate life among Aboriginal people ..." (Rowse 1993:57).

Our interest was with the 'private ethnicity' (Weaver 1984) of Aboriginal and Islander people. Weaver defines this as the "the

practical behaviour and identity of the indigenous minority, the distinctive manner of their collectivity" (Weaver 1984:184-5). This is in contrast to 'public' Aboriginality which is the institutionalised "basis upon which the nation-state formally assigns (or withholds) resources to the aboriginal minorities" (Weaver 1984:184-5). This serves to maintain the position of the Aboriginal person as 'the other'.

The difficulty within our approach was in the task of attempting to formulate 'intra-ethnic' norms without formulating "...an incomplete argument, a romance of the unrepresentable, as 'Aboriginality' is assured its place as the eternal Other of power" (Rowse 1993:59). Difference, like representation is also a contested concept. Thus we also looked to an understanding of cultural difference "...as a process of the political struggle of representation...- a struggle that produces new forms of identities that are hybrid and multiple, allowing us to think about difference as ways in which new hyphenated identities come about which are produced in and through cultural struggles. This concept of cultural struggle includes a sense of struggle and confrontation between the dominant, residual and emergent sectional interests" (Spry 1996a:10). We sought to recognise the "continual contestations, 'the toing and frowing' that make cultures dynamic and challenges the notions of cultures as static" (Spry 1996a:10).

At the outset we recognised difference in the cultural, historical and social reality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This difference was not in terms of a regulatory device but rather in terms of "...a diversity of sources and occasions, none of them to be prejudged as more or less 'authentic' than others" (Rowse 1993:88). We sought to engage with difference amongst Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders – "the positional, conditional and conjunctural..." (Hall 1992:257) aspects that reflect the complexity of identity and representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social welfare practice.

We also recognised that Torres Strait Islander ways have been invisible and subsumed into Aboriginal ways. While there is a lot of shared history between these two groups and they are tied together, at this point, in government policy, we sought to recognise the uniqueness of each group in the way in which they engage in the helping process. These differences and their form in the helping context was central within the project. The text that has emerged as

culture is "...a site of multiple constraints pertaining both to form and to contextual relations. These constraints are not negative, they tend to make sure that (the) text will have a specific application in renegotiating meanings'" (Muecke 1992:138) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social welfare practice.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Welfare Practice

Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been "...positioned as the unspoken and invisible 'other' of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses" (Hall 1992:252) about social welfare practice. In practice and curricula their experience has been marginalised. They have been categorised as a welfare problem to be dealt with through state intervention. The detrimental usage of the welfare model for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders has been well documented in areas such as child welfare, juvenile justice and corrections (Gale, Bailey-Harris & Wundersitz:1990). The approach has primarily been one of control and management to redress deprivation and disadvantage with some recent recognition of the necessity for cultural sensitivity in service delivery.

Where attempts have been made to recognise Aboriginal ways, policy makers and practitioners have often based policy and practice on reductionist and deficit notions of culture, race and ethnicity (Gilroy 1992). At best they may attempt to consult while at worst they impose their own values, ways of working and priorities onto Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Seldom do they succeed in recognising the cultural diversity and the diverse historical and social realities that exist amongst and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Social welfare literature advocates two approaches to working with people from cultures other than western cultures. These are 'ethnic-sensitive practice' and 'anti-racist practice'.

'Ethnic-sensitive practice' is strongly influenced by the literature from the United States (Devore & Schlesinger 1995) while 'anti-racist practice' is influenced by British literature (Dominelli 1988). Each of these approaches have been adopted either separately or together in Australian social welfare literature (Cox 1989; Tomlinson 1985; Petruchenia 1990; Lynn & Pye 1990).

The ethnic-sensitive approach treats culture as fixed and static, tending to stereotype whole cultures. Both 'ethnic sensitive' and 'anti-racist' practice reflect a monocultural view of society and presume that all workers are from the dominant group in society. They also operate from a reductive and deficit notion of either ethnicity, race, or culture. In this instance a white, western, masculine, middle class way of knowing and understanding the world is the norm (McMahon 1995). The reductive representation of racism ignores the complexity of class, gender, ability and sexuality for the black person. In its present form anti-racist practice fails to recognise that "...there is much more to the emancipation of blacks than opposition to racism" and a desire to do away with racism (Gilroy 1992:50).

Gilroy (1987, in Gilroy 1992:50) also suggests that anti-racism not only operates from a '...reductive conception of culture...' but also from a '...culturalist conception of race and ethnic identity'. Thus politically opposed groups are only united in their view of race by culture and identity while ignoring politics and history (Gilroy 1992). In its cultural conception and discourse anti-racism has a propensity to portray blacks as victims and operates '...on a strategy of reversal and inversion' (Hall 1992:255). Consequently, these approaches have limited application for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders working with their own people.

Practitioners within social welfare accept that policies and practice can be different. In this sense there is recognition of cultural difference as a strength, rather than a weakness, as a resource, rather than a problem (McMahon 1995). However, at this point culturally-different approaches are generally treated as 'add-ons' to largely unchanged dominant practices. The cultural and political position of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders within the practice literature and curricula of social welfare remains largely hidden and unchallenged.

Studies to date of Aboriginal work with their own people claim the necessity of a culturally-sensitive approach within a social justice framework (Hazlehurst 1994; Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia & Dulwich Centre 1994). Both of these approaches focus on a process of healing for Aboriginal people.

The 'Reclaiming Our Stories, Reclaiming Our Lives' project was informed by the use of a narrative approach. They claim that

approaches to counselling based on this narrative metaphor have been identified by Aboriginal health workers in different parts of Australia as more appropriate to Aboriginal culture than the more conventional Western mental health approaches. The ideas and the practices of the narrative approach are considered to be more honouring and re-empowering of Aboriginal ways of being on a number of levels, including the level of spirituality (Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia 1995:3).

Through this method Aboriginal people can be shown how to re-tell their stories in ways that redefine the dominant story of Aboriginal people which has been imposed upon them – thus renaming their experiences and strengths.

Through a group process and a 'listening team' approach the project identified a number of strengths within Aboriginal culture. These included humour, self-pride, determination and hope, turning negatives into positives, pride in Aboriginal identity, family connections, being loved and cared for by their family, 'being strong for their families', the example of the strength of the old people, being able to reconnect with family, spirituality and the existence of Aboriginal organisations and counsellors.

Along with these strengths the project also identified a number of ways of healing the effects of injustice, pain and loss. These included: naming injustice, caring and sharing, sharing of stories, remembering the loss and injustices, Aboriginal ways and knowledge of healing.

While there is value in an approach that assists people to identify what they want in their own lives, and to reconnect with their own knowledges and strengths within a social justice framework (Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia 1995) there is a danger that culture may be treated as fixed and static, applied in the identified way to all Aboriginal people.

Hazlehurst (1994) proposes an approach that contains three essential elements:

- i) decolonisation
- ii) community reconstruction which involves the revitalisation of community life and the redrawing of the domains of community leadership; and
- iii) spiritual liberation in the shaping of a vision of their own future.

Within the approaches of both Hazlehurst and the Dulwich Centre there is a strong recognition of the socio-historical experience of the individual and the Aboriginal community, the importance of Aboriginal culture and sharing of experience as a means of reconstruction for the individual and community. Culture in this context focuses on the necessity of renewal for strength, valuing cultural resources and material experiences.

Aspects of Aboriginal helping have also been documented in a less formalised manner in biographies and autobiographies of Aboriginal women. These provide insight into the life experience of the Aboriginal person and their moves into high profile helping roles. Spry (1996) argues that this form of representation of Aboriginal experience is a marginalised space for speaking that falls into the category of 'the victimised'/'success despite victimisation'. In this marginalised position Aboriginal helping is constructed "...in a differential relation to the centre. Hence (Aboriginal helping) is at once "the product and process of its representation". (de Laurentis 1987:5 in Spry 1996:3).

Kennedy (1990) adopts a cultural sensitivity approach in his introduction to western Torres Strait culture. This document is based on field research undertaken between 1976 and 1981. In this report he outlines important Torres Strait values and behaviour for developing a relationship, a different work ethic, the style of meetings and discussions, values and obligations.

At the macro-level Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have advocated through social, political and legal action to have their human rights recognised – freedom of movement, the right to vote, the right to legal representation and equal treatment under the law, land rights, health, shelter and food. This action has operated from the premise that "...every person has inherent worth and is entitled to certain freedoms and certain protections" (Thompson 1994, 1).

The Aboriginal movement has a strong rights focus. More recently it has also included a formalised process of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians that is strongly linked to social justice.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has identified eight key issues essential to the reconciliation process. These include: understanding the importance of land and sea in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies; improving relationships between

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community; valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as a valued part of Australian heritage; sharing histories; addressing disadvantage; responding to the underlying causes of the high levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody; agreeing on a document/s of reconciliation; greater opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to control their own destinies (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1995).

The report 'Going Forward Social Justice for the First Australians' highlights the comments of Indigenous peoples that "There can be no reconciliation without social justice" (1995:22). For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, social justice is measured by the preparedness of the Australian community to shift from a welfare dependency relationship to one of recognition of basic rights and autonomy of Indigenous people. A set of draft principles of indigenous social justice and development of relations between the commonwealth government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was presented by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, in 1995, for adoption by the government as the foundation for its relations with indigenous peoples (ATSIC 1995). Successful movement towards reconciliation requires not only government action but the involvement of the wider community.

The meaning of 'helping'

'Helping' is universal and part of the experience of all human beings. However, it is difficult to describe because it is actualised differently in different social contexts according to the differing interactional structuring of relationships between community members. It is only in the recent history of capitalism in the western world that helping has become a structured, professionalised activity (Jordan 1984). In the traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context helping as a concept was interwoven with kinship responsibilities and obligations. It is only since colonisation and the disinheritance of indigenous people that helping has emerged in an organisational context.

This project was specifically concerned with 'helping' in social welfare practice. This can occur at the individual, group or community level. The decision to focus on the process of individual helping work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers,

within their own cultural community, was directed by the lack of fit between the experience of helping by Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in their own community and what currently exists in the helping literature in social welfare practice. In addition Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, like many others, are seeking help with problems that arise from their day-to-day lives. They are not seeking therapy but assistance with everyday life. It is this aspect of helping in which this project is interested.

Compton & Galaway (1979) and others (O'Connor, Wilson & Thomas 1991; Howe 1987) argue that the nature of social work is such that practice should be approached as an interactive process concerned with what is given as help and how it is given and used. O'Connor et al. (1991:53-54) describes process as occurring in an interaction "when you can identify the choices, why you made them and how you presented these choices to the other person". Central to the process of the interaction is the use of self by the worker. The character of the type of help that is given, and how it is given and used, is derived from the purpose and values of social work. The process of how things are done determines the outcome rather than a method or theory. This process includes the personality of the helper, specific helping skills and growth facilitating conditions to create specific outcomes for the person, society and the helper (Brammer 1988), and the organisational context. Thus structured practice within social work has become identified as a process (Howe 1987; Compton & Galway 1984).

Historically, perceptions of the 'helping' task in social welfare have oscillated between "...friendship and art or ...profession and science" (Rojek et al. 1988). Early accounts of the social work process were heavily influenced by the psychological aspects of social work and the language of medicine. This heavily influenced subsequent writers (Biestek 1961; Hollis 1969) and the dominant thinking about helping in social work today (Rojek et al. 1988). Consequently the literature tends to adopt the scientific discourse focusing on theory and skill building for professional helping. This move to professionalism along with the pressures on workers for outcome and effectiveness, constrains the worker in the form of the relationship developed within the helping process.

More recent critiques from feminist and cross-cultural perspectives have challenged the discourse of traditional social work. They have questioned the purpose and task of helping in

social work and sought to provide alternative ideas to a helping approach that emphasises the personal characteristics of the person in determining a quality helping relationship (Corey & Corey 1989; Jordan 1979). This alternative discourse blurs the distinction between personal and professional and worker and client, placing greater value on equality, mutuality and friendship in the worker-client relationship. They challenge ideas of helping that are grounded in a consensus perspective of society and societal relationships. It is the alternative discourse which has influenced the approach to helping in this project.

2.

Collaborative Research

As a group of researchers we wanted to explore with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, perceptions of their helping styles with their own people and the type of help they provided in a social welfare context. We were interested in identifying the helping process used by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders within their own cultural communities and in particular the cultural aspects of their helping approach. We were also keen to explore with them the differences between their approach and that advocated in the non-indigenous literature on helping, and aspects of the latter that they found appropriate or inappropriate, in their cultural communities. It was important, we felt, that the cultural differences between and amongst indigenous and non-indigenous helpers were made explicit and in our discussions we hoped to identify what these were, how they impacted on the helping process and the implications for social welfare training.

The research project was being undertaken by a research team of indigenous and non-indigenous members who were committed to formulating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander terms of reference (Appendix A) for the project. This involved negotiating terms of reference with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as to how to go about doing this project. The framework for this process is outlined in Appendix B.

These emergent principles were more than a set of guidelines for doing business with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They encompassed an understanding of the historical and social reality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the recognition and application of implicit and explicit cultural knowledge, values, beliefs and priorities in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within their specific local context.

This included adopting methodological and ethical processes that reflected as much as possible a political position of indigenous control of the project in relation to problem definition, choice of research methods, data analysis and use of findings. Central to this approach was an indigenous advisory group and collaborative ways of researching, such as interviewing in pairs of indigenous and non-

indigenous interviewers and summarising previous interviews for participant comment at a subsequent interview. In this way we maximised interaction between members of the research team and with participants, and indigenous control and accessibility to the research.

Forming a partnership

Integral to this commitment to a collaborative and cooperative approach to the project was the development of an advisory group of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. This group was composed of the researchers and Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who had strong experience in the social welfare field in Townsville. Through the advisory group we sought to ensure Aboriginal and Islander control of the project and to share as much as possible the thinking about the project. During this initial stage, time was given to clarifying the project with the advisory group, obtaining community support for the project and negotiation about the ownership of knowledge, authorship of material produced, and the roles and training of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the team.

In conjunction with the advisory group and their knowledge of social welfare workers in the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community we identified 23 Aboriginal and 17 Torres Strait Islander social welfare workers in Townsville and surrounding areas. From this group we identified a combined convenience – snowball sample of eight Aboriginal and eight Torres Strait Islander social welfare workers from both government and non-government organisations. The Torres Strait Islander sample included people from all the island groups.

The indigenous members of the team met with each of these people to discuss their interest in being participants in the project. They outlined the purpose of the project, what it involved and what was to happen with the information. This was followed by phone contact to arrange the first interview. The participants were from government and non-government organisations with varying positions, qualifications, backgrounds, length of experience in the welfare field and types of training.

In the initial stages of the project, members of the research team shared ideas about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

helping and learnt about the differences that existed between us in our own styles of communication and helping. Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-indigenous researchers within the team all undertook training prior to beginning the interviews. This consisted of training in the research process, qualitative research, ethics, development of the interview format, interviewing techniques, data analysis, and the development of the video stimulus material. This program assisted the researchers to review and develop particular skills for this piece of research. It also facilitated dialogue amongst the researchers about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways in relation to the content and format of the interviews.

From these discussions we developed a set of general questions or 'themes' to be explored with the participants. These were shared with the advisory group for their comment. In the process of discussion about the themes, the questions and processes for the initial interview were reworked into a form that reflected the cultural background of the participants.

Collaborative research and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perceptions

Each participant was interviewed on three separate occasions by two interview facilitators – a non-indigenous person and an Aboriginal or Islander person according to the identity of the person being interviewed. These were semi-structured depth interviews (Jones 1985; Minichiello et al. 1990), with the non-indigenous interview facilitator taking detailed notes and the indigenous facilitator in the primary role of facilitation of the interview.

