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The link between Indigenous culture and wellbeing: Qualitative evidence for Australian Aboriginal peoples¹

by

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ABSTRACT

Evidence from both the international and Australian literature suggests that the wellbeing of Indigenous people is enhanced when they maintain their ‘traditional’ culture. This paper uses qualitative data made available from the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children to explore this relationship in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Specifically, responses to two open-ended questions “What is it about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture that will help your child to grow up strong?” and “Apart from health and happiness, what do you want for your child?” are analysed using Leximancer, revealing a number of key themes from the responses. In relation to the first question, culture is the dominant theme, while the other themes to emerge appear to relate to cultural identity, cultural pride, understanding of culture and a sense of belonging. In relation to the question on what parents want for their children, seventeen themes emerged which we interpret as reflecting a balance of desires for success in mainstream society (including education and success) and in their ‘traditional’ culture (being strong, to have a close relationship with their family, to be whoever their children want to be). The responses to these two questions highlight that Aboriginal parents place great importance upon education, but also upon their child maintaining and learning about aspects of their culture for identity development, upon the positive experience of the traditional culture and the significance of support from the community to which they belong. These are seen as preconditions to the achievement of success through education.

1. INTRODUCTION

For individuals from minority Indigenous populations, a small but growing body of empirical evidence points to a range of beneficial impacts associated with maintaining a strong affinity with their traditional cultures. Most of these studies derive from North America and are focused on outcomes for youth. However, positive associations with engagement with traditional culture have been found in several studies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and for Indigenous peoples in other countries outside North America.

This research is very much in a formative stage in terms of both theory and empirical analyses. Greater attachment to, or engagement with, traditional culture is seen to create a stronger sense of self-identity, promote resilience and positive sense of community, but there is no clear consensus on the causal mechanisms through which culture enhances outcomes. Nor is there definitive empirical evidence that such a causal relationship exists. For a variety of reasons, it is not a field of endeavour that lends itself to methodologies such as randomised trials that can eliminate the potential challenges of selection bias, omitted variable bias, or endogeneity driving the observed relationships. The picture is even murkier with respect to the specific contexts of the traditional cultures of Australian Indigenous peoples.

The aim of this paper is to offer a different perspective on the links between culture and wellbeing and the potential impact this relationship has on the healthy development of Indigenous children into adults through the analysis of a unique and large set of qualitative data. As part of the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC), the parents (or carers) of survey children were directly asked “What is it about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture that will help the study child grow up strong?” and “Apart from health and happiness what do you want for the study child?”. Their answers were recorded verbatim. These open ended responses are analysed using the Leximancer text-analysis software. The analysis highlights the emphasis that Indigenous Australians place on cultural aspects for healthy development into adults and their desires for the healthy development of their children.

The next section provides a review of the literature investigating the role of ‘enculturation’, and its relationship to self-identity, resilience and sense of community, in shaping outcomes for Indigenous peoples. This is followed by a brief description of the LSIC and the Leximancer text-analytic tool. A descriptive summary of the concepts and themes arising from the analysis is then provided, followed by a more interpretive discussion of the results and some tentative conclusions.

2. EXISTING LITERATURE

The word ‘culture’ carries many different connotations, and no one definition will adequately reflect all these meanings. In this paper the term is used in the specific context of traditional Indigenous cultures and their persistence within a ‘mainstream’ culture. The sense in which the term ‘culture’ is meant here is well encapsulated in the definition of culture offered by Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales (2006: 2) as ‘...those customary beliefs and values that ethnic, religious, and social groups transmit fairly unchanged from generation to generation’ combined with the added qualification, due to Throsby (2001), that these beliefs, customs and values are likely to be characterised by unique symbols, text and language that in themselves play a role in distinguishing the groups’ distinctive identities. The term ‘traditional’ is used to mean a distinctive Indigenous culture that has its roots in the peoples’ historical customs, practices and experiences. It must be acknowledged that such cultures evolve over time and as such are likely to be far removed from the actual customs and practices of their ancestors.

A number of studies have presented evidence that individuals from such minorities achieve better life outcomes if they maintain a stronger affinity with their traditional culture. Attempts at summarising this literature can be found in Wexler (2009) and Fleming and Ledogar (2008), both of which draw primarily on studies of North American populations. Fleming and Ledogar in fact review studies relating to ‘Indigenous spirituality’, but deem this concept of spirituality to be ‘... closely bound up with culture and ways of living in Indigenous communities’ (2008: 47). The main hypotheses tested are that cultural affinity or engagement acts as a protective factor against the problems of trauma associated with historical loss, discrimination, suicide or suicide ideation, and substance abuse (notably alcohol abuse) that beset many Indigenous communities and populations. The presence of interactive effects between cultural affinity and factors such

as self-esteem and self-efficacy has also been investigated in several studies, as has school achievement as a further outcome variable.

Some key themes that arise in testing and explaining such relationships are enculturation, self-identity (or cultural identity), resilience and sense of community. Zimmerman, Ramirez, Washienko, Walter and Dyer (1994: 199) define enculturation as ‘... the process by which individuals learn about and identify with their traditional ethnic culture’ and ‘... an affirmation of one’s heritage rather than a focus on fitting into the majority culture’. Enculturation contrasts with acculturation, ‘a process by which an ethnic minority assimilates to the majority culture’ (Zimmerman *et al.*, 1994: 201). Resilience relates to an individual’s or community’s capacity for ‘positive adaptation despite adversity’ (Fleming and Ledogar, 2008: 49). Sense of community refers to ‘...the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them [and] the feeling that one is a part of a larger dependable and stable structure’ (Sarason, 1974: 157).

In Zimmerman *et al.*’s study, a factor analysis of data from a small survey of Native American youth, is used to identify cultural affinity (pride and interest in traditional culture), family activities and Native American identity as components of enculturation. Some evidence is found that cultural affinity promotes self-esteem; and that cultural identity combined with high self-esteem is a protective factor against alcohol and substance use, while cultural identity combined with low self-esteem is associated with higher risk of alcohol and substance abuse.

Acculturation according to Zimmerman *et al.* (1994), or what Berry (1986, 1992, 1997) terms assimilation, is associated with intermediate levels of psychological stress. The greatest acculturative stress can be found among those who are marginalised. Marginalisation occurs when ‘there is little possibility of or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination)’ (Berry, 1997: 9). In Berry’s (1970) early work, experiences of marginalisation were found to be present in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia. An important consideration in this research is to examine whether such experiences persist among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Later studies of Native American Indians found evidence that enculturation guards against alcoholism among parents (Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt and Adams, 2004) and suicide ideation among adolescents (Yoder, Whitbeck, Hoyt and LaFromboise, 2006), and promotes school success (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben and Lafromboise, 2001). Enculturation, it is argued, provides resilience by preventing individuals from internalising stress associated with historical loss and trauma. Bals, Lene Turi, Skre and Kvernmo (2011) also draw upon the enculturation hypothesis in a study of Indigenous youth in Arctic Norway. They find enculturation factors, notably native language competence and participation in cultural activities, to be associated with decreased mental health problems, attributable mainly to fewer internalising symptoms of anxiety and

depression. Some evidence of a significant role for interaction effects between self-efficacy and enculturation factors was also apparent.

Perhaps the most fully developed theory and important evidence on the effect of culture comes from the excellent work of developmental psychologist Professor Michael Chandler and colleagues who identify a critical intermediary role of self-identity. While Chandler's most relevant work here (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol and Hallett, 2003) relates to suicide rates among Canadian youth, the findings suggest a much more general, or intrinsic, role of a sense of persistence of the self in the psychological wellbeing of human kind, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, and has its parallels at the community level. It is not possible here to do justice to this body of research and the philosophy underpinning it. Briefly, it studies the ways in which individuals deal with the paradox of facing inevitable change through time and yet also persisting as the same person through time. Working with Canadian youth, Chandler *et al.*, (2003) classified the strategies young people employ to understand themselves as being the same individual through time. At an individual level, they find a stark inverse relationship between suicide risk and the strength or sophistication of young people's understanding of their self-persistence.

