Your Mind on First Nations Methodologies, with Dr. Cammi Murrup-Stewart

[00:00:00]

**Beth:** Welcome to Minds Matter, a podcast sponsored by the Monash Centre for Consciousness and Contemplative Studies. I'm Beth.

**Ava:** And I'm Ava. And on Minds Matter. We explore research from neuroscience and psychology while talking through our own personal experiences.

**Beth:** And this week on the podcast I spoke to Dr. Cammi Murrup-Stewart, who is a lecturer in psychology here at Monash. And her research looks at Indigenous methodologies as a way to study, , wellbeing in young Aboriginal people. So we spoke a bit about what methods she uses. We spoke about her findings and how wellbeing can be connected to culture and family.

**Cammi:** My name is Dr. Cammi Murrup-Stewart. I am an academic at the Turner Institute for Brain and Mental Health, and my research mainly revolves around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing. So looking at wellbeing from a really [00:01:00] holistic lens.

**Cammi:** in terms of not just psychology and mental health, but all of the surrounding factors that support somebody to be well. With particular focus on my community. I'm an Aboriginal woman. My family, our family history has been disrupted through the stolen generation. So I don't claim country out of respect.

**Cammi:** I defer to the traditional owners of the lands that I live and work on. But I have ongoing connections to Wurundjeri Country here in outer eastern Melbourne.

**Beth:** And because we'll have some international listeners, well probably also for the Australian listeners, could you explain what it means to claim Country?

**Cammi:** Yeah. So, when I say claim country Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, our identities is heavily linked to place and Country. And here I'm talking about country with a capital C. So, on the continent of Australia., there are over 250 different language groups and those language groups each belong to [00:02:00] different countries.

**Cammi:** So, there's not one pan national Aboriginal grouping. We each belong to different tribes and different clans. And so, because of a history of stolen generations and the colonialism that disrupted our ways of living, my family and many other families lost access to our home and our country and our tribe.

**Cammi:** And so, because it's such a central part of who we are and where we belong, I think it's more respectful for me to say, listen, I don't have those relationships defined. So instead I'm just going to pay respect to where I am so that I don't go claiming something that I'm not

**Beth:** so, your work involves using Indigenous methodologies in research. Can you explain what Indigenous methodologies are? and how are they being used at the moment in the scientific community?

**Cammi:** Yeah, so I think. [00:03:00] It's weird talking about Indigenous methodologies in, this kind of a frame because when it comes down to it, all Indigenous methodologies are, is the way that we've been doing things for millennia.

**Cammi:** Yeah. It's the way that First Nations people across the world have lived. The way we communicate, it's the way we share knowledge and we share meaning, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were one of the first scientists in the world. And so, we are just using the ways that we used to practice and pulling them into a contemporary scientific environment.

**Cammi:** So, I think a lot of the difference between Indigenous methodologies and non-Indigenous methodologies, particularly Western and Eurocentric methodologies, comes down to, the ontology and the epistemology and essentially the values. that underlie the way we do research, so our, our axiology.

**Cammi:** So, it can be a little bit of a challenge using and promoting [00:04:00] Indigenous methodologies in Western institutions, like universities because there is this tendency to rely on, western Eurocentric approaches science, you know the truth. The gold standard in ways of doing things, but I think Australia's a little bit slower in bringing our Indigenous methodologies into academia.

**Cammi:** Some other places around the world have much more advanced progress here. Although I can guarantee for those nations, it's still a challenge. I am certain. and we definitely bow down to them for a big thank you for the work that they've done. And the same here. I stand on the shoulders of, of my ancestors and the Indigenous scientists and academics that have gone before me.

**Cammi:** It's not an easy space to traverse, but we're, we're chipping away. Challenging things a little bit by little bit.

**Beth:** [00:05:00] It's interesting that when you're in science at a university, it's so kind of to us like we kind of learn, well, these methods are how you get truth and this is the only way you can get truth and anything else isn't truth and I mean, that's a kind of even loaded thing.

**Cammi:** Yeah. It's super loaded. this idea that there is one singular way of knowing and one singular truth. I think I It's impossible. Yeah. Like, it, it can't be reality for everybody. We know this, we know that people experience different realities and create meaning and knowledge in ways that are different from each other.

**Cammi:** When we look at things like culture and how culture influences beliefs and behaviours, surely, we have to know that that reality is different for different people. And western science. is based on these [00:06:00] foundations that do go back hundreds of years, but come from a very small select group of people of philosophers, of theorists, of scientists who claimed that because, you know, they existed within usually.