The initial interview was concerned with gaining participants' broad perceptions of the helping process and the role of culture in shaping helping styles. This also included information about their perception of the relevance or appropriateness of non-indigenous helping models.

The second interview used previously prepared stimulus material as the basis for a more detailed examination of helping styles and skills, and the reasons for their use. This consisted of two video taped role plays that simulated social welfare interviews. Each role play used a scenario of parents seeking help from an agency

because their young son was about to go to court for a stealing offence. Using this scenario, one role play demonstrated the helping approach of a non-indigenous worker with non-indigenous parent. The other role play demonstrated the same scenario using the helping approach of an indigenous worker with an indigenous parent. Separate tapes were made of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approach. Participants were asked to view both an indigenous and non-indigenous video tape and comment upon them in relation to the helping styles portrayed in their similarity or difference with the worker's style, particularly in the cultural sense.

The third interview reviewed the information gathered in the previous interviews by means of paraphrased summaries of the interviews. This enabled the facilitators and participants to clarify any aspects of helping which had emerged but not been sufficiently explored. It also provided a cyclical and iterative aspect to the process of making 'sense' of the data and gave participants the opportunity to comment on the way in which their responses had been heard. Through this process the facilitators and participants were also able to undertake some initial analysis and discussion of the data, clarifying meaning and comparing it with perspectives in the literature.

The interviews took place at the locations which were most convenient for the research participants, for example they were conducted in their own homes, their workplace, or in one instance in a park by the beach.

Each of the interviews were audio tape-recorded with the permission of the participant. A paraphrased summary of each interview was then prepared for each participant for their comment at the next interview. Each person was asked to clarify meaning where necessary and to indicate whether there were parts of the summary they would not want used in public documents. This request did result in some minor changes being made to the interviews. These were deleted from the summaries. However, these comments still remain on the tapes as general background material that will not be paraphrased or quoted.

At the initial interview each participant was also asked if they wanted to be identified in relation to the data in a public document. This resulted in a few participants wanting to avoid identification and in these cases we have used numerical identification. Others

sought to be acknowledged as contributing knowledge to the project and being named in relation to any statements made by them in the final report.

Becoming the subject of the project

While the primary focus of the project was on helping, the research process was itself, in part, an experience of the data we sought to elucidate through the project. The research process contained many of the elements that emerged in the data provided by the participants. For example, in the development of the schedule for the interviews considerable time was spent in ensuring that the language was 'plain talk' as opposed to professional jargon.

Initially, the non-indigenous interviewer felt that she was treated with some suspicion by the research participants, however, she also found that, by being introduced to them by her co-worker, the indigenous interview facilitator, in a way that indicated acceptance, enabled them to feel more at ease with her presence. By the time each participant had been interviewed for the third time, the non-indigenous interviewer had gained a sense of acceptance. This was evident in the gestures and other non-verbal cues which conveyed the impression of participants being comfortable with her presence.

In almost all of the interviews, food and drinks were offered and the non-indigenous interview facilitator learned that it was most impolite to refuse, so she willingly partook in their offerings. This was a very important part of the entire interview process as it indicated friendship and a willingness to share. This sharing included not only food and drink but also deep insights into various, and sometimes very sensitive, aspects of cultural practices, e.g. aspects of spirituality.

It was also conveyed to the non-indigenous interview facilitator during one interview session with a Torres Strait Islander participant, that white people who write 'things' down while speaking with indigenous people (as was the role of this facilitator throughout most of the interviews) were treated with caution and suspicion. In instances where she did not take notes, participants were equally aware that she was likely to go away and make notes. Throughout the process the facilitators addressed this issue by reiterating the purposes for taking notes, clearly explaining what

the information would be used for and providing summaries of the interviews at the next interview for their confirmation. The presence of the indigenous interview facilitator was also an additional factor in assisting participants to speak freely and seemingly at ease while doing so.

Interviews inevitably began by 'sussing each other out', i.e. the indigenous interview facilitator and the participant. The non-indigenous facilitator usually sat quietly while observing this important part of the process. Sussing each other out is a time where each person is basically determining whether the other can be trusted. Trust could usually be established if a family or relative connection could be made; it always was.

The language used was usually informal and the interviews were also conducted in an informal manner. Time was rarely discussed, in terms of how much time was available for the interview. The interviews were conducted until there were no more questions from the interview facilitators and there was a gradual winding down of discussion from the participant. This varied from 1 to 2.5 hours.

It was important for there to be a very friendly atmosphere created, and for eye contact between the participants and interview facilitators which was important for developing this friendship. Initially, eye contact was centred primarily between the indigenous facilitator and participant but as the interview progressed, the eye contact would be made with the non-indigenous facilitator when she was speaking and/or, from their point of view, when they wanted to tell her something, or ensure that she had understood what they were explaining. At times she was also aware of the necessity to curb eye contact in order to avoid shame or embarrassment.

Humour was a very important aspect of most of the interviews. It was almost essential to tell a joke or relay some form of humour. This seemed to ease nervousness about the interview process and it seemed to be quite effective as a means for doing so. The non-indigenous facilitator was usually not directly involved in being a part of the joke which was most often between the indigenous people present. However, the non-indigenous facilitator usually smiled, or laughed and joined in. This appeared to help to ease tension and begin to foster the process of her inclusion within the group.

Gender differences were also observed during the interview process. At one point, both interview facilitators attended a community meeting where men did most of the talking and women's opinions appeared to be brushed off, or not taken seriously. The women, who were known to be well educated and articulate in other community situations, appeared to accept the responses of elder males in the meeting. This experience was reinforced in participant comments, that elder males should not be questioned by females and especially that they not be younger females.

Significant cultural aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping, such as those described, permeated the research process.

The importance of voice

Throughout the project, and in this document, we were ethically committed to ensuring that the interests of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are advanced from a social and political viewpoint in social welfare practice, in the way in which their knowledge is represented.

The voice of the indigenous participants was honoured through both the technical task of listening to team members, advisory group members and project participants, and the interpretive task of representing the voice in the data analysis.

The listening aspects of the Aboriginal and Islander voice have already been discussed in the collaborative processes of the project. In the interpretive task, representation of the indigenous voice was honoured through the involvement of the indigenous team members, in the initial identification of themes and categorisation. During this process there was much discussion by team members about meaning and understanding of indigenous intention and concepts. The Nudist program was then employed in further categorisation and cross-referencing of themes.

The voices in the final representation are multiple in that the primary authors of this book are white while many of the voices within its covers are indigenous. These voices are presented through material from the paraphrased summaries of the interviews which may have the effect of distancing from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants for some readers. Through a

collaborative research process we sought to ensure the presence of the indigenous voice in what was spoken, what was heard in the interviews, and how it is understood by the reader. However, we recognise that in the end this report is a mixture of speaking 'for' and speaking 'about' and 'with'.

In the voice of speaking 'with' we recognise that the depiction and portrayal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping is a production of interpretation in that white authors have chosen the voices and the elements of the indigenous voices to be represented in collaboration with those voices. In the representation that occurs the indigenous voices are speaking from their knowing of their experience as a black person. In this instance they are speaking 'for'. Thus there is both descriptive representation and substantive representation. In these representations we hope the interests of indigenous communities are being served in taking back that which has been ignored and devalued and claiming it as a powerful and positive way of practice.

3.

Key Features of Indigenous Helping Styles

The discourse on helping by Indigenous participants in the project contained both common key features and phases as well as significant differences. The common key features of their approach to helping are summarised in Figure 1.

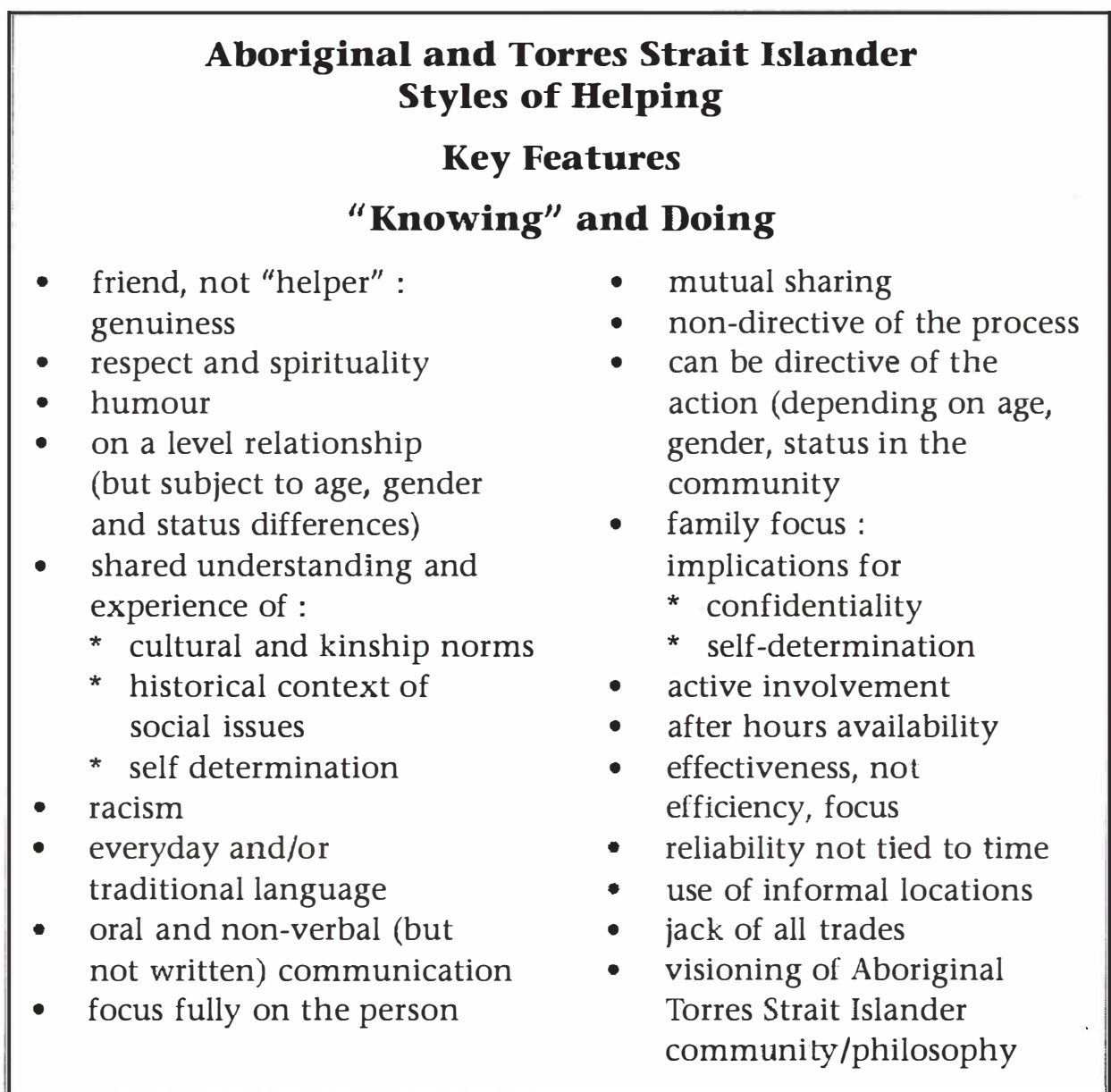


Figure 1

These features reflect the importance of 'knowing' the other as an indigenous person and a 'doing' that reflects tangible outcomes.

Figure 2 summarises three distinct phases of the helping process which are:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Styles of Helping

Key Features

The Process:

Beginnings

"A yarn, a joke and a cup of tea": tuning in and sussing out

- making connections: family, place
- two-way sharing
- yarning and storytelling
- sharing spirituality
- informal
- focus on the whole person in their context
- go with the flow: non-directed, circular time-rich process
- talking plain
- listening
- "reading" non-verbal communication
- non-shaming
- being open to scrutiny
- having a laugh
- sharing tea, coffee
- food, smokes

The Process: Middles

"Doing stuff": practical action

- using own experience as a model: sharing stories
- answers and action
- tapping into the family as a resource
- broker role re: other agencies
- personal provision of information
- walking through the system together and making connections
- following the person's direction of the process
- using knowledge influence and power
- jack of all trades
- selective use of authority and power:
 - * culturally appropriate explicit criticism/shaming
 - * culturally appropriate directiveness
- occasional use of modified "White Ways":
 - * directing the process through probing, clarification, checking understanding
 - * using a problem-solving focus

The Process: Endings of New Beginnings

"Back to yarning"

- sharing stories
- having a laugh
- sharing food, etc
- leave the door wide open

Figure 2

- i) "A yarn, a joke and a cup of tea" : tuning-in and sussing out;
- ii) "Doing Stuff" : practical action; and
- iii) "Back to Yarning".

At the outset, it is important to point out that in identifying features and phases to talk about an indigenous approach, we are simplifying a process and practices that embody a wholeness and complexity that such categorisation struggles to reflect. Consequently, various features may be present in more than one phase, e.g. storytelling, sharing food, spirituality.

'Knowing' was demonstrated by a belief by the workers that their practice was explicitly influenced by their culture. They referred to a necessity for an understanding of issues, life circumstances and background as the key way in which culture influenced their helping style with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island people.

(He) says he has to understand their background and their culture and where different Murris have come from and respect their different culture (Maurice).

(She) says it (her culture) is a valuable tool when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people because both have a lot in common...her cultural background is her best tool when working with aboriginal people (Anon 4).

One of the significant ways in which workers believed culture influenced their work was that it encouraged the people they worked with to "open-up" to them quickly and with confidence.

..if you are white and you talk to a Murri they won't tell you anything, the problem will always be there...But with a Murri they sort of know the problem and they find ways of overcoming them." (Maurice).

(she) finds that if she takes an Aboriginal person to see a white person they will sit down and be really quiet but when they come to see her they just march right in and see her (Diane).

Other cultural elements identified by workers as important tools in their helping work included; language, use of family, direct confrontation or challenging comments and certain types of knowledge. The type of knowledge that both Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders considered important for the workers, came from

being a part of the community and knowing, as a part of living, how to do certain things and why. While not every person mentioned everything the responses suggest that important knowledge for being a competent worker included:

- knowledge of cultural norms
- knowledge of kinships norms and responsibilities
- knowledge of how to indicate respect for elders
- knowledge of the social structure of the community
- knowledge of differences between Torres Strait Islands
- knowledge of the person's spirituality
- knowledge of the white system and an ability to use it
- knowledge of social problems and the historical context of these problems from below, i.e. knowing what it means to be black and in jail, or black and in a white school system, or black and dealing with child welfare.

This knowledge base reflects the influence of culture in the 'knowing' and understanding aspect of their helping.

In contrast, not all workers attributed skills and action to culture explicitly. Some discussed them as broader more generalised concepts and others saw them more as personality issues. While the data suggests that culture plays a significant role in the helping process, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the extent of cultural influence on the process of helping.

4.

A Yarn, A Joke, A Cup of Tea – Tuning In and Sussing Out

The first phase, “Beginnings”, was characterised in the words of research participants, as “A yarn, a joke and a cup of tea: tuning-in and sussing-out”. Without exception, all of the indigenous workers considered this an essential, potentially extended phase of the helping process.

Making connections

Apart from small local communities, where everyone is well known already (for example Palm Island), ‘tuning-in’ starts with a search for family connections, however distant, between the helpee and the helper. Participants described their approach in similar ways to this Aboriginal female worker and that used by Raba, a Torres Strait Islander community education counsellor.

...she wouldn’t go straight up to them, and say to them ‘how are you, what can I do for you?’ Even on the outside she wouldn’t do this ...What would happen is that both of them would slowly introduce themselves, find out what their family connection is and where they are from, this then helps to relax them (Anon 1).

When a Torres Strait Islander student seeks my help for the first time, she usually asks his/her name to find out what family he/she is from. Then she explains her family tree or her husband’s to identify an existing relationship that may not be recognised by the student and to welcome him/her (Raba).