When they began working specifically with Canadian Aboriginal youth they found the same result, albeit with Aboriginal youth adopting different 'narrative' interpretations of their persistence as the same person through time. They argue that suicide rates are higher among Aboriginal youth because they are at greater risk of losing '... the thread that tethers together their past, present and future ...' (2003: 2) and of losing a sense of control over their future outcomes. Indigenous cultures in Canada, as elsewhere, have suffered the undermining of their cultural norms and values, face an uncertain future and have lost empowerment over that future. As Chandler *et al.*, hypothesise '...continuity problems that work to undermine commitments to the future at all of these levels are jointly at work, not just in the lives of individual young persons, but at the level of whole cultures' (2003: 63).

This hypothesis is borne out in community level data showing that Aboriginal communities in British Columbia in which there is evidence of greater commitment to cultural continuity - in preserving a shared past and creating a collective future - have significantly lower rates of youth suicide. The clear implication is that cultural continuity at the community level helps young members of that community to develop a stronger sense of persistence of their self-identity through time. In later work, Hallett, Chandler and Lalonde (2007) find the proportion of people who are fluent in an Indigenous language to be a strong marker of cultural persistence within communities and a strong (inverse) predictor of youth suicide rates.

For Australia, evidence from the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey also found benefits in the form of lower risks of emotional or behavioural difficulties for children whose carers were more fluent in an Aboriginal language (Zubrick *et al.*, 2005: 121). Citing Chandler and Lalonde's research, that report identifies a capacity for personal identity and autonomy and the effective functioning of communities among the

key factors for improving social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Zubrick *et al.*, 2005: Chapter 8). Colquhoun (2005) describes forming cohesive communities as one way cultural groups protect themselves from trauma. Sonn and Fischer (1998) described this type of adaptation as a way to protect and maintain the traditional culture. One major component of this community level adaptation is a psychological sense of community. Bishop, Colquhoun and Johnson (2006) conducted semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal people in North West of Western Australia and found kinship structure, language groups and skin groups defined the Aboriginal social structure, and education and knowledge were key themes associated with maintenance of a sense of community.

Using data from the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSISS), Dockery (2009, 2010) finds that stronger attachment to traditional culture is associated with better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians on a range of 'mainstream' indicators: self-assessed health, educational attainment, employment status, the probability of having been arrested and alcohol abuse. His measure of cultural attachment was based on a single score derived from a factor analysis of the survey questions relating to culture, and heavily weighted toward participation in cultural events. In a follow-up study based on the 2008 NATSISS, separate factors relating to participation in cultural activities, cultural-identity, language use and engagement in traditional activities were constructed (Dockery, 2011). Cultural participation and identity were again found to have positive associations with mainstream outcomes, while speaking an Indigenous language was associated with inferior outcomes for education and employment. Importantly, with the 2008 NATSISS data, it was possible to broaden the outcome variables to show positive associations between participation, identity and Indigenous language use and subjective wellbeing (happiness and mental health). In contrast, stronger identity was found to be associated with a greater incidence of psychological stress, a result that could be attributed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in non-remote areas being more likely to experience feelings of discrimination. However, no evidence of a protective effect of stronger cultural identity against internalising the effects of perceived discrimination was identified (Dockery, 2011: 16).

Wexler's (2009: 267) claim that '... studies have consistently found robust correlations between positive affiliation and engagement with their culture and Indigenous young people's well-being and resilience' probably overstates the strength of the empirical evidence. Results have been more mixed and subject to a number of limitations (see Fleming and Ledogar 2008, Bals *et al.*, 2011); especially when one takes into account a likely publication bias against studies that find no significant relationship. No relevant studies of which we are aware have employed longitudinal or experimental designs required to establish causal relationships. The work of Chandler and colleagues, which employs well constructed control groups and is confirmed through both individual and epidemiological (community level) studies, appears the most rigorous from a methodological perspective. Fleming and Ledogar are more circumspect in saying 'Evidence is accumulating in favour of resilience from elements of a broad concept that

includes cultural identity, participation in traditional activities, and ‘spirituality’ (2008: 61).

There is also a need for further development of theoretical frameworks in which to place empirical findings on links between the various dimensions of ‘culture’, a range of outcome variables and the different contexts in which these are examined, such as by gender and within Indigenous communities as opposed to urban settings. To that end, the following analysis takes a totally different approach to that of developing or selecting measures of enculturation and outcome measures *a priori* and investigating the associations between them. Instead, we attempt to interpret what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have said when asked directly how their culture can help their children to grow up and what it is they want for their children.

3. DATA AND METHOD

The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC), also known as ‘Footprints in Time’ is an initiative of the Commonwealth Government of Australia, with the aim of providing high quality quantitative and qualitative data that can:

- be used to provide a better insight into how a child’s early years affect their development, and
- be drawn upon to help close the gap in life circumstances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (FaHCSIA, 2009: 6)

The sample was drawn from 11 different sites around Australia, designed to ‘... cover the range of socio-economic and community environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children live’ and provide roughly equal representation of urban, regional and remote areas, among other criteria. The first wave interviews were conducted from April 2008 to February 2009 for around 150 children from each site. FaHCSIA estimate that this represents around 6 per cent of the total Indigenous population in each cohort (2009: 12).

In total, 1,687 study children and their families participated in the Wave 1 interviews. Interviews were conducted with the parent or carer ‘who knew the child best’. In addition to the survey questions, which collected a wide range of information on the household and family circumstances and the study child’s health and development in categorical form, responses to some qualitative (or open ended) questions were recorded. This included two questions of particular relevance to this analysis: ‘What is it about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture that will help [Study Child] to grow up strong?’ and ‘Apart from health and happiness what do you want for [Study Child]?’ A confidentialised file containing the free-text responses to these questions was provided to the researchers by the LSIC data team.

The text analytics software Leximancer was chosen as the tool to analyse the free-text data. As described by the software’s user manual, Leximancer extracts information from textual documents and displays it:

‘... by means of a conceptual map that provides a bird’s eye view of material representing the main concepts contained within the text as well as information about how they are related. Essentially, this map allows the user to view the conceptual structure of a body of text as well as perform a directed search of the documents. ... In this way, Leximancer provides a means of quantifying and displaying the conceptual structure of text and a means of using this information to explore interesting conceptual features (p. 4-5²)’.

The qualitative analysis of the comments provided by the participants in the study was conducted through Leximancer’s semantic mapping (Smith, 2003). This automated content analysis uses emergent clustering algorithms to discover and extract concepts from the text to generate a thematic map. These concepts are derived from an analysis of frequency, as well as a comparison of phrases and words with similar usage. The strength of this approach is the identification of co-location of phrases and words through clustering like-concepts. This analytical approach reduces the likelihood of introducing researcher assumptions and influences in the process and produces a “global context and significance of concepts” beyond “anecdotal evidence which may be atypical or erroneous” (Smith and Humphreys, 2006).

Leximancer has layered analysis in the text to identify super-ordinate concepts. These concepts are then clustered into themes. The level of abstraction of the themes can be varied to allow either detailed analysis through the concepts or an analysis of the most important themes.