**Cammi:** A colonial architecture and, nations that had dominion over others. That, of course, that was the truth and the gold standard. And I think it's becoming much more of an awareness throughout society that, maybe there are other ways as well. Things like, you know, the prevalence of Chinese medicine starting to really grow alternative medicines and alternative healings and I, suppose a few decades ago, you know, the beginning of a wellness culture.

**Cammi:** And how these different ideas can start to permeate science. And if we have open dialogue between the [00:07:00] two, there can be great progress. But when one or the other says it's just this way. Yeah. And this is the only way. I think that's where we start to reach the end of the road. Like there's no more you can do down that avenue unless you start to collaborate and open up open up to different ideas other than your own.

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**Beth:** It feels like with the approach of just using, you know, these Western methods or anything, we lose access to knowledge that's there too. Yeah. Because we can't access it through the ways we've set things up.

**Cammi:** Yeah, exactly. If you say for example, that quantitative methodologies are the gold standard, then you are losing all of the value that can be found in qualitative methodologies.

**Cammi:** And so here, essentially if you boil it down to the basics, you're valuing numbers. over stories. Yeah. And I think when we present numbers and statistics, without [00:08:00] meaning and story behind them, we lose the context and we can then interpret things incorrectly.

**Cammi:** So, without that context, without qualitative research, without Indigenous methodologies, without hearing the stories and meanings, behind people's lived experiences, we're not gonna get the full picture, and we're not going to make progress on the things that we're working towards.

**Beth:** And I feel even if you do a lot of stats or anything in your research, you also know that that can, if you find things that are significant, you don't always necessarily know what's causing that. So, I mean, even if you're just focused on that, these issues come up anyway.

**Cammi:** Exactly. And it's so easy to manipulate statistics, especially when you are reporting them. and I think scientists and academics, you know, will read an article in a newspaper that's been written up by a journalist who's interpreted some kind of a scientific report or publication and they've interpreted it and they change language [00:09:00] and they pick certain things that they think might be interesting and suddenly the narrative around.

**Cammi:** the findings look a little bit different, and then of course somebody else passes that on verbally to their friend, and then it goes down the line and suddenly we've got a very different result compared to what the statistics originally said. And I think we have to remember also that statistics are built off somebody asking questions and that somebody has bias built into what they think is appropriate to ask the way they ask things. And there is bias in the people that respond to these things as well. And, when we're working with other kinds of data sets, there's bias there as well. You know, what is the priority to explore? What are we looking at? What is the value that people place behind things?

**Cammi:** And so, I think we have to be really critically conscious of how we look at [00:10:00] science and realize that one little snapshot isn't the entire picture.

**Beth:** Well, I feel like this brings me to the next question based on your research. Yes. So, before you started conducting your own experiments, you did a review on the wellbeing for young, urban Aboriginal people. What findings did you find in this review, and what did you feel were the failings of the current approach?

**Cammi:** I conducted a systematic review maybe in 2017 now. I wanted to look at a few things. I wanted to give myself a baseline for future research by looking at Aboriginal and Torres Islander targeted wellbeing programs. You know, there were a lot out there but I wanted to figure out what was needed moving forwards. And so, to do that, I had a look at 33 different published articles, peer review, published articles, and I wanted to do a few things. I wanted to [00:11:00] highlight Indigenous voices only. And I wanted to review the quality of those publications. And so, the results from this review kind of were separated into two things, those qualities and, the voices of what Aboriginal people said about programs. And I think what people said about program wasn't very surprising, but what was surprising was by taking these 33 articles and pulling out only direct quotes from Aboriginal participants, the story and the findings about those programs looked different to what those peer review publications actually said. It wasn't, you know, complete opposites, but there was a different narrative behind what participants were saying and what an academic was saying.

**Cammi:** Often these articles were evaluations of programs, and so what that essentially said to us was, [00:12:00] there are, like we were talking about before, there are biases behind the kind of things that people ask related to research and the experiences of people that are involved in these kinds of programs. It means that measurements were established at the start of programs that didn't necessarily reflect the things that were valued by program participants. Yeah. So, if we looked at things like, is a program successful? there were predetermined statistics about, does somebody complete a program, for example, in education, what are the retention rates of students?

**Cammi:** Does somebody, you know, go on to get a job from this program? Does somebody's heart health improve from this program, but the participants of programs, actually, those weren't the things that are important to us. For example, if we take education, [00:13:00] we look at things like are students growing as a person?