Invariably these connections are found, but if, after exhaustive exploration, they are not then at least some connection through place, language, or indigenous identity is identified in order to break down barriers, develop trust and to overcome shyness.

Regardless of which island they come from, (he) says the ‘Creole is the best asset that we have because it is a lingo that both of us can understand’. Once he starts talking in Creole it just breaks down all the barriers... (Will).

Some Islander workers also wove information about their role into this connection process.

Agnes said that when she worked at the Upper Ross Family Centre she would say her name and tell people where she worked and what her role was. She said they might still not know what to say but ‘somewhere along the line they’d

say which Tapim are you, or where are you from, you got any relations? (Agnes).

When she greets another Islander person she may say hello or 'which way' which means how are you, then they will start talking. She will explain her role and she would say this in Creole. She will sit with them for a while and talk about her job to let people know she works for the Department. Then they will tell her why they've come to see her although this depends on whether she 'sabbi's' that person (Anon 6).

Yarning and storytelling

Regardless of how well connections are already known, yarning and story telling, accompanied by the sharing of food and drink, laughter, and/or spirituality is an absolutely vital part of the "beginnings" phase.

Then she asks if they want a cup of tea, and they'll talk about other things first before they get to the problem. They'll talk about things that are happening in the community, or what they did on the weekend. (She) might talk about what she did on the weekend, or talk about Christianity and the church (Delena).

He generally just uses 'small talk' initially, and then he would offer them a cup of tea or coffee....If (he) saw the person in their own home he would purposely ask for a cup of tea or coffee or would ask for a meal even if he wasn't particularly hungry because he finds this a very important part of the process to gain a closer working relationship. If a Murri person offers food or drink to (him) and he doesn't accept this offer then this leaves 'a bit of a bad taste in the mouth' (Noel).

The helper could have offered the mother a cup of coffee and made her feel like she is wanted, this would also be a sign of respect for the mother and the concerns which she has come to talk about (Anon 6).

Humour

A crucial aspect of the yarning and storytelling is humour.

...she would ask them if they wanted a cup of tea and she might sit out the front with them and have a smoke and a laugh and a talk (Diane).

Joking, smiling and laughing was particularly emphasised by Torres Strait Islanders. This is a technique which the worker may use to minimise any shame or distress being experienced by the helpee.

For Torres Strait Island people humour is the other side of shame. The process of asking for help is embarrassing and therefore there is an element of shame that will be present in the beginning of the contact. Humour is a way of giving the client the opportunity

to not tell the worker everything and provide a means of escape from embarrassment.

...laughing and smiling are very important and even when things are serious Torres Strait culture people will laugh as this takes away the pressure and the tension (Louisa).

Go with the flow – a circular time-rich process

Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helpers emphasised the importance of time and patience. This is reflected in comments such as those by Anon 2, Noel and Louisa.

It is the Murri way to talk about other things first, to never 'hit the nail on the head' straight off...The main things from this video are not to be too direct and to give them time to start to talk about the problem and the problem is not to be spoken about until they're ready to do so (Anon 2).

He said that he personally doesn't time-limit people because he finds that with a lot of Murri people they just don't get to the point and there has to be a lot of general dialogue in the first instance. (He) says that this sets people at ease and lets the client know that he's another human being and more importantly he's a brother... (Noel).

The worker has to be very patient with the client...She has to approach a client in an informal way and not talk in departmental language but say hello to them and yarn to them for a while over a cup of tea and this will break down the barriers... (Passi).

Considerable time would be spent talking about general interest topics – family, weekend activities, *anything* except the reason a person has come for help – until she or he feels sufficiently comfortable to focus on the problem or issues. This process ensures the helpee is free to determine the content, direction and pace of the interaction, while the worker 'goes with the flow', however circular or time-rich the process may be.

Sometimes they start in the middle, sometimes, it is storytelling and yarning, forwards and then backwards. They don't say what they want to say straight to you, they are not direct (Anon 3).

This would all be based on whether the person was feeling uneasy or not and if so she'd tell them to take their time and I wouldn't 'rush it'. So it's not asking what the problem is but waiting for it and a lot of the time it's not done by asking straight up front but they talk for 'a good while' then gradually the problem will come up (Agnes).

There is no concept of time when working with Islanders, the helping has to be informal, maybe sit down for a long period of time and go over things, have

to be very flexible. She says she can't make an appointment plan for them she just has to turn up and fit them in on her free days, and they will come to her home when they want something (Anon 6).

Reading and knowing

Of particular importance is the attention focused on 'reading' and understanding body language. Knowing the cultural significance of this and other aspects of non-verbal communication was recognised by all helpers and emphasised especially strongly by Torres Strait Islanders, who will go to great lengths to protect people from the shame or distress entailed in verbalising their problems.

she'd look at the person to see if they were looking distressed or happy or sad, i.e. she'd look for their emotions, then they'd sit down and she'd begin the conversation... (Agnes).

(She) says that she looks for their attitudes, she looks for their fear and there are two types of fear, (1) fear because they don't want your help, and (2) fear because they do want your help but are shy...the eye and face tell a lot and she looks at these main things first (Anon 3).

...Islanders do more reading, reading the verbal reading people...because that's the way we are, we look more than verbally talk...they can be smiling from ear to ear but it is their eyes that speak a different language altogether, they may be crying out for help (Anon 3).

Both Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders drew attention to the cultural meanings of non-verbal communication, many of which differ considerably from non-indigenous understandings.

"they might say yes, and yes means no, and no means yes or I don't know..he just knows by the way they talk whether they are saying what they actually mean. He tells this by the facial expressions and tone of voice (Maurice).

An aboriginal person might say nothing at all, but just by the way they are looking at someone they might be 'chucking shit' at them (Delena).

Talking plain

Similarly, with regard to verbal communication, all of the indigenous workers stressed the unsuitability of western professional jargon or typical bureaucratic language. At the very least, 'talking plain', every day English was considered essential, with the use of traditional language or Torres Strait Creole preferred for Torres Strait Islanders.

...a Murri helper should just be themselves when working with and communicating with other people but they should remember not to 'use big words' but 'just talk plain' (Maurice).

...language is a big barrier too and even today some people are still too frightened to go into departments or offices to seek help because of the language and that white people can't understand them... this is a big thing that holds the Torres Strait Islander people back (Passi).

...a lot of aboriginal women would be afraid to approach a white person because of the way they talk, they talk big and use all these words they don't understand. Aboriginal people will say 'yeah, yeah' and go away, even if they don't understand fully what has been said to them (Delena).

Being open to scrutiny – sussing out

While making connections and yarning are crucial to the process of 'tuning-in', they also facilitate a two-way process of 'sussing-out'. All the workers understand that, before opening up, indigenous people will need to reassure themselves of the worker's credibility as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (that is, not a 'coconut': black on the outside but inside – mentally – 'white'). This need, to suss-out the worker, is accepted and respected.

...the person will go 'round and round in circles' while they are wondering if they can really trust her enough to tell her their problem. This is a sussing out time where they are trying to work out 'what sort of person you are' (Anon 1).

The first thing a black client will observe is how the helper is presenting themselves, how they are dressed as this will tell them a lot about the helper (Angie).

However, by the same token, Aboriginal workers in particular spoke of the need, sometimes, to 'suss-out' the person seeking help in order to guard against 'being fooled'. Strategies of resistance used by some indigenous people in relation to 'white' bureaucracies could sometimes be applied to indigenous workers who, therefore, it was felt, must be alert to detect 'bullshit'.

The greater emphasis placed on this by Aboriginal workers may reflect the different historical experience of Aborigines as a result of colonialism compared with Torres Strait Islanders. It also may be related to some significant differences in helping styles identified in the middle phase of the helping process.

Spirituality

Spirituality was referred to by both Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and comments indicated a belief in their spiritual nature as a people.

...for some older aborigines who were taken away from their culture, they could be trying to fill a cultural gap, or the cultural loss they feel, by turning to religion and perhaps for some; Anon 4 believes they are able to regain some aspects of their cultural loss through spirituality and religion. She says 'that black people are very religious people' (Anon 4).

The meaning of spirituality varied and while some spoke of it being expressed through formal religion others alluded to a connection between cultural ways, beliefs and an essential spirituality that is basic to life and thus hard to verbalise.

...laughter for Torres Strait Islanders, is their way to deal with difficult situations and she believes the ability to handle such issues in this way is a sign of their spirituality (Anon 3).

...if a hearse was driving through the streets of (the community) all the people would stand up as a show of respect even if they were drunk or drinking under a tree by the beach. Some go to church whether drunk or sober because of their religious beliefs.(Anon 5).

This spiritual essence remains despite social abuse, humiliation or other hardships that may be dealt to the individual.

For some helpers spirituality and religion was a significant influence in their life and practice which was used as a means of connection with the other person.

(She) believes the Torres Strait Islander people are not living as spiritually as they once did and this belief helps her when she is helping other Torres Strait Islander people because she is able to connect spiritually with the other person (Anon 3).

Another worker used her christian beliefs as a topic to 'yarn' to people about, openly sharing her beliefs with clients. This form of spiritual expression seems to vary amongst workers according to their formal training. While these workers recognised the importance of the spiritual aspect, the participants with formal tertiary training were less explicit in their expression of christianity and spirituality in this way.

It could be speculated that spirituality forms one of the bases on which people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island background form connections when first coming together. Consequently, it is

reflected in the seeking of family connection and the location of kinship ties as a means of connecting spiritually.

After identifying herself she will go on to give her fathers name and where he was born and what his tribal name is and this breaks the barriers... (Angie).

When she is helping other Torres Strait Islander people I am able to connect spiritually with the other person (Anon 3).

...the worker would know by the clients surname that they are distantly related somewhere along the line and this connection is a very strong one (Will).

Amongst aboriginal participants there was less identification of customs and rituals which gave a clear indication of a spiritual dimension to the helper. None of the participants discussed their own lifestyles and therefore in the data the issue of spirituality appears to be removed from the workers themselves, and it is more something they need to remember for clients. It is unlikely that this is the real case, however, and similar to most Torres Strait Islanders, it is implied by aboriginal helpers, that the kinship connections that aboriginal helpers work so hard to establish on first meeting are intrinsically entwined with connecting at a spiritual level.

5.

'Doing Stuff' : Practical Action

Once 'tuning-in' and 'sussing-out' have developed to the extent that the helpee feels comfortable to focus on issues of concern, the helping process moves into the middle phase of "Doing Stuff": practical action. Despite moving into the next phase of the process some of the general principles described above remain very important throughout the entire process. For example, the whole interaction must continue to be informal, with yarning and joking still being important.

Answers and action

While listening was considered to be important as a means of demonstrating caring and respect many of the helpers focused on the need for and importance of action beyond just talking.

...in the video (he) says that the social worker is doing too much listening because the woman has come to her for help and some answers to her questions...people need to be given some answers.. (Will).

They (Murri counsellors) don't just leave it at a talk they always try to do something to follow up... He offered to go to the house and she asked if Phillip was going to go to court with her, so again, (she) says this is an example of Murri's looking for that personal touch and contact (Anon 2).

The provision of direct information was important for many helpers in responding to the person.

(She) believes that when people get frustrated enough to seek help they want direct information that will help them with their immediate problem (Angie)

He thinks the white helper should have explained 'straight out' what's going to happen in court with the boy but she didn't do this...(He) said she should have explained the court system and what was going to happen in court with the boy to put her mind at ease 'instead of going on and on' as she did... (Maurice).

This information and action is contextual.

Direct information or concrete advice was considered appropriate in response to requests for help. Useful information was communicated in an active way by the worker, and tools such as the use of a pamphlet by the worker in the non-indigenous video was given considerable critical attention by Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander helpers. Many considered it inappropriate action with indigenous clients and even those who saw some benefit in its use did so with some proviso.

(She) wouldn't have offered the mother a brochure because she said that Murri's are very people- orientated so she would have rather referred the mother to a person rather than a brochure (Anon 2).

(She) said giving the woman a brochure was not something she would do and she didn't think this was helpful for the woman seeking help in the video. The mother needed help there and then...Anne asked what would a Murri do if they were given a brochure to read. (She) said they'd tell you to get stuffed (Anon 1).

(He) says that giving a brochure to an Aboriginal person is not a very helpful thing to do. What he'd do is get the brochure and talk it through with the person and work with them to ensure that they understood what the brochure was all about (Noel).

Using a pamphlet is not really a 'no-no' as it could have been helpful although it depends on the individual client whether they be black or white (Anon 4).

However while answers and concrete information was important, direct action that consisted of doing things that were tangible with and for someone was seen as a preferable strategy. This may include accompanying the person, walking through the system together and making connections with people in that system.

They (Murri counsellors) don't just leave it at a talk they always try to do something to follow up... He offered to go to the house and she asked if Phillip was going to go to court with her, so again, (she) says this is an example of Murri's looking for that personal touch and contact. (Anon 2).

The social workers offered support by saying that she'd go down with them to court and this was a good point.(Will).

She thinks that the helper could have done more for him, i.e. by contacting child care for him because he was asking who he knew at child care and even though she told him that Francis worked there (she) thinks the helper could have made the initial contact instead of referring him there (Louisa).

The following strategies are ones that helpers drew on to use in their helping. They were often considered to be tools used by indigenous helpers rather than white helpers and these could be considered elements of a 'Murri' or 'Island' way or even a 'black way'. However, not all participants mentioned the following strategies and while these strategies could be applied in other scenarios, the breadth of these is possibly constrained by the video

scenario used to stimulate discussion rather than being an exhaustive outline of action.

Using own experience as a model – sharing stories

Considered and deliberate use was made by the workers of their own experience of problems and their way of dealing with them. This involves a mutual sharing – the worker and the client both giving up personal information and creating equality in this sharing. Through this strategy the person is encouraged to share their story and think about possible options.

She says she has to open up first and when she does this she says they will pick up on this and they will disclose to her (Anon 3).

...she tells them about the troubles she has had in her own life and she tries to get her message across to them in a roundabout way through self disclosure (Delena).

She says that sharing some of her own personal background, (which she does a lot with the Murri kids, but not so much with the non-Aboriginal kids because she doesn't know their problems like she knows those of the Murri kids) is to let them know she understands that she's been there and she knows what they're going through" (Anon 2).

Tapping into the family as a resource

Use of the family as a resource and as part of the helping strategy was almost always the first option to be explored by the helper.

She also says that another thing she has to be aware of is that she knows most of the Aboriginal and Islander (young people) and she knows most of their family backgrounds and because of their culture instead of tapping into outside agencies (she) says she 'taps into relatives, that is where she may refer a white student to a psychologist, she may refer a black student to 'auntie so-and-so or granny so-and so' (Anon 2).

She also said she noticed how the helper came back to using the extended family when seeking a solution to her problem and this is also very important in Aboriginal culture (Anon 1).

With the Torres Strait Islander situation the social worker talked about family and William says that she could always have fallen back onto the family as another support mechanism for the father in this situation. For example suggesting that he talk to uncle or aunty or grandparents or get the boy to talk to one of these relatives also (Will).

This was considered to be more helpful and appropriate than a referral to a community agency. While family is an important cultural element in the situation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, this focus on the use of family as a primary resource may also be attributed to the historical and current experiences of helpers and helpees with policies and services in the broader community.

Where family or black community agencies are not used as a resource there are usually relationship factors that have to be considered. One worker explained it in the following way:

(Anon 2) says that the Aboriginal and Islander community is a fairly close knit community because everybody knows everybody and a lot of the (young people) or their families 'won't go to the medical centre, or child care, or legal aid because there is a relative or a friend or an enemy working there'. (She) says she has to work around this... 'we see them as people'(as opposed to a professional person) and this is a big difference (Anon 2).