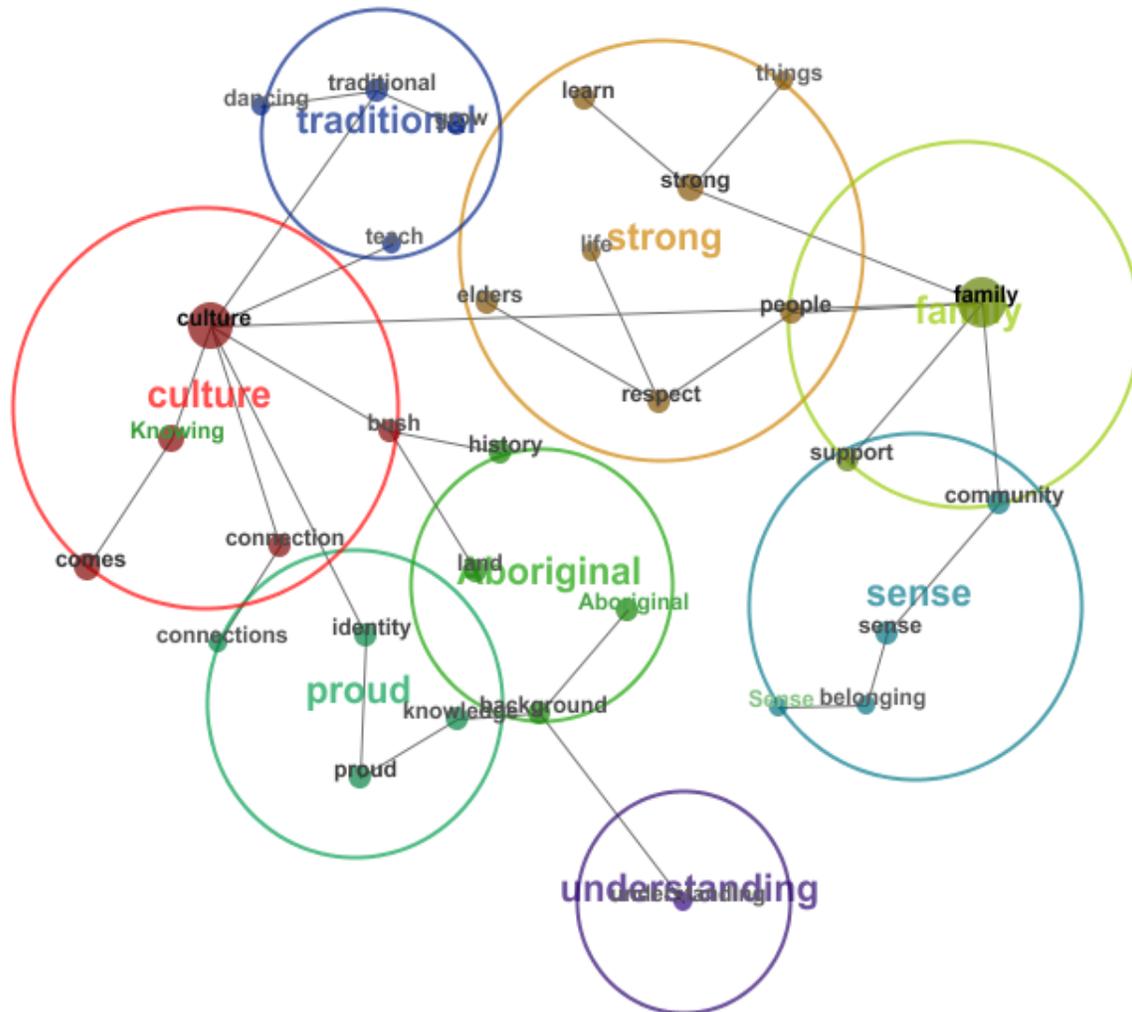
4. RESULTS

Cultural aspect of children’s futures

When asked what it is about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture that will help their child to grow up strong, parents’ most common responses were knowing about their cultural heritage, background and their country, being proud of their Indigenous culture, knowing their language and culture, knowledge, understanding and connection to the family and the community, strong identity, learning the stories about the elders, sense of belonging and pride. Leximancer clusters data into concepts and themes, the former being subordinate to the latter. The initial analysis provided a number of themes of varying importance. There were a total of eight themes and the theme of culture was most dominant. The remaining themes were strong, family, Aboriginal, proud, sense, traditional and understanding. These are depicted visually by the Concept map presented as Figure 1.

² Leximancer manual: From words to meaning to insight.

Figure 1 - Concept map of culture



Below we provide examples of the responses identified through the semantic analysis as contributing to each of these themes. Here, and throughout the paper, we present the responses as they appeared in the data file provided to us. We deliberately make no effort to ‘correct’ grammar, so that quotations should also represent a verbatim transcript of respondents’ comments and original turns of phrase so that we cannot in anyway distort their intended meanings. However, it is not possible for us to distinguish possible errors in the transcribing of the spoken responses to text.

Culture

Comments that defined this theme included: 'Being around family, knowing the culture', 'Singing and storytelling and link to country, knowing what is right and what is wrong', 'Having strong family ties, to know who he is and know where he comes from', 'Knowing all her family members, knowing where she comes from and where her family has been and who they are'. This affirmed the relationship between culture, country and family.

Strong

Strong included comments such as: 'Having strong female role models e.g., Grandmother, cousins, Aunties friends who are the backbone of the family', 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders have a strong group attitude and are family orientated, are very outdoors people and like to get out', 'Respect for yourself and family, get taught when younger you know it when your older', 'Knowing your culture makes you strong and learning traditional ways', 'She should be strong and be proud of her culture and know that she has a lot of family there for her', 'Strong family connection that was taught through and by my parents'. This illustrates strong family and cultural connections are important to parents.

Family

The theme family had comments such as: 'Connected with her family', 'Knowing family always be there to support you', 'Being down to earth, being who we are, close as one big family and working together', 'Everybody's involved all different ages, and family'. Connection to family is also highly regarded by parents.

Aboriginal

Another theme was being Aboriginal. This included comments such as: 'Teach them to be proud, just knowing the Aboriginal language and culture', 'Learning his culture and to respect it and not be ashamed because he is Aboriginal', 'I only found out myself about our Aboriginal background two years ago', 'He was smoked two times as a baby to make him strong, when he was a baby his dad and old people poked him in mouth with the beak of the [Aboriginal bird name] to make him talk'. This theme is about being Aboriginal and following the cultural traditions associated.

Proud

Proud had responses such as: 'I want to be proud of it', 'Proud of it, pride in his culture', 'Culture and who she is and being proud that she is Aboriginal', 'Being proud of who she is and close family connections and related to other'. Pride in being Aboriginal is identified as an important theme for Aboriginal children.

Sense

Sense had a number of examples: 'Connection to family and kinship ties, his sense of responsibility', 'Strong sense of family and community', 'Know who her mob is as this gives her a sense of belonging, sense of family', 'Sense of pride in who are and sense of survival'. A sense of belonging to the family and the community is highlighted by this theme.