**Cammi:** Are they finding value in the educational environment? Are they feeling supported? It wasn't necessarily about do they go every day? And so, the results were quite different which was a little bit disturbing when we consider the policies and the laws that are created around some of these things.

**Cammi:** The other thing that really shocked me, to be honest, was the findings regarding quality of publications. So here we're specifically zeroing in on how academics do research and publish research, and I used two different tools to assess the quality. I used a tool called the bond Evidence Principles, which is commonly used in actually the community development sector.

**Cammi:** And then I took the NHNMRC ethical guidelines for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, [00:14:00] and kind of turned that into a bit of a tool to assess things. And what I found firstly was that within published articles, not much evidence is actually talked about. Not much of this is spoken about.

**Cammi:** So, there are principles to highlight, you know, how involved Aboriginal people are in the research, who leads the research, who ask the questions, how they're interpreted, what are the methods and are they appropriate? And in all of these little details and most of the articles, I just couldn't tell.

**Cammi:** It wasn't spoken about in the article more broadly, it wasn't mentioned in their methodologies section. Some of them would note that they abided by the principles, but they didn't provide any evidence or articulation of how they did that. and of course, this often would come down to word count. [00:15:00] So you know, you've got a trim somewhere to, fit all of your information into a journal's requirements.

**Cammi:** But I, I found that this was actually really concerning because it meant you didn't have a good basis to critique where the articles findings came from. A lot of the time it was really difficult to tell if the authors were First Nations peoples or not. You know, where did their bias come from, was there bias?

**Cammi:** Of course, there was, but you couldn't interpret it. And so, its kind of said a few things. It said one, the publishing sector has to do better, just in general, the publishing sector has to do better, but two, even though there are these guidelines out there by different research bodies. So, in Australia, the NHMRC is our leading health focused research body, and then we have the A R C, which is more of a social sciences and humanities research body.

**Cammi:** We also have [00:16:00] AIATSIS, which is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific body. Each of these bodies have principles and guidelines to assist researchers do research, but often they're really difficult to interpret and even more difficult to apply right in all of these varied contexts. So, it meant that for me moving forwards, I had to be really conscious of addressing those failings that I saw in this other research. And that's not to say that the research and the papers that I looked at were completely negligent. It's to say that it was really hard to figure that out.

**Beth:** So now talking about the, the studies that you've done one of them used Yarning methods. Could you explain what that method is?

**Cammi:** So, Yarning, well, yarning is two things. Firstly, there is yarning as a research method. Yeah. And then there is just yarning and [00:17:00] yarning is just the way the Aboriginal and Torres Strait are people communicate.

**Cammi:** Yarning is based on relationality, which is one of these principles that holds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture together. It is one of the most important values that we hold. We, we are in relationship with each other and we are in relationship with the environment and the cosmos around us.

**Cammi:** And yarning enables communication that values relationality. So really, it's about a way that we can speak to each other and talk and pass on knowledge to each other, share and create meaning together. When it comes to the research environment, we have kind of, adapted yarning as a communication practice into a method that can be used within research. So, yarning is a research method., is relatively [00:18:00] new in the Australian academic environment. What happens in yarning research is that we shift the way we approach data collection, essentially, you can apply it to other analysis and steps in research, but it is primarily used in data collection when you're working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, and what it does is it means that rather than value findings as the, the, the primary thing that you wanna get out of research, you value relationship and creating shared meaning. This is a bit of a flip to methods like an interview or a focus group or even a semi-structured interview.

**Cammi:** And it is greatly different to things like surveys. Yeah. When we're talking about both qualitative and quantitative research what it does is try and encourage an environment that [00:19:00] is mutually respectful and mutually beneficial. It tries to break down the barriers that typically exist between a researcher and a participant, where the researcher is the one who decides what to ask, where the questions go what is important? and brings a bias to the conversations. Whereas yarning as a research method allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait are the people to follow the protocols we do in community. And that means that we have obligations to each other and we have relationship to each other. And so, all of those things come into within a research setting. It means that a researcher doesn't get to dictate what is determined. What the findings are. Oftentimes it might look quite similar to a semi-structured [00:20:00] interview for people who are not familiar with Aboriginal culture and you find a lot of people kind of co-opting the method and saying they're doing yarning, but in actual fact it's a white person coming in to an Aboriginal community and doing a semi-structured interview and using yarning terminology right. To kind of, you know, pay lip service to being culturally safe. There is, there is argument within academia about who can do yarning.