Family relationship may also act as a constraint in the helping process particularly if the worker is related to the person seeking help. In this situation the worker needs to recognise the difficulty and support the person in speaking with someone else.

(She) says that with some of the Murri (young people) because they are either related to her through blood or marriage they sometimes tend to hold back some things with her...Therefore (Anon 2) says she will suggest to Murri students that they could talk to (other people in the organisation) but she has to firstly reassure the (young person) that they can talk to them, that is, because the other counsellor is white. She says she has to 'sell the other people before I refer the kids on' (Anon 2).

Broker role with other agencies

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helpers saw themselves as undertaking a broker role with other agencies which meant the workers used whatever power, influence and knowledge they had to help the people they were working with to get whatever they wanted.

He says that there are a lot of demands but there is only so much he can do for them, that is, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, because there are not Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders in management in mainstream and this makes it very hard regarding flexibility of what he can do for clients... However he does say there is always a way to beat the system if you know how and if you are determined enough (Will).

Linda asked whether (her) position in the Aboriginal community effects the way she helps others. (She) says 'yes' because she knows a lot of what resources are available and she is able to tap into these for Aboriginal people (Anon 4).

The positives of her position is that she is in a position to always be raising cultural issues to magistrates which white workers can't do (Anon 4).

Selective use of authority and power

The use of authority and power was evident in the use of explicit criticism or challenge and the use of shaming as a 'proactive process'. Culturally appropriate directiveness may be used by Torres Strait Islanders as well as Aborigines.

(She) says that Murri helpers are a lot more direct with their clients than white helpers usually are. For example if a client came to see a white worker and they hadn't bathed and really smelt, a white worker probably wouldn't say anything about it, but for a black worker,...they would tell the client to go home and have a bath and change their clothes then come back for help then if they needed it (Angie).

However if their query is with the department (he) says he will try to 'drum a bit of common sense into them'. He'll say 'hey you know you my brother or you my sister and you come in here and you think I'll listen to you.' (He) says that if he is straight forward with them they know that he is serious but that he wants to help them...However if a white worker were to say the same things to the Aboriginal or Islander client (he) says 'they'd get up and floor them straight away' (Will).

(She) says that a couple of the other young girls 'were mucking up fighting' and she said to them. 'I demand respect around this place I've warned you two and I expect it.' ...(She) says, 'really you couldn't get away with doing that to non-Aboriginal kids and the non-Aboriginal (staff) can't get away with saying these things to Murri kids either.. (Anon 2).

(She) bought him over to her office and he was being 'really smart' and she said to him 'you keep getting smart and doing this and that, what you need is a good strapping', and he said oh and who is goin' to give it to me, she said take a look kid, meaning - she was (Anon 1).

Between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders there were very significant differences in the use of explicit criticism or shaming. Torres Strait Islanders will do their utmost to avoid shaming and may use techniques such as humour or circular talk or indirect talk to avoid shaming the person. To shame the person would show active disrespect and invite bad spirit.

Then (she) explains her family tree or her husbands to identify an existing relationship which may not be realised by the student...this also clarifies to the student that there is no shame in going to see (her) (Raba).

When (she) was filling out forms for DSS male clients she could write only what the man told her and she couldn't ask any further questions of him...a white woman could ask these questions of Torres Strait Islander men as a white outsider but they would probably only laugh with embarrassment and shame (Louisa).

The exception to this would in general be in older workers who are community elders.

(He) said that everything comes back to the respect for elders and sometimes they will discipline the person who needs it. He sees this as a shaming and learning experience (Will).

For Torres Strait Islanders, shaming and explicit criticism is a highly complex mix of factors of family position/gender/status and age which is not determined by simply gender or age. A younger female worker who has a high status position in relation to the person she is working with, for example is an 'aunty', may use shaming as a strategy

In contrast Aborigines may deliberately set out to increase shame as a strategy to stimulate change. In this context it is a 'proactive process' that is related to the positive outcomes that can result from an individual experiencing the shame of having done the wrong thing and the role of family in the issue.

The use of shaming can be used as a 'proactive process', that is, to be used as a deterrent, for the young girl, from misbehaving again...(He) said in the first interview there appeared to be shame cast on the whole family because of what their son had done, so shame was used as a 'reactive process'. Whereas in the second interview the only person shamed was the girl and this was seen more in terms of being a proactive process (Noel).

Also the shame of going to court was an important factor. (She) said this could be 'more punishment than what the judge could hand out.' The shame factor is very important, especially for a first offence and depending on what family the child is from...the woman in the video was a single mother and the shame of letting her mother down could be important in preventing the girl from doing the same thing again. It was also shameful because the male counsellor was going to speak to the other children... (Anon 1).

He said he'd give them some options by pointing out that if things didn't change the young person could 'end up in a home' or they could end up 'being charged for neglect or whatever.' (He) said some parents will then feel shamed. He said they could be alcoholics and they will be 'shamed' of themselves and they will usually sit down and listen to him (Maurice).

However it cannot be concluded that all aborigines would use this as a strategy and one Aboriginal female helper with a feminist perspective would choose not to use shaming on women in this scenario.

He (the helper) bought up the shame issue and (she) thought this was only rubbing salt into how the mother was already feeling and she says it is not up to the worker to put shame on to the mother (Anon 4).

While this may be attributed to formal training it could also be a consequence of biography and organisational environment.

Use of 'white ways'

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers described the use of techniques or strategies which they consider to be white ways but which they used at certain times or for certain purposes. These workers were people who have participated in some form of formal welfare education in a white institution.

This skill of clarification is a skill (she) has 'picked up' through her learning influenced by western ways. Sometimes what (she) will do is ask the client to explain back to her some information she has given them to ensure that they understood what she was saying....she wouldn't get an older person to repeat information back to her because this would be treating them with 'ignorance and lack of respect.' (She) would use this technique with a younger person... (Agnes).

Sometimes these ways need to be modified to be acceptable but the worker continues to identify the strategy as 'white'.

She says if she doesn't know them she tends to 'fall back on what (she) learnt at uni, those type of skills in terms I suppose probing, getting information, that type of thing, but always keeping in mind that they're Murri kids and you gotta bring that cultural aspect across any way (Anon 2).

And she thinks that Robyn's direct questioning is very much a white counselling way. (She) says she would have asked the same questions at the same time but not in such a formal way and she would also be more indirect in her questioning style (Anon 4).

6.

‘Back to Yarning’ – Endings and New Beginnings

As the helping process moves towards a close there is a strong emphasis on ensuring that the door is left open to allow a pathway for new beginnings sometime later. Termination of the relationship in terms of ending the work with the person completely was not evident in worker's comments.

Some workers would initiate the closure while others took their cue from the client.

She said that the endings are not done 'on her side', she usually waits to pick up a hint from them that they are finished. She can usually 'see the limits of the person' although if it is a 'very heavy' session she will sometimes end it (Anon 1).

Back to yarning

This phase sees a return to the informality of the beginning in the sharing of stories, laughing and sharing of food, drinks and smokes. Aboriginal workers in particular talked about ending a session in the way in which they started it.

The majority of times when ending with an Aboriginal client they end with how they connected with each other in the beginning, i.e. by mentioning their mutual connection and this is a reassuring thing for both the worker and the client (Anon 4).

...the session is finishing she would ask them if they wanted a cup of tea and she might sit out the front with them and have a smoke and a laugh and a talk (Diane).

...when finishing the session, Anon 1 may let them sit quietly for a while or offer them a glass of water or a coffee (Anon 1).

Leaving the door wide open

Whether the helper or helpee draws the interaction to a close the worker gives an invitation for the person to return to talk further if they wish.

Sometimes with the fellows that Anon 1 works with, when she is finishing a session she will say 'look bunj, I've got a few others here, or look I've gotta go,

time's gettin' on here, then they'd say "O.K." and she says 'look catch me later'. Otherwise she might say 'look we really need to sit down and speak for a period of time but I can't do it now'. When I say 'look catch me later', the fellows know that this is leaving the door open for them to go back and see her later on (Anon 1).

He wouldn't just leave it finish at the end of the session he would say something like 'after the court case can you come back and we'll sit down and have a yarn with you and your son and your husband (Maurice).

She says that she would always leave it open so that they could make the decision that best suits them (Agnes).

She says that the worst thing she could do would be to not follow up on something and get back to people. Getting back to people also has to be done verbally because Agie says that 'our people (Torres Strait Islanders) don't read a lot of stuff' so she prefers to speak to people on the phone (Agnes).

Further contact is not confined to the hours of the organisation for which the person works and the client may even be invited in some instances to make contact with the worker at home.

...when she finishes helping someone she just sits and talks with them for a while and tells them they can come back and see her and if they don't want to go to the centre they are invited to go to her place (Delena).

She says that she reminds them of what they have to do, for example lodging forms, and tells them that they can come back and see her or give her a phone call, or even come and see her at home. She will also follow up on clients to see how they are going. Louisa doesn't consider it as the end of a session when the person walks out the door (Louisa).

He says that once he's helped somebody he encourages them once again and tells them that if they need any further support to come back. He always reassures them that he'll always be there for them regardless of anything else and he gives them his phone number so they can contact him after work or on weekends. So he believes he has to commit himself to support them and stand by his word to them. If he doesn't provide this support and they have a problem, he says that 'then it's just back to the drawing board with them' (Will).

Sackietalk

Torres Strait Islander workers indicated that this further contact may happen informally and be at the initiative of the worker. 'Sackietalk' may be used by the worker to find out if the person is alright. This is a technique that has a different meaning for people from each of the island groups, that is Eastern, Central

and Western and the generation of the person. Again it is important in indicating respect for the person and avoiding embarrassment and shame.

She says the person may walk out the door but there is always follow-up and further contact, even if this is done socially, or she may drop in at their home and say hello to see if they are all right.. She doesn't put this straight to them, that is the client, but in 'sackietalk' they understand why she is there. She says it's like beating about the bush, she says things that will give them hints so that they understand why she is there. 'Sackietalk' has more meaning for old people than for younger people and it is like saying one thing but meaning something else, it can be good or bad. It is an indirect way of speaking like talking in riddles (Anon 6).

7.

Significant Aspects of Indigenous Cultural Diversity

While many of the workers believed that there was a 'Murri way' or 'black way' they also emphasised that strong differences existed between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The latter also focused on different ways for working with Eastern, Western and Central Torres Strait Islanders. Gender, age, status, family position and organisational context interwove with ethnicity and biography to form a complex mix in the use of knowledge, techniques and approach of the worker, serving to constrain or enhance their ability to carry out their role and task with the helpee. While we have attempted to identify the impact of the cultural aspects of gender, age, status and family position on the individual helping style it has been difficult to isolate these from the organisational context of the worker and their individual biography. This project makes some tentative conclusions in relation to these matters. However this would be well augmented by a more detailed study of the impact of organisational and biographical experiences of the worker on their helping.

Cultural diversity amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners demonstrated shifting balances of power between dominant, residual and emergent sectional interests.

Language

Language was of significant importance to Torres Strait Islanders and the use of Creole was recognised by workers as a key tool in making a link with other Torres Strait Islander people and ensuring their understanding of the issues and the process.

(She) thinks that speaking in Creole forms a bond between her and the other islanders she works with because they know who she is and they know they can trust her (Agnes).

Regardless of which Island they come from, (he) says the Creole is the best asset that we have because it is a lingo that both of us can understand. Once he starts talking in Creole it just breaks down all the barriers... (Will).

In contrast Aboriginal helpers acknowledged that the use of the person's own language or dialect was an advantage but also stressed the importance of being genuine in the use of language.

...she uses mostly broken English and she will tell the (people) that she cannot use their dialect (Anon 1).

He doesn't talk lingo to them, he doesn't know any Aboriginal and Islander lingo and he doesn't try to make out he is something he is not and they respect him for this (Maurice).

Non-verbals

Non-verbal communication was commented on consistently by participants and amongst Aboriginal people non-verbal communication was considered to be of major importance, giving clues to the real message, more so than the verbal. However, in some instances worker understandings of non-verbals is more contextual than generalised across Aboriginal helpers. While a number of workers commented on the importance of eye contact, the use of eye contact and how eye contact could and would be interpreted by Aboriginal people is different for different workers.

...if a Murri sees you looking down it's as if you are not interested in what they are saying (Anon 5).

...She said she doesn't like full facial and eye contact when she is counselling a person. She says her eyes will 'look up now and then' at the person, then she will 'look away from them'. If she really wants to get a message across to them she will hold the eye contact for 'a bit longer than she usually would' (Anon 1).

Aboriginal body language is important as (he) says that Murriss won't look a person in the eye, they feel shame when they do this. ...While they may not be looking at you they are still listening but their eyes are focussed elsewhere (Maurice).

Amongst Torres Strait Islanders touching was identified as an important form of non-verbal communication which varied between workers as to when and why they would use it. Some workers talked about it as 'the island way', while others emphasised the complexity of its use and the importance of avoiding shame in its use.

(She) said counselling the island way involves touching as a way of welcoming..touch lightly on the shoulder as a way of comforting them... (Raba).

She says that she doesn't touch them, this is important, sometimes maybe a handshake may make them more shame, that is shy or embarrassed. Although perhaps at their second or third visit,..it may be okay to touch, maybe just a stroke on the side of their arm would be alright (Anon 3).

Thus it is difficult to suggest that touching is a unique island way and perhaps as with all workers it is a strategy some use and some don't at different times and for a range of different reasons.

As pointed out earlier, Torres Strait Islander workers emphasised the importance of being able to 'read' their clients – their feeling, thinking and even what they wanted – through their non-verbals. In some instances they claimed that they usually worked out what the person's problem was well before it was stated, through their observations of the person.

Making connections

While the importance of making a connection with the helpee through family connections was identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island workers, Torres Strait Islanders emphasised that this was closely connected to the use of Creole or 'language'.

Agie thinks that speaking in Creole forms a bond between her and the other Islanders that she works with because they know who she is and it takes time to build a relationship with people and they know they can trust her. She says that she doesn't even have to complete the sentence when speaking broken because the understanding is there and it's 'the non-verbals that do all the work' because that person knows the culture and understands how the other person would react in a given situation (Agnes).

Language, reading of non-verbals and a knowing of the culture are interwoven in the task of connecting with the other person.

Joking, smiling and laughing

For some Torres Strait Islander participants joking, smiling and laughing is a particular 'island way' which they may use as a method to avoid shame and distress.

She says that joking is part of her personality and is also part of her culture which has also been mixed with sarcasm from the white culture. To mock and tease is in keeping with Islanders' sense of humour and this is an affectionate way, they will end up all laughing together. This is a way of showing that they love each other (Anon 6).

(she) says that laughing and smiling are very important and that even when things are serious Torres Strait culture people will laugh as this takes away the pressure and the tension (Louisa).

Shaming

While shame is important for both groups, Torres Strait Islander workers talked more about it being a negative thing which should be avoided or prevented. However, it was acceptable for elders of a community to undertake a process of shaming.

(He) said that everything come back to the respect for elders and sometimes they will discipline the person who needs it. He sees this as a shaming and learning experience (Will).

Worker qualities

Amongst the participants there were various emphases placed on what they considered to be important worker qualities. A number of participants spoke about their main goal being to put people at ease and relax them through informal friendly interactions.

A number of Aboriginal participants added to this characteristic by often mentioning the need for the worker to be genuine and not too direct, to be patient. Some implied that the quality of being genuine was present in their discussion of language, (for example as mentioned earlier, only using 'lingo' if one knew it), yarning and a Murri worker's ability to be more direct than a white worker.

On the other hand Torres Strait Islander workers emphasised the need for the worker to be respectful, to show respect and to know how to indicate respect through who one spoke to, how one addressed other people, and through acknowledging the importance of (and even participating in) 'island ways' and rituals. To show disrespect was inviting bad spirit.