Traditional

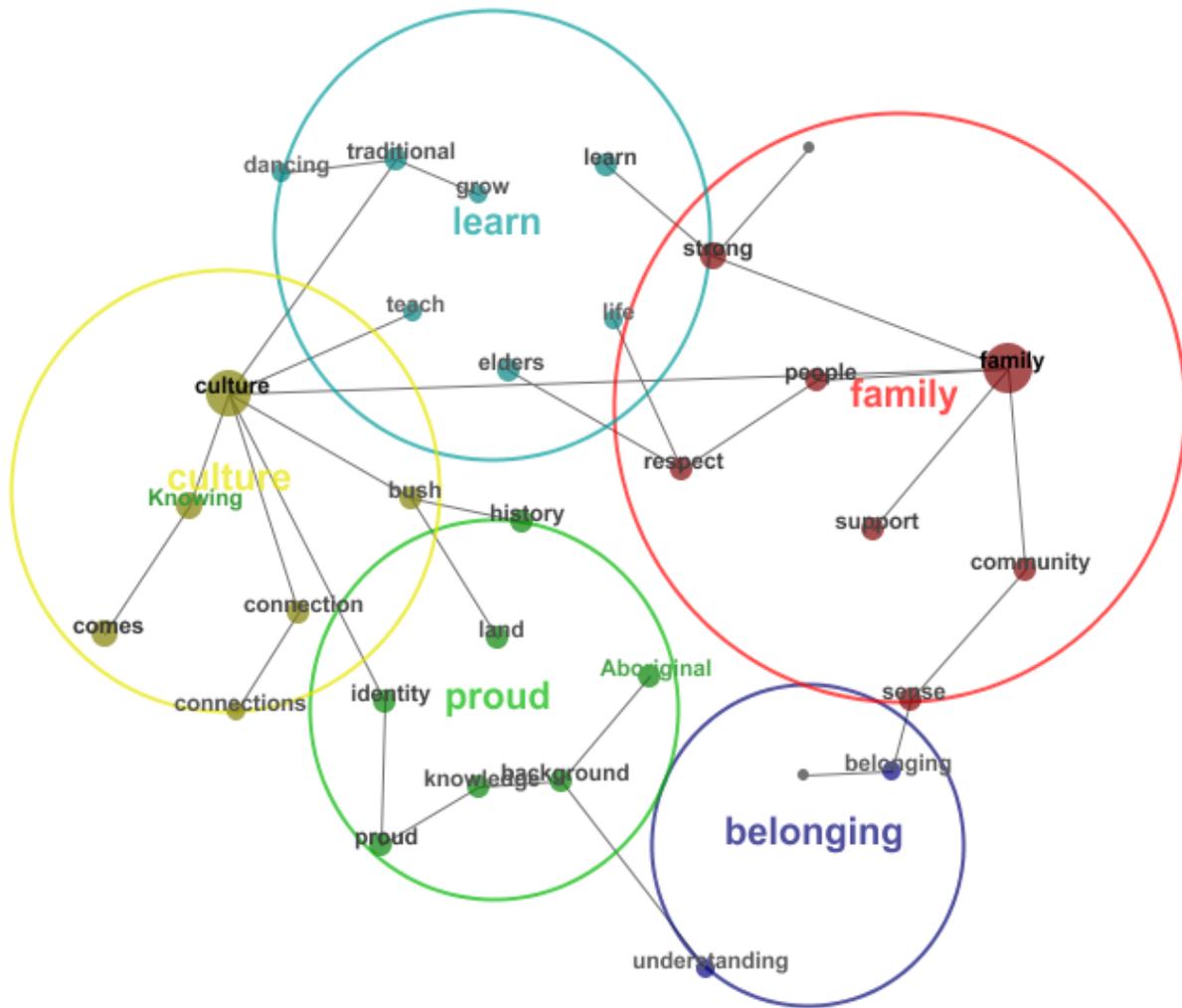
The responses which categorised this theme were: 'Have the freedom to talk to people, learning traditional culture.', 'For her to learn her traditional customs such as dancing, singing etc. This will help her grow up strong', 'Grandfather and uncle are traditional dancers and will teach him the same and he will learn from them'. Learning about the traditional culture is an important part of identity development.

Understanding

The final theme was understanding. This included parental responses such as: 'Help in music and creativity, be more understanding in the long run when he finds out what everything is all about', 'Knowing his past and knowing where his ancestors come from and to get an understanding', 'Connection with land, understanding of oneness to the land and family orientated'. Understanding of the culture describes this final theme.

When the number of themes is consolidated in the concept map (see Figure 2), five major cultural constructs emerged which participants saw as providing a source of strength for their children's future. These were family, culture, proud, belonging and learning. This highlighted which themes were most significant.

Figure 2 - Parsimonious mapping of culture

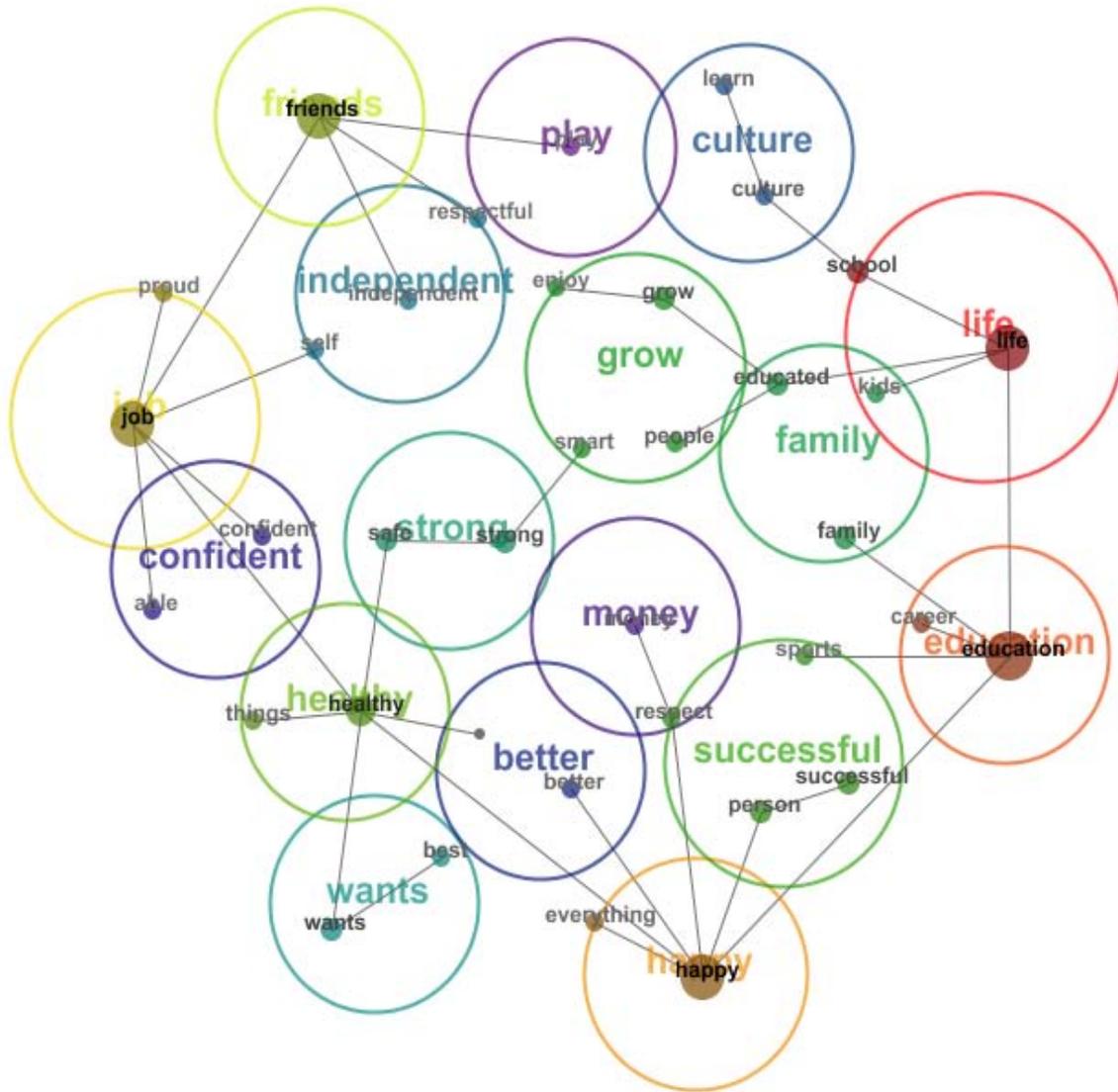


Wants for children's futures

When parents were asked what they want for their child, apart from health and happiness, their dominant responses were: have a good education, have a good career or job, be good at sports, do well at school, have lots of friends, be successful, have a better life and have kids, have time to play, be happy, healthy, confident, strong, have respect for others, learn about culture and support the family. Seventeen themes emerged from the Leximancer analysis from 1520 comment blocks. These are: life, education, happy, job, friends,

healthy, successful, grow, family, strong, wants, independent, culture, better, confident, money and play. The dominant theme was life.