**Beth:** I was gonna ask that. Yeah. Yeah.

**Cammi:** So, my perspective is that you can't do yarning without both explicit and tacit knowledge about Aboriginal culture.

**Cammi:** And I'm sure, some of that knowledge might exist between a non-Indigenous researcher and an Indigenous participant as well, but it won't have the depth and the longevity of understanding the underlies things. For example, [00:21:00] when I am conducting a yarn, a research yarn with a knowledge holder and that, and that's one of the other things I use different terminology when it comes to research. Because when you speak about a researcher and a participant, it kind of makes the participant passive. In these conversations and in this relationship when it comes to research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, they hold the knowledge and I'm just there learning about it

**Cammi:** So, it was really important for me to use language like a knowledge holder rather than participant to reflect who holds that knowledge, where the power is in these relationships, and where the obligations are. And so yarning will often look like me introducing myself, them introducing themselves using [00:22:00] cultural protocols that establish our relationships.

**Cammi:** And when it comes to the different kind of knowledge that can come from, these types of yarns, you will often find things where I'm having a conversation with somebody and they share something with me and then comment like a, oh, you know what I'm talking about? All right. And this is the tacit knowledge. So, it's something that being an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, you would have an understanding of the circumstances that somebody else exists within. You would have a level of lived experience that they likely share and without having that knowledge, you wouldn't know what they're talking about. And so, there is a little bit of unsaid understanding that I don't think a non-Indigenous person would understand. The other thing about [00:23:00] yarning and who can do yarning ? Is that like, it's become a buzzword? It's such a buzzword to, you know, yes, I'm culturally safe, I'm including Indigenous people, and I think I, I really don't think a lot of non-Indigenous people know what the difference is between yarning and other methods, interviews, whatever, having a conversation. And you find that in a lot of publications that claim they've used yarning and they'll explain it in their methodology by saying, we use yarning, which is an informal conversation, but it's actually not yarning. And the protocols that underlie are actually a formality within Aboriginal community.

**Cammi:** Yeah. So, there is a formality to it that is unseen by a lot of people and essentially it rests upon foundations of oral cultures. So, a lot of Indigenous [00:24:00] cultures across the world are, are oral cultures. And so, there is a lot of spoken knowledge shared down through generations that holds meaning that may not be able to be seen by non-Indigenous people.

**Cammi:** And here's another way to complicate things. It is a colloquial term in Australia to have a, a chat. Essentially. You know, you go and have a yarn with your neighbour. Means different things to a white person as it does to an Indigenous person. And for White Australia, this colloquial term is an informal little chat. It's a conversation between two people. Yeah. It doesn't really have this underlying knowledge. It doesn't have the principles and the values that Indigenous people bring to it. And it, the purpose isn't to create meaning together, which is the purpose of yarning between Indigenous peoples.

**Beth:** I think having a yarn with your neighbour for a white Australian is the complete opposite. It's probably very surface level.

**Cammi:** [00:25:00] Yes. Yes. It's, I think so. It's, it's that like click, click kind of chat. You know, the one where you meet an acquaintance at a party, you have a yarn.

**Cammi:** Yeah. And that yarn is about, oh, are you doing full work these days? How's your family? And yeah, so, oh, weather the next week looks terrible. That is totally different. A yarn between Indigenous peoples really is about sharing knowledge and creating meaning together. And I think, those values and principles cannot be understood by non-Indigenous researchers.

**Cammi:** And they cannot be appropriately applied. My perspective is not necessarily the same and shared across academia even by other Indigenous researchers. And I think it's important to remember that when we're reading and interpreting research that uses that language that some people mean one thing.

**Cammi:** And some people mean another thing, but there's not necessarily a right way. Yeah. Or a wrong way. Yeah. But in, in my preference, there might be [00:26:00] read up on my new article “storying ways”.

**Ava:** So, I found this interview super interesting. It's definitely a perspective that we rarely get both in science and on our podcast. I think on our podcast we obviously tend to focus on researchers who are doing more, in a sense, standard right ways of, of doing research which Cammi has talked about as being potentially problematic when we only focus on that. And so, one thing that I thought was really interesting was first just the qualitative research that she does, which be it Indigenous focused or not. Regardless of that, we talk about that so rarely on the podcast. And it's so rare to do that in psychology research, which maybe for listeners, I'm not sure, how surprising that is because I think a lot of times when, when I tell people I'm studying psychology, they think I'm doing therapy. So probably something more similar to doing interviews when we're actually just like coding all day. And like, yeah, doing numbers. So, I thought the aspect of the [00:27:00] qualitative research was really interesting and really important.