Angie will go out to see them and she will always address people as an 'aunty' or 'uncle', or 'brothers', and 'sisters', or Mr or Mrs' because she has respect for people. Then people will respond to her as aunty or uncle or 'which way'. This builds their confidence up (Angie).

This issue of respect was two-way and some participants indicated that it was also important for the client to respect the worker.

Agnes said it was the body language and how the male client appeared to be quite comfortable just before he finished the interview and also he called the helper 'aunty Genoa'. This showed respect by him for the helper. Agnes says it makes a difference who the helper is as well as their age (Agnes).

Spirituality

While Aboriginal workers seem keenly aware and sensitive to the spiritual needs of Aboriginal people (or at least the importance of certain rituals and customs, such as funerals, that have some spiritual meaning), and incorporate this understanding and sensitivity into their work in a way that white workers cannot and do not, not all workers articulated this as clearly as others. This gives a sense of a hidden, almost secret element to the spiritual dimension of all Aboriginal people that regardless of trauma and oppression can be maintained. This may be attributed to it being so much a part of their work and life that it is difficult to separate out, and also to the variation that existed around its meaning for the individual.

In contrast Torres Strait Islanders emphasised the vital importance in helping of understanding the relationship between traditional culture and spirituality. They referred to spiritual rituals such as tombstone openings, funerals and the process of mourning, knowing and understanding medicine men and their powers and beliefs in certain Gods and spirits which were integral to their culture and actions.

One participant clearly had very strong Christian beliefs and talked about how these influenced her work and her ideas about helping and her role as a helper. She also alluded to a spirituality among Torres Strait Island people that was not about formal religion (that is Christianity) and which seemed to flow from cultural traditions and the observance of cultural ways. She expresses very specifically, a connection between spirituality and cultural ways.

She believes that Torres Strait Islander people are not living as spiritually as they once did (Anon 3).

...religion and Christian belief are two different things. ...Torres Strait Island culture religion didn't teach people this...they kept it in a section where only a priest can do it (Anon 3).

The lack of similar explicit comment about the relationship between spirituality and culture amongst other participants may be

a consequence of the basic nature of the daily lived experience of the connection between cultural ways and essential spirituality. Thus, it is merely alluded to in comments about traditions and customs. If the comments of other participants about spirituality are influenced by this idea then the Torres Strait Island spirituality becomes almost the cornerstone of the helping process. Tradition and custom are intertwined with the daily lived experience. In this way and in recognising the importance of these, the spiritual and the cultural are intertwined.

Most of the participants spoke at some length about their own involvement in a variety of customs and rituals. Spirituality, for these helpers, is an intimate and intrinsic part of their own lives, beliefs and personalities.

...Culture is very important...so there are things that we do in our daily lives which are specific to ...culture and traditions. For example there are things we must do when somebody dies which for an Islander just has to be done as they are very important (Agnes).

...asked to identify any skills that she uses which are strongly linked to culture...knowing and understanding cultural customs and traditions for example medicine men and their powers (Angie).

...for Islander people a funeral is very important because they show a lot of respect for the deceased person. ...She said tombstone openings are an important social event to show respect for the person who has died and it also strengthens the network system between Islanders (Louisa).

...our people believe there are good spirits, ...there are bad spirits and some spirits can even take that baby out of a house, not that they are going to hurt the baby or anything, just locate the baby elsewhere. ...This happened to her brother's child (Louisa).

While joking and laughter may be used to avoid shame and distress the comments of some participants indicate it as also being an expression of their spirituality.

...joking is part of her personality and is also part of her culture. ...To mock and to tease is in keeping with Islanders sense of humour and this is an affectionate way, they will end up all laughing together. This is a way of showing that they love each other (Anon 6).

Beliefs and traditions vary between islands and thus to 'the island way'. These spiritual beliefs were seen to influence Torres Strait Islanders ways and reactions to helping situations as much as it influenced the workers style of helping.

Anne asked is this because it is shameful to ask for help and Louisa said that she can only speak for Murray Island people and she spoke of their God Malo who ruled the island (Louisa spoke in Creole here). She said that what she meant was that 'if something doesn't belong to you, you don't touch it, or you don't go near it, or you don't have nothing to do with it, it's not yours so you just leave it be'. This plays a very vital part in the Eastern Island culture. ...Christine and Louisa both explained that Islander people have been traditionally self-sufficient on their island and this is expected of them, however when they come to the mainland they are also expected to be self-sufficient and find out for themselves about what resources are available (Louisa).

Although with Eastern Torres Strait people you sometimes have to be very careful. Anne asked why this was so and Anon 3 replied because of MURTHDMEL which means that they will sometimes 'condemn you before you open your mouth'. Then she must sit down and yarn with them and 'if she can play the ball she can have it all' (Anon 3).

Attention to confidentiality

Issues of confidentiality, as conceptualised in western views of helping, were not discussed in any great depth by the participants, particularly Torres Strait Islanders. This would suggest that confidentiality which is so fundamental to western views of helping is significantly different in indigenous helping.

Trust was discussed at some length by Torres Strait Islanders who tended to see this as a pre-requisite for effective relationships. It is possible that confidentiality was assumed in a relationship that was based on trust. Two of the Torres Strait Island participants discussed specific strategies that they may use to protect the confidentiality of the people they were working with. Angie talked about speaking with an individual in a different part of the house or outside to maintain confidentiality so that other family members could not hear what was being said. Another worker talked about using a cubicle in the front of his work office if the person indicated that what they wanted to discuss was private.

Aboriginal workers made more comment on confidentiality and amongst them there were various ways in which it was approached. While workers generally considered that it was important to maintain confidentiality their comments indicated that workers experienced difficulty in maintaining confidentiality in the form expected in western texts. This may be due to it being a small community, overcrowding or the nature of the problem.

It is hard to keep things quiet on Palm Island and Delena says that everyone adds a little more to the story each time it is told.. (Delena).

Confidentiality can be a problem because of overcrowded houses where extended family members are living with families and Delena says more and more people are moving to Palm Island to live (Delena).

Anon 2 says that the workload is considerable but they have so much support within the family system and some things that are confidential, are kept confidential, but they are also talked about within the family (Anon 2).

Another worker commented on the dilemmas confronting workers when they have access to information that is confidential but could also be useful to members of the community in terms of accessing services or funding.

This has to be weighed up by him and he has to give people enough information to 'keep them out of a set of circumstances that they could get themselves into' but he has to balance this against the fact that he has confidential information which, if divulged, could jeopardise other matters (Noel).

In contrast the organisational context of Anon 1 and Anon 4 necessitates strict adherence to confidentiality. One worker indicated that she took particular efforts to ensure confidentiality of written records such as locking away written records and deliberately and clearly assuring clients of the confidentiality of their comments. She commented that failure to observe confidentiality within that organisation could place a persons life in danger.

Anon 1 says that she maintains confidentiality and she reassures the person that nothing will be said outside of her office. ...Anon 1 is very particular about confidentiality because there have been problems in this regard in the past and a person's life was in danger and Anon 1 says there is no way she will place herself in that situation (Anon 1).

They have to clearly define their roles and assure the client that this is my role and everything is confidential (Anon 4).

While for these workers in government organisations, confidentiality was primarily a consequence of their role and mandate, Anon 2 and Noel (who also worked in government organisations) saw other factors also having a role in determining their decisions about confidentiality.

Issues about the use of family resources and how these may effect confidentiality were at times alluded to but not expanded on. At least three of the Aboriginal participants indicated that they may

discuss client situations with other workers or other professionals or helpers but did not necessarily consider this to be an ethical issue.

While the extent of comments about the use and treatment of confidentiality amongst Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal workers are limited and prevent any exhaustive analysis on this aspect of helping, it appears that it may be treated in quite a different way, from western conceptions, by indigenous helpers and warrants further in depth exploration.

Impact of training background on areas of difference

Amongst the Torres Strait Islander participants, two workers had formal qualifications, these being from a University and College of Advanced Education respectively. Other workers had received various forms of inservice training or partially completed tertiary training or considered that their training was in their personal experience.

Louisa said that she has no formal training in helping, her experience comes from her own personal experiences (Louisa).

William said that most of the skills he's learnt have been through experience and sitting with very wise elders and listening to them. During the course of his work the lessons from these experiences come back to him and it gives his work direction (Will).

Formal training in social welfare does not appear to be a significant factor in areas of difference at the level of interaction amongst Torres Strait Islanders. However, some workers consider that training has impacted on their helping style or their ability to work with white clients and how they cope professionally.

Agie says that because she has studied community welfare she uses some of those skills with people for example open ended questions (Agnes).

She finds her tertiary background helpful which enables her to cope with things professionally, and she believes this has also enabled her to develop confidence in herself (Anon 6).

Raba believes her helping style changed when she did some 'Reality Therapy' training, just the questions she now asks the students are different to how she would ask them previously. Now she asks questions like 'what do you want, and what do you really want?', and leaving out 'why', most of time, and only using it when she has to, and most of the time she kinda leaves that 'why' right off the sentence She says counselling in this way helps the students to

develop behaviour patterns and helps 'them to realise how they behave in the class room'. ...Raba says she now has a more caring and understanding approach to students and she listens to them very carefully now also (Raba).

Generally, participants did not explicitly consider formal training a potential handicap, however, too much white education could have bad aspects for two workers.

Anon 3 says she is concerned that black workers get a lot of welfare training and if we don't watch ourselves we are changing our own people to be white people (Anon 3).

Louisa said some of her people who become educated – it goes to their head and they forget sometimes who they are and they forget sometimes who they are talking to, they become too assertive (Louisa).

Louisa and Anon 3 have not undertaken formal training and it would appear that those Torres Strait Islanders who have experienced training saw less danger in it and are choosing to use those aspects that are most useful for them.

Amongst the Aboriginal participants, four workers had completed formal training at University, and four had received various degrees of inservice training. Similarly, to Torres Strait Islander workers, the type of training does not appear to be a significant factor in terms of difference in worker style at the level of interaction. However, there does appear to be a relationship between training and whether the worker is comfortable or considers themselves able to work with white people. Anon 4, Anon 2, Noel and Anon 1 see a role in creating links and educating fellow white workers, though not always working with white clients. The qualifications were regarded as a means of entry into a white system which enabled them to work with Aboriginal people. Workers such as Anon 2, Anon 4 and Anon 1 believed they have always known how to work with their own people and what works with them. The 'uni stuff' is something they can draw on if they feel stuck or are in an unfamiliar situation. While aspects of their work may have some of the characteristics of non-indigenous helping they believe their practice to be first and foremost that of an Aboriginal man or woman. To deny this belief is to homogenise and reduce Aboriginal culture to one form.

In contrast some workers without training expressed discomfort about working with white clients. Participants on Palm Island and two other workers with inservice training in the agency

indicate that they are uncomfortable with or consider themselves unable to work with white people.

...with white people it might be different because she couldn't relate to their background or how they were brought up. She thinks it might be hard for her to gain the confidence of a white client (Delena).

Biographical influences on helping

The biographies of the participants are an important aspect of their helping and was often a significant contributing factor in terms of placing them in a position of helper within their community and in their own consciousness. This may include their age, gender, family connections and the course their life had taken.

A number of Aboriginal participants indicated that age was a significant factor in gaining respect and status within their community. This seems to relate to the respect that is attached to age and wisdom. It provides workers with an opportunity to legitimate their positions.

She says that age is important because if you are a younger counsellor and you are counselling someone older you have to be very careful otherwise you could sound like you are patronising and there is the issue of respect for elders also (Anon 2).

...if she were to go to an elder for help and they growled at her, then this would be acceptable because they are an older and respected person (Anon 4).

Similar observations were made about age by some Torres Strait Island respondents.

She thought that it was good for Genoa to be the helper as Torres Strait Islanders respect older people (Anon 6).

This participant also indicated that her own youth had presented some difficulties in achieving the respect and acknowledgment of her ideas, particularly within the family. As she has grown older however, these experiences have been less.

Another element that contributed to respondents, analysis of their own status as helpers included family connection. One participant of Torres Strait Island background indicated that her position in her family made taking on a helping role inevitable.

...as my husband's wife.... people in the community think ...{his }wife can do all the other things well... her husband's position in his family, he is the eldest

son of the eldest brother so he is quite highly ranked within his family and extended family....Responsibility comes with this type of status (Agnes).

The ability to 'come up with the goods', that is to be effective was also identified as a contributing element to people's status as helpers.

...when the community got to know that she was there for them they used to make a lineup at her home door step on the weekend. People would also see her at church or at social events regarding their problems. One family would tell another family that she had helped them and they would come and see her and so on (Louisa).

...people know him and know what he does and they respect him for this (Maurice).

A position in a Department or Government body may also contribute to both community and self perception of status, particularly as the following respondent suggests if those positions allow people to forge links between white social structures and Torres Strait Islander people. Such abilities may be highly valued.

She also said that Islanders...don't readily go and seek counselling if they have a problem....a black welfare officer has to have a good knowledge of Islander cultural background and also a good knowledge of the western background to be able to fit the cultural aspects of things into that culture....the black welfare officer has to be the middle person between the white society and the black community (Louisa).

...she thinks so because different people have different sorts of status because of their employment (Angie).

Similarly, being well known within the community established a reputation and status that allowed one to take on the role of helper. This was commented on by both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island respondents.

...if the helper is well known and respected within the community then people seeking help will usually specifically ask to see that person (Angie).

She doesn't see herself as having any particular status, she says that she is just well known because she was born here and she grew up with people who are involved in ATSIC, i.e. the leaders in the Aboriginal community (Anon 1).

Despite these links to certain demographic dimensions such as age, family background and networks, none of the respondents saw their helping activities as related to community power or special status. They all described their involvement in helping work as something more to do with their own biography and the course their life has taken.

This relationship between biography and practical welfare is a theme which emerges in other descriptions of men and women who have been identified in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities as helpers. Ann Cuthroys (1996: 331) in her review of the books *Auntie Rita* and *The Sun Dancin'*, identified "the themes of work, caring for...children, practical welfare and political organising for one's people emerge(ing) over and over again" in these biographies.

Similarly, themes of caring for one's own family, of beginning work in domestic or low pay positions, and moving into helping work because of experiences of difficulty in negotiating the welfare system, emerge frequently in the participants' life stories. Such themes are also found in Jane Thomson's (1996:20) study of the lives of social welfare workers. She talks about how, for these workers, "their own struggles had been fundamental to the ways ...{they} shaped their practice".

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in this project too, have faced and seen real and major oppression (Thomson 1996) in their lives. They have had the opportunity through often bitter personal experience to recognise the inadequacies of many white services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. Their role as helper is quite often one of overcoming the barriers set up within services, or to services.

For years she worked as a domestic within an institution and because of what she saw happening there, she realised there had to be something better for the children who were in the institution (Agnes).

Before she had not considered taking an interest in schooling of children, until she got involved with her own kids in primary school. It was then {she} realised that there was a lack of cultural awareness by the teachers (Raba).

...she had no previous experience....she can identify with other women's problems as she's had similar problems herself and has sometimes been through what they're going through...eg domestic violence. She has five children and is a supporting parent (Delena).

...as an Aboriginal worker and counsellor about 20% of her training at university has equipped her to work with families and about 80% of her knowledge and skills come from her personal self and experiences (Anon 4).

Some of the respondents commented on the advantages they believed were attached to the role of helper. These included being able to act as a link for Aboriginal people within government agencies.

...she knows a lot of what resources are available and she is able to tap into these for Aboriginal people (Anon 4).

The positives of her position is that she is in a position to always be raising cultural issues to magistrates which white workers cannot do (Anon 4).

...he sees that he could be a positive role model for his own people and also for prospective employers (Will).

However, many of the respondents identified great costs to themselves personally because of their status as helper in the community. These costs generally resulted from the high expectations family and other community members may have of them as helpers.