Figure 3 - Concept map of wants



A synthesis of some of the responses underlying these themes is as follows:

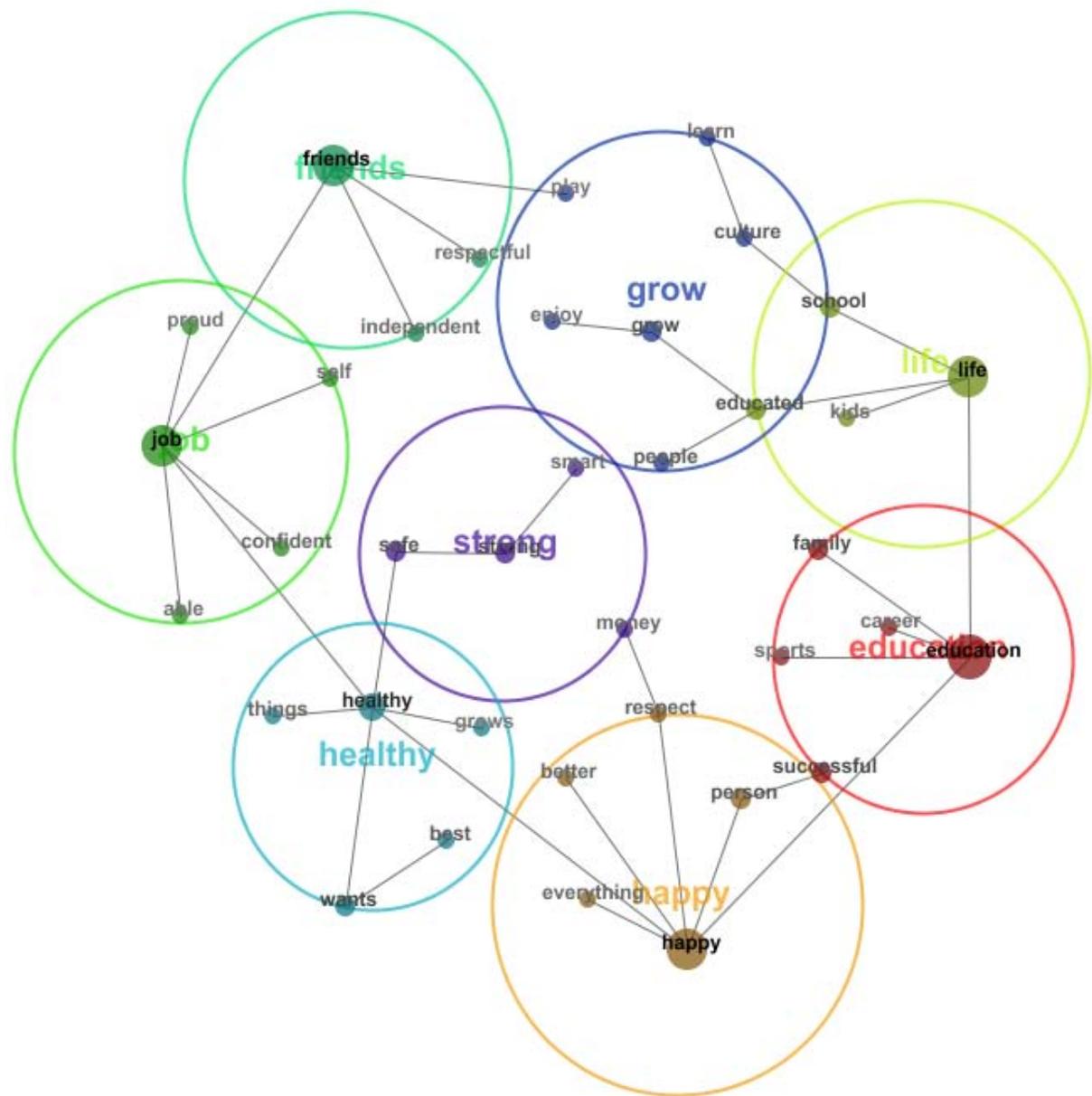
Theme	Comments and description
Life	<p>'That her teenage/early lifestyle is opposite to mine', 'Make sure she finishes school and doesn't end up in slump that we are in', 'Get a good education, get a good job', 'Like not just exist but make something of herself'.</p> <p>Parents want a better life for their children compared to theirs.</p>
Education	<p>'A good education and successful career', 'Not to have a financial burden and to pursue her dreams', 'Learn the skills for life in a supportive atmosphere'.</p> <p>Parents want their children to have a good education and succeed.</p>
Happy	<p>'Confident in themselves, have a goal as to where they want to be', 'Want him to have everything that kids have these days', 'To feel confident and to feel happy with himself'.</p> <p>Parents want their children to be happy and confident.</p>
Job	<p>'Have a good job, have lots of friends and be a balanced individual. Lots of love, can't go without love', 'Writing and speaking in English', 'To get a good education so he can get a good job'.</p> <p>Parents want their children to have a good job.</p>
Friends	<p>'Socially competent, culturally competent, economically independent - able to get by, be independent, but still connected', 'Being successful, to be sociable and well, good morals', 'Be healthy, and a good partner in life'.</p> <p>Parents want their children to have good relationships and be sociable.</p>
Healthy	<p>'Lead a happy life', 'To have a normal child independence, successful in whatever she does in life', 'Healthy and happy', 'Just to be healthy that is the main thing'.</p> <p>Parents want their children to be happy and healthy.</p>
Successful	<p>'Being successful', 'Be the best at what she chooses to do, regardless of financial gain', 'Have money-career before she has kids', 'Confidence, education, love, self-esteem, fun'.</p> <p>Parents want their children to be successful in whatever they do.</p>
Grow	<p>'Want him to grow up to know Jehovah and have a spiritual side', 'And not let other people tell him what to do with his life, to be honest, grow up and be his own person', 'To be well educated, think if well educated, and have good common sense and be respectful, will grow up to be a</p>

	<p>good person’, ‘Safe, enjoy life, grow up to be a responsible person, good education, good job’.</p> <p>Parents want their children to grow up and be a responsible and good person.</p>
Family	<p>‘To know his culture and family background’, ‘Healthy, considerate of people, be educated, be happy and know all her family’, ‘Want her have a nice family and husband if she wants it’.</p> <p>Parents want their children to know their family and to have one of their own.</p>
Strong	<p>‘Happy, healthy, a strong man. I want [boy’s name] to have a good stable start in life’, ‘To have a strong sense of appreciation for what she has and the world around her, to have faith in humanity, strong self-belief, have a faith, respect for others, to be safe, always knowing where her support is’.</p> <p>Parents want their children to be strong people.</p>
Wants	<p>‘Better childhood than I did’, ‘Do the best he can in whatever he wants to be’, ‘Want her to do what she wants to do to achieve her dreams, want her to be happy with and in tune with her family’.</p> <p>Parents desire their children to have and seek what they want in life.</p>
Independent	<p>‘To be independent and safe’, ‘be her own self, an individual...’, ‘Be confident’, ‘Grow and get a job to be independent and look after himself’.</p> <p>Parents want their children to be independent and safe.</p>
Culture	<p>‘To know his culture and family background’, ‘To have a good education and schooling, and learn about her culture from both sides’, ‘Comfortable with himself and who he is and to be proud of his culture’.</p> <p>Parents want their children to know and understand their culture.</p>
Better	<p>‘Wouldn’t mind him having a better life’, ‘That he gets a decent job, has a better life’, ‘A very good education for a better start in life. Be the best he can, good education, respect’.</p> <p>Parents want their children to have a better life than they had.</p>
Confident	<p>‘To be socially capable’, ‘Respectable, confident, good education, able to work for herself’, ‘Education, good health, confident’, ‘To feel confident and feel happy with himself’.</p> <p>Parents want their children to be confident.</p>
Money	<p>‘Hope to put money away for her for the future’, ‘Want her to have a nice family and husband if she wants it. Good job, money, enjoy life, doesn’t have kids too early’, ‘To support his mother when he’s older and</p>

	to be successful and have money!'. Parents want their children to have money to live well.
Play	'Play footy for Port Adelaide, good education and good job', 'Be a good person and be respectful towards other people, make sure she has..good work, play hard ethic', 'If she want to dance, play football, just be able to do what she wants to do'. Parents want their children to balance their lives with both play and work.