She said that people expected her to help them because they believe that she belongs to the community,...they usually want her to help them there and then and usually she does this... if she is very busy and if she can't do it straight away then she is the worst person....for a week(Dianne).

...other Islanders don't understand the workings of the Department and they think that she will know everything about the matters of every other Department ...{she} always tries to help them with their enquires anyway (Anon 6).

...he thought that this was a really big issue for Aboriginal and Islander workers,i.e. trying to work out how to balance their work role with the pressures put on them by family and friends and others.. On the one hand the Murri helper has to be caring and sharing and understanding; on the other hand if the situation is not handled properly there can be accusations of nepotism and bias (Noel).

He says he always has the demand from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to do things for them. ...This happens regularly, i.e. if he is on lunch or at home on weekends and any time after work hours (Will).

She says the stress rate is very high for black helpers and this is because you are not just dealing with a particular problem, you are dealing with the other problems as well (Angie).

Culture and gendered influences on helping

A number of the participants, both male and female, identified gender issues that are important in the helping relationship. While the conclusions that can be drawn about the role of gender are limited by the number of males who participated in the project, it is still clear that gender does impact on the style and focus of the relationship for indigenous workers. Despite training, participants agreed that in traditional indigenous culture, men were 'dominant',

'head of the household' and the community leaders. This traditional gender script was not challenged by the women helpers and most of the women spoke of strategies they would use to demonstrate respect for the status of men in their helping relationships with men.

The traditional gender script does not appear to reflect in different patterns of helping for male helpers. In terms of differences in the qualities that workers considered important in a helper, and in the ways women worked with men, women were no more likely than men to talk about being a friend, or being available for people. Both Maurice and Will were quite explicit that they approached helping as a friend who was warm and caring. They were generally unanimous about the importance of warmth, caring, patience and the importance of understanding culture. Noel, Will and Anon 5 all talk about people approaching them at all hours, in their personal time and about things that aren't even part of their role. They still followed it through.

Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers identified that indigenous people would seek help from a worker of the same gender as themselves. A number of the women helpers rarely saw men in their work and often had specific strategies that they would use to provide men (or boys) with a male worker.

She tries to get an older male to attend the ... program so that if there are any concerns the young male may talk to him (Anon 2).

Communication problems can be overcome by having a male talk to a male client and a female talk to a female. If a suitable counsellor was not available that is male or female, then she would bring in someone from the community (Angie).

However there were also occasions when workers did work across gender. There was almost unanimous agreement from these participants that such situations were often difficult and needed to reflect the traditional gender scripts in relation to values and the place and behaviour of women. While family connection may lessen the impact of gender difference, it did not override its significance in the relationship.

Women spoke of strategies they would use to demonstrate respect for the status of men in their helping relationships with men. A number of the participants, including males, indicated that the way in which men and women seat themselves in helping

relationships is very important and is a key way of demonstrating respect.

(She) has to keep this in mind when speaking to a male parent so that she can discuss the main points, and keep the session short and to the point...They would sit with one spare chair between them, there wouldn't be a lot of direct contact and they wouldn't be directly facing each other (Anon 2).

She says that she has to remember that the people she is working with are mainly men...that she has to talk to them so that they understand her and that she shows she respects them in the Aboriginal culture as me (Anon 1).

Traditional men have status and power within their own race...and they have to be respected for who they are in the community (Angie).

Amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers there were also some distinct differences in relation to gender issues. While Aboriginal workers acknowledge the importance of considering gender in the development of helping relationships most identified strategies that lessen the impact of gender differences. Anon 1 who worked with predominantly male clients, suggested that as long as the woman helper is aware of the need to explicitly demonstrate respect for men, particularly elder men, then she can still work with the indigenous people better than a white male worker. Thus the cultural/racial differences are greater and more inhibiting than traditional gender differences. None of the Aboriginal participants indicated that gender was a limitation to their helping; more an important issue that needed to be considered.

In contrast a number of the participants of Torres Strait Island background talked about how men don't listen to women or belittle women's opinions, even if those women hold important positions in various government departments. As Torres Strait Island women, these helpers would not be able to speak with men about sensitive issues such as their domestic relationships, sexual issues or any issue that may imply some criticism of their male role.

...the male's head was lowered and this maybe because he is talking to a female. In Torres Strait culture, women don't have any authority, as well as this, a Torres Strait female would never give advice to a Torres Strait male (Louisa).

There are a lot of things that she or Torres Strait Islander women in general can't say to men folk such as a woman couldn't ask a man who had hit his wife why he did it. This is because culturally women don't have the right to ask men these types of questions... (Louisa).

Most of the Torres Strait Island women talked of living their private lives in accordance with the traditional gender script despite their public responsibilities.

She says she has to keep in mind when work ends, to the point of when you're home because she is married to a Torres Strait Islander...the status of men is very important and...this is the way it is at home (Agnes).

...a lot of black workers are themselves subject to domestic violence, a lot of them are subject to family pressure as well... (Angie).

Only one of the Torres Strait Islander participants was male and he also commented on the subordinate position of Torres Strait Islander women and the ways in which this would influence helping.

If the mother was a Torres Strait Islander she would never come to see a social worker alone. ...This is because of traditional ways where mothers weren't allowed to say anything, the father had to do the talking for the family (Will).

In contrast Anon 6, who is younger than some of the other female participants, is less accepting of the gender script about male position but feels criticised for her non-traditional behaviour.

...it's really difficult, I guess, being a woman and trying to voice your opinion at times, and in most cases I guess you are not given the opportunity to do so in our own communities with our own people (Anon 6).

She gave the example of her expressing her opinions to a male Islander and she felt she had put her point across well and he couldn't argue any further with her so he told her she talked too much. ... 'he couldn't win the argument so he wanna run me down' (Anon 6).

Anon 4 also includes a feminist analysis in the Aboriginal worker's use of shaming of the mother.

Other workers recognised the influence of 'white' ideas about gender on their work but believed that their use had to be with caution.

She says she has to be careful when working with women...the women can't be changed because to change them means domestic violence in lots of ways because the men won't stand for their women changing (Angie).

It took a long time for Louisa to accept the western way of working with domestic violence situations. It also took Louisa time to accept the fact that Torres Strait Island women shouldn't have to put up with violence and that they should get help. However, culturally the women were supposed to put up with these problems and no one else was supposed to get involved or help (Louisa).

These responses indicate a synthesis by women of the old and new values in working with women in relation to issues such as violence and child welfare. These differences do not preclude a feminist analysis by the women. The worker's own biography may account for some of the difference, but it may be attributable to their direct experiences as workers. Anon 4 was employed in child welfare where the status of Aboriginal women as mothers is a current and recurring work theme. Similarly, Anon 6 is in a role of entering communities where she is expected to conform to the traditional role – organisational role interacting with worker age. It appears that the synthesis of old and new creates dilemmas and contradictions which require the worker to weigh up the possible consequences in helping women in these situations.

The data suggests that both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were more aware of gender as an influence in their helping. They have a view of themselves as black women and their roles in relation to black men.

black people have been bought up to be, and black women in particular are more strong. They may have all these problems but they know how to turn off to a certain extent... (Angie).

However, this does not preclude a feminist approach or analysis in the women's practice. Rather there is an indication of a complex feminist perspective which considers issues of race and gender in their response. The women's comments imply elements of a black feminist perspective. The workers' comments also carry the implication that black men and women are fighting for the same thing, regardless of gender differences (Huggins 1991).

In contrast the male participants did not mention gender, they were not aware of it influencing their work to the same extent as the women helpers. Women commented consistently and regularly about traditional role expectations and the influence this has on their work. In so doing they identify a range of dilemmas and contradictions which indigenous women, working as helpers, confront in both their professional and personal lives. The acceptance of the gendered roles may well be attributable to the fact that sexism is not the main form of oppression experienced by these women in their practice (Spry 1996).

8.

Contrasts with Western Discourse on Helping

The theories which inform practice and the purpose of helping are found in traditional and radical social work (Rojek, Peacock & Collins 1988). In the 1990s social work literature (Rojek, Peacock & Collins 1988; Howe 1994; Leonard 1995) has also included postmodernist approaches.

The traditional social work approaches include psychodynamic models, crisis intervention and task-centred models, behavioural models, systems and ecological models, social psychological and communication models, cognitive models and humanist and existential models (Payne 1991). What has been classified as radical views of social work emerged in the 1970s. These approaches introduced an element of social criticism as being a part of social work theory. In this environment, empowerment, advocacy and consciousness-raising theories of social work emerged. These approaches have provided a critique of the family, state, power, ideological hegemony, professionalisation, gender and oppression (Payne 1991). This provides a structural analysis but tends to neglect the immediate personal needs of the client. While radical approaches have introduced new ideas such as mutuality, 'the personal is political', radical approaches also operate on sets of received ideas similar to those of traditional social work, e.g. respect, self-determination, confidentiality (Rojek, Peacock & Collins 1988).

These approaches have been recognised as creatures of modernity as opposed to postmodernism which has critiqued modernity. The value of this approach is in the opportunities it affords for alternative discourses and realities. The client is no longer viewed as a "...passive recipient of 'intervention' or education. (It) emphasises dialogue and shared realities, rather than a necessary power relationship of active worker/teacher and passive client/student" (Ife 1996:89). However, in its discourse of difference postmodernism dismantles any universal understanding of social justice and human rights.

Despite the range of theories within social work there are broader sets of ideas that underpin traditional and radical approaches in social work. It is these broader sets of ideas that will be examined in terms of contrasts and similarities with the 'Murri Way'.

The different theoretical approaches within social work have led to considerable debate about the nature of helping and practice. Despite this debate a dominant discourse exists in the literature about helping in social welfare. This helping discourse is about "...enhancing the fit between individuals and social arrangements ...(through) the development of equitable relationships and empowerment" (O'Connor, Wilson & Thomas 1991:11). It promotes a helping process that emphasises working 'with' rather than doing 'to' or 'for' the person (Brammer 1988; Carkhuff 1969; Egan 1990; Howe 1987; Nelson-Jones 1988; O'Connor et al. 1991; Payne 1991; Turner 1986). The theories, ideologies, roles and self-images within this discourse are ones that reinforce the provision of sensitive and humanitarian service to strangers without creating too much disturbance of existing power relations (Rees & Wallace 1982: 166).

This form of helping includes specific language about the activities of a worker and different forms of intervention; namely casework, groupwork and community work, and a focus on micro-skills and techniques for practice. The worker-client relationship within this discourse is characterised by values of neutrality, choice, respect, individualisation and self-determination.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping styles contrast most strongly with the traditional social work literature. The primary principles of this orientation are: individualisation, purposeful expression of feelings, controlled emotional involvement, acceptance, nonjudgmental attitude, client self-determination and confidentiality (Bisteck 1961). These principles are reinforced by the values of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers (AIWCW) Codes of Ethics: respect for each individual, regardless of personal characteristics, social justice and self fulfilment, self-determination, confidentiality and privacy. Sociological and psychological knowledge is the basis used by the worker for understanding and assessing the individual. Despite introducing new ideas to social work, radical approaches also

operate from a similar knowledge base and share some of the principles and values of traditional social work, for example self-determination, confidentiality, respect for each individual.

In contrast a 'murri way' emphasises a relationship based on familial/cultural connection rather than individualisation. In this context the role is more akin to that of 'resourceful friend' as opposed to professional provider which has implications for the process in terms of formality of the relationship, use of self in the helping context, self-determination, right of worker to judge the clients behaviour, confidentiality and privacy. The knowledge base the worker uses for understanding the client is located in the experience of being black, cultural knowledge of black and white society, community knowledge, spirituality and a belief in authority.

Ethics

The codes of ethics of social welfare specify the values and responsibilities of professional social work. Both the AASW and AIWCW Codes of Ethics are defined in relation to a principle of individualism and are foundationalist in nature (Rojek et al. 1988). Values of trust, confidentiality and respect are tempered by the endorsement of professionalism.

Individualism

The 'Murri Way' is in strong contrast to the individualistic focus of the western codes of ethics and strikes at the heart of western liberal democratic philosophy.

For both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the family and community are of central significance, and group interests and needs are a fundamental part of an individual's identity and self-fulfilment. All of the indigenous workers who participated in the research said they would rarely work with an individual but almost always would involve the wider family and community, even if the individual was not entirely comfortable with this. Exceptions to the focus on the family's interest rather than the individual's were rare, although there was some acknowledgment by some workers that power imbalances within the family, for example in situations of domestic violence or child sexual assault, might lead them to act in support of an individual. However, among Torres Strait Islander

workers, especially, a family focus is seen as the most culturally appropriate way to support female victims of what they prefer to call, family violence.

When workers were prepared to support an individual against the family, this concession appeared to be related to exposure at University to feminist analyses rather than to any commitment to the individualistic focus of the professional codes of ethics. Indigenous students are quite selective about what they take on board from professional education. Professional ethics components of social work or welfare work courses were not valued as core knowledge, but rather were seen as something they would draw on if they feel stuck or in an unfamiliar situation.

Confidentiality

A further contrast to the individualist focus of the Codes of Ethics was found in relation to confidentiality. In western professional practice, confidentiality for the individual is virtually a sacred cow. By contrast, indigenous workers considered confidentiality important but difficult to maintain in many instances. Thus the boundaries of confidentiality may shift from the individual to the family or even to the community. Unlike the non-indigenous worker's interpretation of confidentiality, cultural and environmental factors influenced these boundaries.

Culturally, indigenous workers considered it appropriate to involve the family, and the wider sharing of information which this entailed was over-ridden only when confidentiality was insisted on by an employing organisation. Environmentally it was considered difficult to maintain confidentiality because commonly, people in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities know about an individual's issue already, particularly in small communities, such as Palm Island, where privacy is a virtual impossibility.

An example of a culturally appropriate expression of confidentiality was the use by Torres Strait Islander workers of 'sackietalk' (figurative talk in riddles or euphemisms around an issue), in order to avoid creating a sense of shame or embarrassment for an individual, family or community. Some workers claimed that usually although people in Torres Strait communities will already know about an issue, they may avoid talking about it directly because the imperative to avoid causing shame is very strong. The

imperative to avoid shame is sufficiently strong to be considered a distinctive Torres Strait ethic, in its own right.

Neutrality

The position of neutrality or non-judgmentalism in relation to the client is considered an essential principle for effective helping amongst non-indigenous workers. For North Queensland Aborigines the notion of shame has a quite different significance that places it at odds with the principle of non-judgmentalism. We were told that in certain circumstances, particularly where the worker has status because of age, family position or gender, an Aboriginal worker would deliberately set out to increase the sense of shame in an individual in order to generate change, in the interests of the family or the community. In North Queensland Aboriginal helping, forthright criticism and attribution of blame are accepted and acceptable partly because of the cultural authority of the helper in that particular instance, but also because usually it is combined with both understanding and unconditional support.

Respect

While respect is as important for indigenous workers as it is for non-indigenous workers, it is understood and demonstrated in rather different ways. The use of respect by non-indigenous workers is related to commitment to the value and dignity of every human being and the underlying principle of individualism. In contrast, indigenous worker's demonstration of respect is for the family. The Torres Strait Islander worker who does not show respect for the individual can bring shame on the person's family and thus contravene a significant ethic of that culture.

Respect begins in the initial circuitous, time-rich beginning phase of the helping process with the forms of address, establishment of links at the personal level, searching for family connections, sharing stories of similar life experiences and actively sharing spirituality, however secular the agency context. For some indigenous workers praying together with a service user is considered not merely culturally appropriate and a sign of respect, but highly desirable and therefore ethical.

Role of the worker

Aboriginal and Islander worker perspectives of the helping process place a strong emphasis on the importance and value of relationship. This was expressed in how they established the relationship and their helping style. The relationship developed through adherence to traditional interpersonal relationship protocols where they were defined in relation to the other person as 'uncle', 'aunty', 'sister', 'brother', 'grandmother' or 'friend'.

All the participants in this project identified in a variety of ways that workers needed to be friendly and informal. This was in part a critique of what was seen as 'white' helping (removed, formal, professional) and also reflective of what the participants saw as most helpful to people. A number of participants spoke of their main goal of putting people at ease and relaxing them through informal friendly interactions.

Consistent with the role of a friend or relation, was availability of the worker. Most of the participants agreed that their work was not confined to an office, or to office hours. They could all relate frequent occasions when people had contacted them at home, in the evening, on weekends seeking work-related assistance. Only one participant actively discouraged this contact, attempting to keep her home life private. In this instance the worker's behaviour was influenced by organisational requirements with which she agreed. Many of the other participants considered this 'on constant call' arrangement a necessary part of their work and reflective of their commitment to their work with their people.

In contrast much of the western social welfare literature (Brammer 1988; Compton & Galaway 1984; Egan 1986) emphasises the professional role of the worker. Whittington (1977) identified eight role orientations. These are categories of social workers' subjective meanings in respect of clients. While the worker may adopt a professional, bureaucratic or client orientation these change from case-to-case or situation-to-situation. Their chosen stance may be concerned with professional values and standards, or a preoccupation with the policies and norms of the employing agency or concern with the need of those served by the agency (Rothman 1974). The primary orientation of the role emphasises working 'with' rather than doing 'to' or 'for' the person (Brammer 1988; Egan 1990; Howe 1987; O'Connor et al.1991).

Traditional social work has also emphasised the establishment and maintenance of the relationship as the main instrument for carrying out the worker's role (Payne, 1991:27). However the focus in this form of relationship is on the emotional aspects of the relationship and the importance of the relationship for ensuring individualisation within social work (Perlman 1957). The emphasis is on 'the disciplined use of self, in a way that is helpful to the other, constrains the spontaneous sharing of information, comfort and support which defines friendship' (O'Connor et al. 1991). Relationship is encouraged within professionally defined boundaries and the worker is advised to treat the role of friend with caution.

Use of self

The use of self in indigenous helping takes on a whole new dimension. The informal friendly emphasis in the interactions requires the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worker to engage in far greater self disclosure, sharing and story telling in the process of connecting with the person and helping them. In contrast, western workers engage in minimal self disclosure and sharing while at the same time expecting the client to share intimate aspects of their lives.

Aboriginal participants added to this characteristic by often mentioning the need for the worker to be genuine, not too direct, and patient. While not every Aboriginal respondent mentioned these elements, a number of them did and still others implied these were present in their discussion of language, (e.g. only using 'lingo' if one knew it), yarning, and a murri worker's ability to be more direct than a white (that is because they are genuine and black) to be genuine, patient and not too direct.

Participants of Torres Strait Island background focused on the need for the worker to be respectful, to show respect and to know how to indicate respect through who one spoke to, how one addressed other people and through acknowledging the importance of (and even participating in) 'island ways' and rituals. This focus on respect did not appear as apparent amongst Aboriginal participants.

While helping literature (Brammer 1988; Egan 1986; Truax & Carkhuff 1967) identifies genuineness, and respect as being

important conditions for effective helping, their development is not contingent on greater use of self disclosure and sharing. Rather they advocate the development of these conditions through the use of empathy and reflection. Respect, in western thought, is about separating the person from their actions and accepting them as a valuable human being despite their behaviour (Biestek 1961). This is further demonstrated through a commitment to the idea of self-determination and client control of the process in non-indigenous helping.

Spirituality

Historically, western helping had a moral basis and Christianity had a strong influence on the basis of welfare. However, we would consider this a religious basis as opposed to a spiritual basis. "Originally the Christian tradition required people 'to give and not to count the cost' " (Rees & Wallace 1982: 117). This action was in turn rewarded in heaven. It had little to do with the spiritual nature of the person. Despite the decline of the Christian influence on professional approaches, Christian and other spiritual attitudes do survive in the humanitarian tradition (e.g. Holman 1993, Brandon, 1976).

In the literature about western helping (Brammer 1988; Egan 1986; O'Connor et al. 1991) the professional helper is not encouraged to speak openly about christianity or their spiritual beliefs. To do so would be considered inappropriate self disclosure and an imposition of the worker's own values and beliefs. Workers who engage in this outside of a religious organisation, where this is not part of their mandate, are often considered to be incompetent practitioners. Nor is there any acknowledgment or discussion about spirituality in the use of self or the spiritual nature of the client. In the humanist approach of the western discourse on helping, spirituality has little place in a process that professes to be apolitical and value free.

Holistic vs instrumental focus

The spiritual aspect of the 'Murri Way' has further implications in terms of facilitating a holistic approach within their practice. It is an approach that is highly systemic and organic as opposed to the instrumental approach within much of the western social welfare literature. Task-centred theory, problem-solving theory, crisis

intervention (O'Connor et al., 1991; Payne, 1991; Reid & Epstein, 1972; Turner, 1986) outline processes that are instrumental in focus concerned with personal and social change and underpinned by a consensus perspective of society and societal relationships (Midgley 1981).

It may be argued that the systems and ecological models (Pincus & Minahan 1973; Germain & Gitterman 1980) are systemic and holistic in nature. However holistic refers to a lack of emphasis on any particular method, the worker operating at the individual, group or community level. Biological theory which proposes that all organisms are systems influences the understanding of systems in the latter approach. This approach provides an alternative basis to the medical model of social work and while some of its concepts may have more relevance for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context than for example task-centred theory, it is primarily assessment focused and instrumental in nature. The assessment focus breaks the system into parts destroying its organic nature. It is instrumental in its concern with ensuring a better fit between a person's needs and capacities and the environment. In contrast, the 'Murri Way' encompasses a spiritual understanding that underpins its holistic focus. This differentiates it from the systems and ecological models (Pincus & Minahan 1973; Germain & Gitterman 1980) of social work.

Circular vs 'purposive' process

While it could be argued that there are parallels between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stages of the helping process and that of the social work literature (Howe 1987; Brammer 1988; Egan 1990; Compton and Galaway 1979) in terms of a beginning, middle and end, any similarity ends there. The stages of the indigenous helping process place a much greater emphasis on the beginning of the process and the development of the relationship.

In contrast to western discourse this is a time-rich process which is not tied to bureaucratic purposes, language and efficiency and is in strong contrast to the bureaucratic role. Rather the concern is with the person and being effective. Problem identification and exploration is interwoven in such a way that it is part of the whole relationship rather than another phase of the process. All the participants in the project emphasised the importance of people talking around an issue, 'sussing out' each

other and using stories through which the problem was defined. For the western worker the distance from the client makes the beginning phase necessary. Amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, understanding of the problem is encompassed in their connectedness and one-ness as an indigenous person.

This circuitous approach is in strong contrast to the direct, logical, sequential steps of western problem-solving models (Perlman 1957; Reid & Epstein 1972), which are 'purposive' in their approach. The emphasis is on the presenting problem rather than internal motivation and the use of a scientific process to assess and address the problem. The process of these approaches incorporates a specific phase for identifying the problem which is then followed by phases of goal setting, contracting and the provision of a range of resources (social, material and psychological) to achieve the goals (Perlman 1986) before termination. Within the task-centred approach (Reid 1986), the tasks become a means of problem resolution with 'the client's and practitioner's efforts (being) devoted primarily to the construction, implementation, and review of tasks' (1986:271).

Responsibility for the process

Many theories of traditional social work place the emphasis for responsibility for the process on the worker. The phases of the helping process have been mapped out with progression to termination. The worker takes responsibility for building the relationship, directing the process and the relationship through the various phases. In contrast a number of the Aboriginal and Islander workers indicated how it was their task to follow the client and move at their pace. This is directed by reading the non-verbal signs and knowing the person. In this context the client directs their discussion of the problem. Similarly at the end of a session with a client, it is the client's cues that are listened for.

Use of authority and power

Many traditional social work approaches encompass a professional ideology that includes '...a belief that professionals are experts who know more than clients about their problem situation and the means to deal with it' (Fook 1993:60). This means that workers often assume an expert role, distancing themselves from

clients and controlling the means and resources for solving the problem.

In the radical approaches of social and welfare work, professionalism and its accompanying authority and power has been strongly critiqued (Illich 1977). Power is equated with control and oppression (Payne 1991) rather than issues of responsibility bound to familial or cultural roles. Consequently, western radical helping discourse advocates the minimisation of the use of authority and power, in relation to the client, in an attempt to address the considerable authority and power vested in the worker's position. In contrast, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders determine their use of authority and power within the complexity of familial relationship, gender, age, status and organisational role. These factors determine the use of authority and power rather than a narrower emphasis on self-determination and the avoidance of control and responsibility for the client.

In western helping approaches there is an emphasis placed on not directing or advising the client. Rather, through effective use of skills, the worker assists the client to reach their own decision. Particularly in radical approaches, this requires consumer self-awareness, structural understanding of the problem and responsibility by the client to change the system.

In contrast, directiveness, particularly amongst Aboriginal helpers, is considered to be important to effective helping. The workers' authority and power may be used to legitimate this directiveness. Self-determination and the idea '...that people can make their own decisions ignores the fact that all individuals are constrained within a social environment by a huge array of factors' (Fook 1993:61). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worker recognises the cultural, social and political constraints on the individuals' ability to make their own decisions. The use of the technique of 'shaming' to change client behaviour, particularly amongst Aboriginal workers, is also based on the workers authority and power. In western discourse active shaming is not considered appropriate.

9.

Similarities with western consumer critiques and alternative approaches

In the debates about the nature of practice, consumer critiques of western helping and alternative approaches that challenge the dominant discourse in helping have emerged. The 'murri way' adds further challenge to the western professional and bureaucratic approaches. It is with the consumer critiques and alternative approaches in social welfare that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping has the most similarity.

Feminist (Dominelli & McLeod 1989; Hanmer & Statham 1988) and empowerment (Solomon 1976) approaches to helping outline principles that have some similarity to those valued in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping. These include principles of mutual sharing of life experiences, equality of relationship and powersharing. Holman's 'neighbour principle' (1993, 1995) which encompasses concepts of mutuality and resourceful friends also reflect similarities with the practice behaviours of the 'Murri Way'.

Direct action

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander emphasis in the 'doing' phase of the helping process on answers and direct action reflect the overall findings of consumer critiques identified by Rees and Wallace (1982). This study showed that respondents greatly appreciated direct action by the worker and that such strategies were seen as examples of particularly helpful work. Similar to the beliefs of Aboriginal and Islander workers, good helping was about friendly and caring workers doing things and being seen to do things that were supportive, '...concrete, immediate and directive' (Rees & Wallace 1982:72).

The power, influence and knowledge of the worker, which may be an outcome of their agency position, family or community position was considered important in helping the person they were working with to get what they wanted. Similar to the findings of

Rees and Wallace (1982), the personal qualities and knowledge and ability of the worker was of little use unless they were able to take action.

In terms of personal qualities and knowledge, numbers of Aboriginal and Islander workers believed that specific qualities and knowledge were essential to having a true understanding of the experience and problem and thus their ability to provide appropriate action. Like the clients in the study by Rees and Wallace (1982), experience in terms of blackness and experience of similar problems was believed to increase their effectiveness with and ability to help the person. The worker identified as being like the client and would talk about how they got out of a similar problem.

Mutual sharing of life experiences

The mutual sharing of life experiences is a principle strongly advocated in feminist and empowerment approaches. Self-disclosure or sharing of experience is considered an important technique in terms of these approaches and the 'Murri Way'. Feminist approaches and the 'murri way' share further similarities in the idea that women, like indigenous people, be they helper or 'client' share common experiences based on gender in the case of women and race in the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This recognition of common experience acts as a basis of power sharing through self disclosure.

In addition the consumer critiques and feminist approaches advocate and value a deprofessionalised role with an emphasis on relationship. Mutual sharing and shared responsibility for the process are primary means of encouraging equality between the worker and the client. Not only must clients act in a certain way and demonstrate their commitment and motivation but the helper must also be prepared to open themselves to their clients' scrutiny before they can expect anyone to share personal issues.

Equality of relationship

Between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and their clients, equality of relationship was evidenced in their identification with the experience of being black. Feminist approaches also strongly advocate equality of relationship through

commonality of experience. Aboriginal and Islander workers further this equality through self disclosure, mutuality and 'sussing out' of each other. It is also enhanced further by the role of 'friend'.

While participants did not elaborate on the meaning of 'friend'. The style of helping that developed from this approach is similar to that identified by Jansen (1992) in her study of South-east Asian helpers where friend was understood as a metaphor for equality and not intimacy. The exception to the influence of these factors on equality in the relationship may be in relation to gender, age or status whereby familial/cultural relationships determine the boundaries in terms of behaviour and responsibilities.

Powersharing

Powersharing and equality are highly valued principles in radical approaches. Attention is given to a deprofessionalised relationship where social distance between the worker and the client is reduced. This is encouraged through co-operative, non-hierarchical techniques such as self-disclosure of positive and negative experiences and mutual aid. For Aboriginal and Islander workers, powersharing in the relationship is encouraged through two-way sharing and 'sussing out' in the initial phase of the relationship and mutuality. The worker shares their power in walking people through the system, sharing their knowledge of the system and helping them to get what they need.

Mutuality

The value of mutuality (Holman 1993) is an idea that is evident in the 'Murri Way'. Holman describes it as a 'neighbour principle' that should '...guide our behaviour towards others' (1993:57). Mutuality appears in this project to provide a strong guide for the behaviour of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in terms of the worker's behaviour to the client and the type of action taken in conjunction with the person. Action is based in '...a sense of obligation and responsibility for, the well-being of others' (Holman 1993:61). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers recognise that while they may be able to assist a person today, they may also be reliant on their own needs being met from within their community on another occasion. The principle of mutuality for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders is based in

kinship and the mutual obligations that accompany this, their shared oppression and the cultural way of the community.

This has many parallels with Holman's idea of mutuality which he defines as:

the recognition of mutual obligations towards others;
stemming from the acceptance of a common kinship;
expressed in joint action; and
towards a more equitable sharing of resources and responsibilities' (Holman 1993:57).

Holman (1993) draws heavily on christianity for his understanding of this concept. So there may be quite a significant difference between the elements that bind people together in Holman's use of the concept and its use in a 'Murri Way'. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the binding factor is shared oppression and cultural understanding, a component of which is a shared spirituality. The common factor is an agreement that human beings should be treated in a way that upholds their humanity.

Holman (1993) identifies three ways in which mutuality can be practically applied. Firstly, mutuality includes making judgements in relation to others' conditions by reference to our own. Secondly, it means not separating ourselves from others by huge differences in status, power and income, and thirdly, enlarging individualism by accepting responsibility for others as well as ourselves. These uses of mutuality are evident in the 'murri way'. The fourth aspect of mutuality is about creating different structures in which it can flourish. The Reconciliation process could very well form this component of mutuality.

Deprofessionalisation

Illich (1977) began the strong critique of the ideology of professionalism within social work. Other radical approaches have continued this critique and the development of ideas to deprofessionalise social work and welfare work. The 'murri way' encompasses many aspects of a deprofessionalised approach and provides another perspective to this approach for non-indigenous workers. The 'murri way' is strongly based in the lessons of helping in ordinary life and a 'needs of one's neighbour' approach (Ife

1995). In a deprofessionalised approach, friendship, yarning, recognition of your common humanity with the client, sharing of stories, sharing of self, including spirituality and humour, are recognised and valued techniques. A relationship characterised in this form works with power and equality in a more complex way than the present approaches within social and welfare work.

'Resourceful friend'

Throughout this project workers emphasised the necessity of being friendly and informal in their relationship with the other person. In this context the role of the worker is akin to that described by Holman (1995) – the 'resourceful friend'. Holman (1995) advocates an approach in work with young people that cultivates a relationship between an older person and the younger person. The older person brings '...concern, stability, integrity and certain skills in order to help the (young person)' (1995:176).