The distribution of the themes provides some cognitive mapping of the concepts. The concept links provide an insight into conceptual framing, in a sense, providing an insight into cognitive and conceptual frameworks and relationships. Education, personal success, money, being strong, having friends and family, want a better life than parents, be independent and confident were key linked themes. The suggestion here is that many of these concepts appear to reflect aspirations of success in, and hence integration with the mainstream culture, particularly education, money, independence and having a better life than the parents themselves. This could indicate either a desire on the part of the parents for their child to have such things, or a recognition that life will be very hard for their children if they resist the expectations of mainstream society.

Figure 4 - Parsimonious map of wants

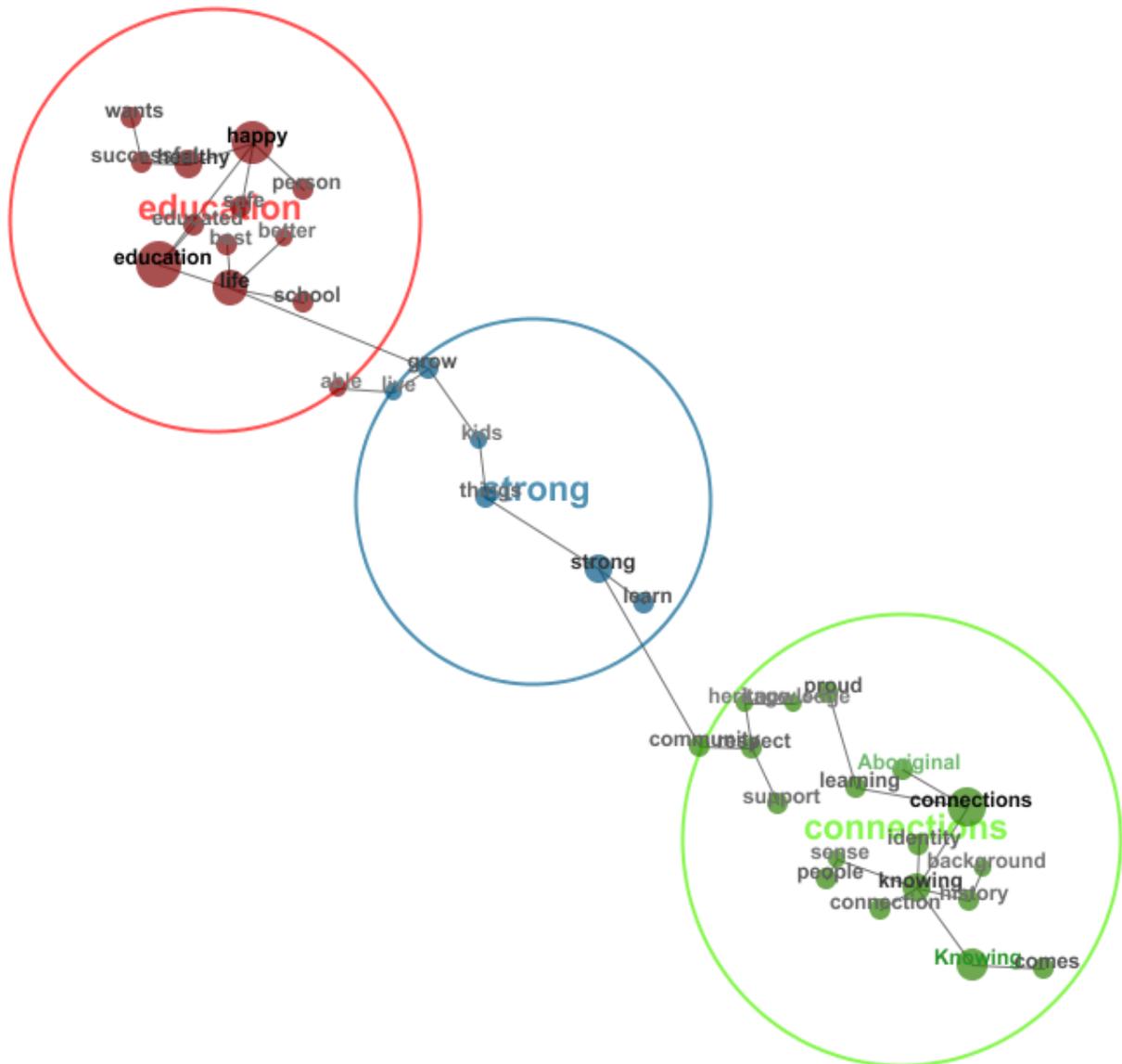


When the theme size is consolidated eight themes remained (see Figure 4). These were to have a good and successful life, a job, have friends, grow up strong, be happy and healthy, and have a good education. The paths between concepts are also shown in the concept map. An interesting feature is that the job theme in Figure 4 seems separate from education. Having a job maps to pride, confidence, 'able', self and is linked to friends and health. This appears to suggest that Aboriginal parents associate securing a job with a sense of self-efficacy. Quite separate to this, education, success, career and money are all linked. There also appears significant associations between healthy and strong, and between life, grow and education.

5. COMBINED LEXIMANCER ANALYSIS

The data for the two questions were combined to generate a set of concepts that reflected both the parents' wants for their children and aspects of the culture that will help their children grow up strong. The resulting concept map is shown in Figure 5. The combined questions resulted in three themes: education, connections and strong.

Figure 5 - Concept map of wants and culture



6. DISCUSSION

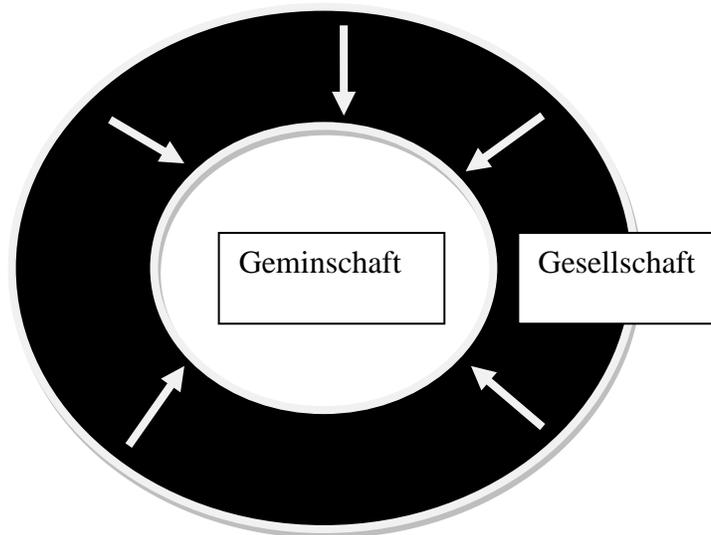
The standard approach in investigating the link between traditional culture and wellbeing is to take some measure of enculturation and test its association with various outcome measures. In contrast to this literature, we have investigated the qualitative responses given by Indigenous Australians when asked what it was about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture that will help their child to grow up strong. Initially eight key themes emerged: culture, strong, family, Aboriginal, proud, sense, traditional and understanding. Culture itself was found to be the most dominant theme. The cultural theme appears to relate to knowing their community identity and what it means to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. For instance, according to Green (2000) being Aboriginal involves having cultural identity which is tied to the land. This is further linked to a sense of community or home of Aboriginal people. How Aboriginal one feels is heavily influenced by their association with cultural community and aspects of culture itself.

The strong theme is an unusual one, but would appear to denote having a strong cultural identity. Family plays an important role in Aboriginal society. The family plays a key role in determining appropriate behaviour and cultural identity. It is closely linked to land and has important spiritual bonds for Aboriginal people (Bishop *et al.*, 2006). Being proud is another theme and relates to being proud of their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture. The theme sense focuses on the sense of belonging to community. The traditional and understanding themes relate to understanding of culture.

These relationships between family, knowing their culture, being proud, belonging to their culture and learning about their culture are highlighted when the number of themes is reduced in the concept map. These larger, more encompassing themes related to cultural maintenance, families and sense of being Indigenous and belonging. Interestingly, knowing and learning about the culture appears to be central to what it is about the culture that will make child grow up strong. Research on Aboriginal sense of community has indicated that cultural education plays an important part in the maintenance of Indigenous social and cultural factors. Education and knowledge of culture serves a vital function in the preservation and continuation of traditional aspects of the culture (Bishop, *et al.*, 2006). This appears to suggest that the family is important in establishing the specific Indigenous identity, but the maintenance of being Indigenous is enhanced by the wider concept of sense of community. Without this broader social concept the significance of a tribal identity has little to sustain it once it is removed from the localised area.

Psychological sense of community, according to Sarason (1974), is important for understanding human functioning and plays a key role in both personal and community wellbeing. We can understand a psychological sense of community as an experience of the individual in relationship to others. Psychological sense of community involves the development of self-identity and serves as an important protective factor or a source of resilience. Dudgeon, Garvey and Pickett (2000) described the need for Aboriginal people to build a sense of community when faced with a history of trauma and a breakdown of

culture and community. Tönnies (1957) describes the building of sense of community according two components: Gesellschaft (society) and Gemeinschaft (community). Gesellschaft 'as the groups with the set of more or less agreed upon rules and conventions which, if isolated, could have serious consequences for any individual within a social organisation' (Bishop *et al.*, 2006: 5-6). Whereas Gemeinschaft 'referred to groups with a commitment to a common good achieved through traditional ways and sense of obligation to work and participate for the community's wellbeing' (Bishop *et al.*, 2006: 6). Bishop *et al.*, (2006) found that kinship factors and cultural factors are central to understanding Gesellschaft or Aboriginal social structure, while Gemeinschaft or psychological sense of community can be understood or represented by education and knowledge - in this case understanding of the culture.

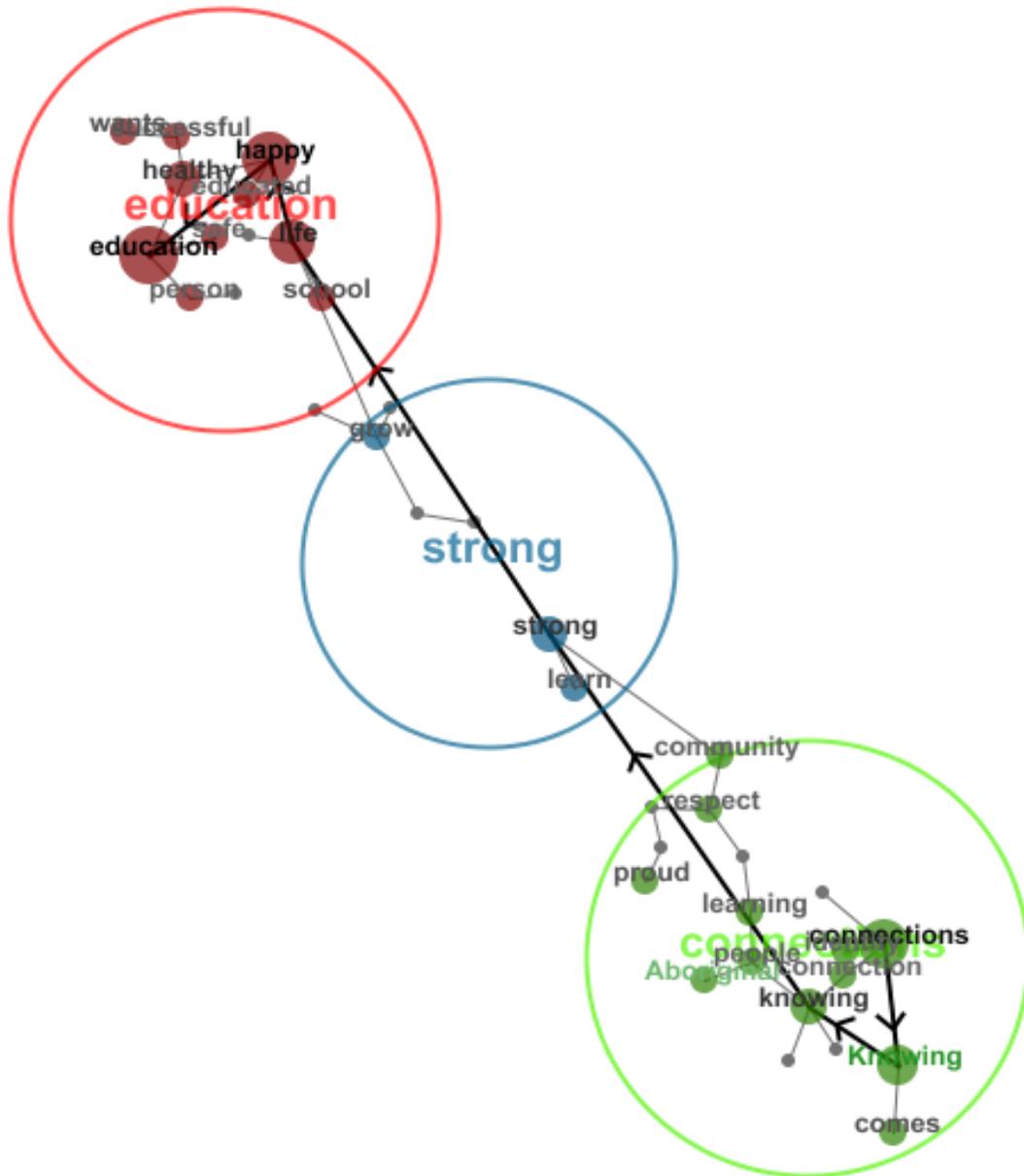


When parents were asked what they want for their child, apart from health and happiness, the Leximancer analysis revealed seventeen themes: life, education, happy, job, friends, healthy, successful, grow, family, strong, wants, independent, culture, better, confident, money and play. The dominant theme was life. The importance of a different life for their children from their own is regularly quoted. It is this aspect which parents can influence and it is central to their child's growth into a healthy adult. It is clear, however, that mainstream culture has influenced Aboriginal parents. An interesting feature about these themes is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents want, it seems, what parents of the mainstream culture want for their children. That is, for their children to have a good education, to be happy, to have a good life, be strong, to have a close relationship with their family, to be whoever their children want to be, to have children with their own mind and to be successful. When the theme size is reduced, eight themes remained: to have a good and successful life, a job, have friends, grow up strong, be healthy and happy, and have a good education. Zimmerman *et al.*, (1994) referred to the process of acculturation in which the minority culture assimilates to the majority culture. Berry also referred to this process as assimilation. Assimilation was associated with intermediate levels of acculturative stress. We in no way mean to suggest the results can be taken to

condone past policies of assimilation pursued through the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. However, what we can glean from the results is that many parents now want their children to integrate into the mainstream culture, while also knowing and understanding their own culture. According to Berry, adaptation to both the original culture and the mainstream culture is referred to as integration. It was seen as the most psychologically healthy outcome of acculturation. This difference by parents seeking to have their children understand and experience connections to their traditional culture (the themes of family and culture) in order to live and deal with mainstream society represents an important awareness on part of the parents of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as to how their children might survive better, by improving their relationship to mainstream society without losing touch with their own identity. Malin, Campbell and Agius (1996) recognized the importance of attaining this balance. This is highlighted by the dominant themes when the two questions are analysed together.