The 'resourceful friend' is part of the person's community and provides long term support. Friendship work is not defined by hours of employment, bureaucratic processes and other such organisational factors. It responds to the needs of the person and may involve them phoning or visiting the worker at home, sharing aspects of the worker's life and a long-term commitment to sustain the friendship. This has many similarities to the style of helping provided by Aboriginal and Islander workers within this project who take on various roles like going to court with the family, ensuring the young person gets to school, or caring for a child for a period. These roles are carried out in relation to a specific need for the person.

10.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Helping Discourse in Social Welfare Curriculum in the 21st century

The helping approaches of indigenous workers in North Queensland poses some significant challenges to the principles and ethics of social welfare curriculum in the 21st century. Furthermore, if the Social Work and Welfare professions are to operationalise their avowed commitment to the process of Reconciliation, then indigenous perspectives should be centre stage in the teaching of practice theory and evaluation and revision of ethics.

In this regard, however, the task will not be easy, given that there are:

- significant differences between Torres Strait Island and North Queensland Aboriginal workers;
- significant differences and complexities within North Queensland Aborigines' helping styles according to gender, status and position; and
- further differences between North Queensland Aborigines and those in other parts of Australia, between urban, rural and remote locations.

This complexity makes the evolution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping discourse in curriculum extremely challenging, but it is one that should not be avoided if we are at all serious about making a professional contribution to the Reconciliation process.

This project and others are the beginning of a process of Indigenisation and authentisation of Social Work and Welfare practice theories, principles and ethics. Indigenisation of Social Work and Welfare courses will mean that important ideas within these fields will be altered to make them appropriate to local conditions. Authentisation will also occur with local ideas being '...developed in association with imported theories to form ...new structures of ideas' (Payne 1991:7). Through this process multiple

theories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social welfare practice will emerge in the next century.

Given that much of the writing of social work derives from the western cultural frame which contrasts strongly with the 'Murri Way' in North Queensland, the development of an indigenised approach will also be dependent on theories imported from other indigenous groups and eastern cultures. Radical approaches provide some points of common dialogue between an indigenised curriculum and western approaches. Basic principles for developing the dialogue include a recognition of common good and recognition of humanity. Other macro influences on the indigenisation of social work and welfare curriculum in the 21st century will include the reconciliation process, social justice and citizenship.

Indigenising the curriculum

Teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practice tends to be marginalised and positioned as an add-on in curriculum, if it is represented at all. Spry argues that 'any development of a curricula of Indigenous studies must be embedded in an acceptance and understanding of the "difference" between Indigenous and non Indigenous cultures, and that this difference needs to be identified, drawn out and taught' (Spry 1996a:9).

Historically, white, western, masculine and middle class ways have been dominant in social welfare curriculum. The 'Murri way' in this context is absent. More recently indigenous ways have been accepted as different as long as they do not challenge the mainstream approach. They are 'other'. 'Yet while many educational institutions claim to tolerate and even celebrate difference, difference continues to be silenced and the "norm" reproduced' (Spry 1996:10).

We would argue that to indigenise social welfare curriculum, cultural difference must be viewed '...as a political struggle for representation. ...(This requires a revaluation) of previously denigrated images and representations of marginalised groups' (Spry 1996a:10).

A primary issue in the indigenisation of curriculum is who is doing the speaking, where this speaking occurs in the curriculum, what is said and how it is said. These questions can only be

addressed by ensuring ‘...Indigenous people have access to the procedures to construct curricula that serves the interest of their communities’ (Spry 1996a:11). Current ideology and practices in curriculum must be questioned and relinquished to enable the indigenisation of social welfare curriculum. For example in discussions in social welfare courses students are asked to explore personal experiences, attitudes and beliefs. It is not acknowledged that these are already ‘...politically and selectively situated; so that their knowledge can be gauged, debated or reconstructed in terms of what is valid for the topic and its subsequent investigation’ (Nakata & Muspratt 1994:231).

Indigenising curriculum goes further than installing new content. Questions asked in relation to Aboriginal children in classrooms are worthy of exploration for social work and welfare curriculum. Review must include

...an analysis of the production of (social welfare) texts and knowledges as an historically specific practice, an analysis of the teacher’s role as agent for the continuation of that process, and an analysis of the central organising device that ensures that learning progresses according to Western traditions (Nakata & Muspratt 1994: 238).

An Indigenised curriculum will value Aboriginal and Islander and other marginal groups cultural resources and material experiences (Nakata & Muspratt 1994).

Beginning the dialogue

Recognition of common good

Social work helping has been developed on a set of instrumental and marked assumptions about human beings and nature which precluded the recognition of common good. During the 1980s there has been an increasing critique of these assumptions by humanitarians, environmentalists, women and other minorities who have presented visions of societies that are more respectful of human individuals, nature and communities (Cox 1995; Ife 1995; Rees & Rodley 1995). These visions strive for the recognition of all people and in some cases the recognition of humanity in nature that ensures dignity for all.

Amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities recognition of people and nature has been part of their spirituality

and social hierarchy which provided a basis for honour and respect. While this project shows that the utilisation of this form of recognition in the 'Murri Way' varies between workers and between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, it would still appear to be a strongly held value by many workers. This ensures an identification with the other person and a recognition of their identity.

The principle of common good reflects '... values not simply to individuals collectively, but to whole communities cohesively,...fosters a shared bond among individuals (of friendship) and ...presupposes established relations of shared identity and tangible bonds of community' (Simons 1995:283). Simons (1995) argues that common good is a precondition to active participation in public affairs.

A strong sense of common good within our society would seem to be necessary to the reconciliation process and the recovery of the humanity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and their recognition and identity within Australian society.

Recognition of humanity

Humanity is an idea that has had violent implications for indigenous people in that they have been outside of humanity, closer to nature and therefore lesser than a human being. Likewise, humanitarian approaches with individualistic focuses within social and welfare work have been shown to contrast strongly with the 'Murri Way'. More recently, humanity is being used in universal terms in relation to reconciliation between races (Rees 1995). Clearly, humanity in this form is of little relevance for the Indigenising of social welfare curriculum.

Humanity, in the sense of interdependence between people and nature, is a notion that has parallels with the spiritual and organic recognition given to the relationship between people and nature by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This principle underpins the bond between people and between people and place, and encourages a concern for the welfare of the family, group or community. When social and welfare work begins to talk about humanity in these terms then there is a place for dialogue and understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous workers.

Reconciliation

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has been directed to develop a united vision for this country by the year 2001. In the late 90s the 'reconciliation' process is tenuous in its form with national attention on the emotive and difficult legal matters of land ownership. However, as a continuation of the 'treaty' debate and the difficult issue of the relationship between contemporary Australian society and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is unlikely to disappear as part of the policy agenda.

'The (reconciliation) Council considers it axiomatic that the fundamentally accepted human right of freedom of speech in Australian society underpins the continuing right of indigenous peoples to advocate their support for indigenous self-determination and sovereignty if they so choose' (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1995:39).

Reconciliation is a key component in the development of a socially cohesive society in Australia. This will require the recognition of our common humanity, acceptance of diversity and rejection of gross inequalities (Cox 1995).

In terms of the indigenisation of social and welfare work, attention to Reconciliation and its principles will remain part of the discourse. The principles of Reconciliation provide guidelines for respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping approaches in social and welfare work. The process of reconciliation also provides the opportunity for dialogue and action about the key issues that require attention within the curricula and the scope for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping processes to be adopted more generally in the helping field.

Social justice

Social justice is one of those broadly defined terms within the discourse of social and welfare policy and practice that is glibly used and difficult to implement. However, reconciliation has little future without implementation of the Commonwealth's Social Justice strategy for indigenous Australians to eliminate the wide disparities between their living standards and that of the wider community.

Mick Dodson has described social justice from an indigenous perspective:

Social Justice must always be considered from a perspective which is grounded in the daily lives of indigenous Australians. Social Justice is what faces you in

the morning. It is awakening in a house with an adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to a school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and appreciation of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination (1995:22).

In 1995 (13-14) ATSIC recommended the adoption of a set of Principles for Indigenous Social Justice as the foundation for government relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Principles such as these should remain part of the discourse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping until they are adopted and implemented in policy, service delivery and practice.

These principles require the recognition and empowerment of indigenous Australians for example in the constitution, the structure of government, in terms of compensation, agreements with the wider community, economic development of communities and valuing the cultural integrity and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1995). It is a concept of social justice '...that is built on respect for diversity and recognition of our common humanity' (Cox 1995:71). Through inclusion rather than exclusion a sense of common good, necessary for social cohesion, is built.

The attention given to social justice in the future will shape the discourse that emerges in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping. If Australian society continues to deny these basic human rights, it will be difficult to call ourselves a civilised society and the style of practice will be informed by these injustices.

Citizenship

The final idea we want to consider as having a place in the development of indigenous helping in social and welfare work is citizenship. The rights and obligations of citizenship are a strong part of the current discourse on reconciliation and social justice for indigenous Australians. Citizenship means people '...are owed respect for their rights and have certain guaranteed freedoms' on which they are able to act and effect their purposes (Simons 1995:280). It is a concept that is integral to any discussion of reconciliation, recognition of common good, mutuality and civil society.

For indigenous Australians any willing identification with the polis as citizens will require '...a sense that the political institutions in which they live are an expression of themselves' (Simons 1995:282). This will require laws and conditions that reflect them as people to enable a common identification with others. For Cox (1995) it is our relationships and this ability to identify commonly which constitute society rather than our individuality.

The ideas that we have explored in this chapter that can contribute to the authentisation of the 'Murri Way' in education, training and practice are not an exhaustive list. They form a beginning basis for dialogue in the process of indigenising social and welfare practice.

Conclusion

This project set out to explore with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, perceptions of their helping styles with their own people and the type of help they provide in a social welfare context. In particular, we have identified the helping process used within their own cultural communities and the cultural aspects they consider important to their helping approach. We have also considered the differences and similarities of this approach to that of non-indigenous approaches. In this process we have highlighted important aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island helping and its implications for social welfare training.

Within the 'Murri Way' there are significant differences that emerged between workers that highlight the complexity of helping amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers. We have identified an approach to helping that draws strongly from the individual's cultural and life experience. It suggests that social and welfare work education and training needs to consider approaches that will enhance and support these qualities in terms of training good helpers.

This project has only examined one side of the helping interaction – that of the perception of the indigenous worker. Further development of appropriate approaches for Aboriginal and Islander workers could occur through an exploration of client perceptions of their encounters with Aboriginal and Islander workers. This would provide further information on what is valued by the client in the helping process used by indigenous workers.

In terms of the significant differences amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers' styles we have only made some tentative conclusions. We would suggest that these areas are worthy of further exploration in terms of understanding the complexity of the 'Murri Way'.

Clearly, though, there is an indigenous approach to social welfare practice that needs to shape social and welfare work curricula. The complexity of this approach suggests that indigenisation of social and welfare work curricula requires more than an add on, piece meal approach that stops at cultural sensitivity in practice. This descriptor approach confines indigenous social welfare practice to the margins as the other – always in the position of difference to the dominant discourse – 'the other'. It prohibits an understanding of the 'holistic' nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping. A more effective approach requires the social and welfare work profession in Australia to confront and deconstruct the 'whiteness' of the dominant discourse in social welfare, if indigenous social welfare practice is to exist alongside rather than continue to be spoken about, for or not at all. It involves the very practical issues of control, resources and strategic alliances with indigenous academics and practitioners 'with a commitment to serving their interests' (Spry 1996:5). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to helping must be respected for their quality and scholarship rather than for their difference (du Cille 1994). Only then will social welfare curriculum be able to successfully address the complexity of being a black worker and provide more effective training of non-indigenous workers. Indigenising social welfare curriculum will assist in and strengthen the work being undertaken in rethinking social work and welfare practice.

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Appendix A

Aboriginal Terms of Reference

These terms of references were negotiated with members of the advisory group and the Centre for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander Participation, Research and Development at James Cook University.

1. The Project team seeks to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to:
 - (a) identify their special knowledge and skill relevant to helping in social welfare; and
 - (b) make this special knowledge and skill more widely available to indigenous Australians and the wider community.
2. An advisory group comprised of members of the Aboriginal and Islander community will be formed. The Project team is accountable to the advisory group and the Aboriginal and Islander community in all aspects and stages of the project.
3. That all information gathered during the course of the project remains the property of the Aboriginal and Islander community.
4. That correctness of the participants' input will be safeguarded in returning the content of each interview to the participant for their comment.
5. That training of indigenous research assistants will occur through the appointment of dual research assistants to work as a team in each interview and the provision of a short training program in research processes and techniques.
6. Ownership of special knowledge will be safeguarded by participants being asked if they wish to be identified in the report.
7. Co-authorship is addressed by the identification of participants names in the project report.

Appendix B

A Framework for Establishing Aboriginal Terms of Reference

This framework has been taken from the draft document on processes and ethics in Aboriginal research produced by the Centre for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander Participation Research and Development, James Cook University.

Establishing the Terms of Reference within local settings or specific contexts is about:

First

Determining with the relevant Aboriginal group(s) the *priorities*, the *outcomes wanted* and the *processes* which are *appropriate* to achieve these in relation to a specific issue(s).

This requires:

- an understanding of the current situation of the group(s);
- an understanding of the historical, social and political factors which have contributed to that situation;
- the identification of appropriate *ways of working* in a given context;
- the identification of things that are *valued* at a local level and related to this;
- the identification of the things *that are wanted, and/or needed* in a specific context – together all these things comprise key aspects of Aboriginal culture;
- the identification of different issues, concerns, and priorities *within* or *between* the groups involved; and
- the *reconciliation*, if possible, of different priorities and needs within the group to achieve best outcome and process as agreed by them.

Second

- These determinations will provide the *standards* to guide or inform further actions and decisions within the group according to the constraints, needs and priorities of the situation;
- and the *standards* for judging whether desired outcomes and processes have been achieved as agreed upon by the group; and
- these standards may involve deciding what is *just and fair* as determined by the groups affected.

Third

- If other external bodies (e.g. funding bodies) are involved,
- it requires negotiating the terms and conditions with these external bodies which take account of all the elements that have been previously identified and agreed to with the relevant Aboriginal groups/agencies.

This book explores Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perceptions of their helping styles with their own people and the type of help they provide in the social welfare context. Through semi-structured depth interviews, the use of video as stimulus material and collaborative analysis with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, the book identifies the helping process within their own cultural communities and in particular the cultural aspects of their helping approach. In the course of this project active collaboration has occurred between indigenous and non-indigenous people in methodological and ethical processes that reflected as much as possible a political position of indigenous control of the project in relation to problem definition, choice of research methods, data analysis and use of findings.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Robyn Lynn is a lecturer in the School of Social Work and Community Welfare, James Cook University, Cairns campus. She has a professional background in community work and cross-cultural practice.

Ros Thorpe is Professor of Social Work and Community Welfare at James Cook University, Townsville campus. Her areas of interest include gender studies, family support and child welfare, indigenous and other non-western approaches to social welfare practice, community work and environmental issues.

Debra Miles is a lecturer in the Department of Social Work at the Northern Territory University, Darwin. She has a professional background in working with women and people with disabilities in the context of government departments where she has observed first-hand the structural and institutional oppression faced by both groups.

Christine Cutts is a Torres Strait Islander who has taught in the Aboriginal Health Worker Programme at Cairns TAFE. She has a professional background in community work.

Linda Ford is an Aboriginal, working in Protective Services at the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, Townsville. She has a professional background in child welfare.

Anne Butcher is a senior resource officer in the Community Services Development and Planning Division at the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, Mackay.



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