When the data for the two questions were combined to generate a set of concepts that reflected both the parents' wants for their children and aspects of the culture that will help their children grow up strong, the outcome indicates a polarisation of connection to family and the cultural community and the desires for the children's futures. The analysis of conceptual links is complemented through identification of knowledge pathways. These pathways show the linking logic of concepts from one concept to another within thematic space. The selection of knowledge pathways to portray was driven both by key concepts in the discussion and by the 'gaps' identified in the conceptual links. Knowledge pathways provide an insight into the logic behind the perceptions of those participating in this research. These knowledge pathways show the logic links between concepts and themes providing evidence for the development of policy for the well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. This indicates that though the links might be direct between the concepts within each thematic group, the pathways of logic are not as direct. When pathways are highlighted and the concepts and linkages shown (Figure 6), it can be seen that there is no direct link between the themes of education and connections. Figure 6 suggests that knowing and understanding culture and understanding the importance of cultural and community connections will make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children strong and able to survive in the mainstream culture through education. A cautious note from Bishop *et al.*, (2006) suggests the impact of trauma has forced this process of learning to be sped up, leading to burnout and possibly suicide.

Figure 6 - Concept linkages and overlaid knowledge pathways between the concept 'connections' and the concept 'education'



Knowledge Pathway: Connections to education

Connections

➔ Knowing

- “being non-judgemental of other strength in family ties, passing of stories and remembering them and passing them on”
- “Having to learn to stand her own ground”

➔ knowing

- “knowing his culture”
- “Its will be good to know where her mother’s country and where she comes from”

➔ Strong

- “Be a leader”
- “independent and strong, financially secure”

➔ Life

- “good education, be into sports not into drugs, have a good job, look after his family”
- “Good education, good job not just to be a mum be someone”

➔ Happy

- “To have a good education and get a good job”
- “Learn her culture, know her family and where she comes from, to get a good education and get a good job”



Education

These tensions create difficulties for Aboriginal people when the tensions are internalised by the Aboriginal communities and create social tensions that can and has led to both internalising and externalising psychological and social problems. The concept map provides two key characteristics. The position in the space reflects the relation of the concepts to each other (and also the themes). Thus the themes of education and connections do not have any direct linking pathways. The two themes are important and are seen as being similarly important for the futures of the children, but they are linked through a series of intermediary themes.

Figure 6 illustrates education as linked to connections through the intervening theme of strength. It can be speculated the success cannot be achieved through individual education alone. Friedel (1999) also suggests that this education can only be successful by involving Aboriginal parents in the education of their children. Without this involvement the success of education of Aboriginal children is unlikely. The strengthening of culture and connections is important in this intervention. According to the parental responses, the emotional strength of the study child needs to be attained via the connections and cultural identity to result in a successful education. Van Ucelen, Davidson, Quressette, Brasfield & Demerais (1997) in their work with Aboriginal people

in Canada, argue that helping to support these strengths can lead to improved health among Indigenous people.

Reynolds (2005) presents three models which aim to help Aboriginal children in gaining effective education and at the same time maintain their cultural connections: Bilingual/Bicultural Models, the Strelley Educational Model and Ganma Model. The first set of models, adopted a two-way process of learning at schools. A bicultural model has been developed by Stephen Harris (1990) in which Aboriginal culture is learnt as part of the school curriculum. A bilingual model has also been developed by Ian Malcolm (1999) in which teachers are instructed to teach both Aboriginal English and Western English. Adopted in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, the Strelley school model has an exclusively Aboriginal school board, with both Aboriginal and Western teachers who are trained and teach in the Aboriginal traditions of community. Unlike a majority of other models, the Strelley model avoids assimilation. The final model, Ganma model, developed by Mandawuy Yunupingu involves learning the true history of Aboriginal experience in western culture including invasion of westerners to Australia and its effect on the Aboriginal community. As may be appreciated, this model has been seen as threatening to the mainstream western culture in Australia, and widely rejected.

It could be argued that the outcomes were an artefact of the analysis, as the clustering of concepts will be affected by the nature of the questions, and that Figure 6 merely reflects responses to cultural futures on one end and individual concepts at the other. Given the separation in the responses to the questions, it could also be argued that both questions are reflections of the outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. In this conceptual argument, it could be seen that both questions reflect the historical and oppressive situations Indigenous people have been living and that the outcomes reflect deeper tensions. Adopting a more speculative abductive approach (Peirce, 1955; Polkinghorne, 2004) it could be argued that the map reflects the tensions inherent in and faced by many Aboriginal communities. Success in mainstream society's terms through education and work is one major goal, while the maintenance of the cultural identity and its connections is another. Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo (2003) suggest understanding the community identity can lead to better health outcomes and improved personal identity and improved self-esteem, typically associated with the mainstream culture. The concept cloud (Figure 7) demonstrates this better. The concept cloud is derived from the concept map. It provides textual information on how the concepts are grouped.

Australian society - contributes positively or negatively to the healthy development of the child depends upon the availability of suitable educational options. Providing adequate and sufficient social support to Aboriginal communities and their families is essential to ensure that a positive enculturation process can be achieved.

The analysis has been undertaken very much as an exploratory exercise which, it is hoped, will assist in the development of theoretical frameworks to underpin the 'enculturation hypothesis' in the Australian context. Without further research and validation, it would be unwise to attempt to draw definitive policy implications from the findings. That said, it seems worth noting some areas where the results may be seen to have some bearing. The first is with respect to 'resilience', a somewhat elusive concept but one being cited with increasing prevalence within policy circles as a desirable goal or characteristic to foster, including with respect to Aboriginal children and families. The themes that emerged in the parsimonious mapping of what it is about culture that will make Aboriginal children grow up strong - family, learn, culture, proud and belonging - may provide some indication of the constituent elements that contribute to resilience, and hence aid with its conceptualisation. The strong theme that mediates the themes of connections and education in the concept linkages (Figure 6) seems to represent well the idea of resilience, and at the same time suggest it is grounded in culture. Second, the findings sit at odds with the recent (2009) shift in policy in Northern Territory schools to stipulate that all teaching for the first four hours of each day be conducted in English, and not through bilingual methods, to focus on English literacy and numeracy outcomes. Aboriginal parents and carers, at least, would appear to view formal education as contributing to success in the mainstream culture, but have a sense that growing up strong requires a balance between this and cultural learning, understanding and identity. Finally, a review of the Australian governments' 'Closing the Gap' agenda may be warranted to assess whether the implied pursuit of statistical equity against some targets may be undermining potential sources of strength and wellbeing for the current cohort of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The maps may offer insights that, admittedly, we ourselves may have missed in this paper, but which other scholars may glean. We hope to have provided some valuable insights offered by – and for – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents as they reflect on what is important to them in bringing up their children in a healthy and successful way within a context of a mainstream culture different from their own.

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