**Ava:** And also, within that, A lot of what Cammi was talking about was acknowledging your own positionality. So, thinking about who you are when you're, when you're doing your research. And I thought it'd be interesting for Beth and I to kind of talk about the idea of positionality in quantitative research, which is what we typically do, because I think when we're doing interviews and when there's a more qualitative aspect, it's really normal to acknowledge that because people are more transparent about the fact that they're interpreting their data.

**Ava:** Yeah. Whereas quantitative stuff where it's just quote unquote just numbers. That's supposed to be, the researcher is completely removed from it, and the science is just kind of like happening. But as we know, that doesn't really happen. So, I don't know. I was just wondering, Beth, if you've ever thought about positionality in your research and if you think you might do it more now, or if you think your research maybe is like a little bit more abstract, so positionality doesn't make [00:28:00] sense or, what are your thoughts on that?

**Beth:** I think that that is a really interesting thing to think about.

**Beth:** So, in my research I use quantitative methods and I do coding and running these simulations, like these computational modelling simulations, which is at this kind of higher-level abstract place. I guess we. Of it that way. But what I'm interested in is mental health and optimism bias and things like that.

**Beth:** I bring so much. and my research, I think is also informed a lot by my personal beliefs about those things and how I've seen other people experience those things. And it's no way just, oh, these are the numbers that relate to anxiety and these are the numbers that relate to this kind of thing, and then I'll just plug those in and then that's what comes out.

**Beth:** No, it's, I, because of my experience, because of people I loved experience. Have all this belief about what I [00:29:00] think this number should be, and why this number should be that, and I do it that way.

**Beth:** I don't know if you've had that experience as well.

**Ava:** I feel like I'm kind of in the middle because I study a lot of my work studies social identity. But we do it in a quantitative way, so my lab is like a social neuroscience lab. So, a lot of the studies that we run are also just like brain scans and thinking about social identity, like in the brain, mm-hmm.

**Ava:** And so, I think because of that, like you're saying, it feels in a sense your kind of shielded from this positionality stuff because it's like, oh, it's just I can't mess directly with someone's brain. But at the same time, I think there’s. There's two places in which I think your, your positionality as a quantitative researcher really comes into play and where it's just impossible.

**Ava:** Even though, the philosophy behind quantitative research is that you are a scientist that's just discovering the truth. I think this is also just in general messy psychology. And any scientist technically running that study, right? Like we [00:30:00] talk about the replication crisis, any scientist should find the same results.

**Ava:** I. Some of the differences come into first just the questions that you're asking, why are you asking that particular question and, where does it come from that you wanna ask that question? And so, like you're saying, some of your research that's on mental health, you might have experienced something in your life that leads you to say, I think that this is tied to this.

**Ava:** Right? So, I think the questions that we choose to ask and the way that we choose to ask them is really, even if then we start measuring into numbers, that's really tied to who we are as people and what we've experienced. And then, like you said, definitely in the analysis, people say numbers don't lie, but like numbers can be bent.

**Ava:** we can choose the numbers that we want. We can choose to report like really specific numbers, just the same way that I think sometimes qualitative research is criticized for not being precise enough, for example. But the thing is, I feel like it's just more honest in the research process of saying, these are the themes that I think came out.

**Ava:** And, you can do the same thing in your data. You can pick out certain [00:31:00] themes and especially if you don't do things like specifically register what you, what your analyses are gonna be before you do them, it's really easy to trick yourself afterwards too. And so, I think, yeah, a positionality statement would be really interesting to implement in quantitative research as well.

**Ava:** But it seems hard to do that because it's so antithetical to what western science and quantitative research is about. Just discovering truth. Scientists are just doing experiments and trying to figure out what is really out there without messing with it too much.

**Beth:** So, what would it mean if all we were doing was in these, you know, carrying out these experiments to discovering truth without us and our histories and everything being involved in that like that? Unless we were robots.

**Beth:** I mean, that wouldn't, that wouldn't work. Cause yeah, we have motivations, we have emotions, we have all these things that come into it. And it's interesting because I [00:32:00] feel like there is this thing, oh well we should be, not bringing any of this stuff into our research, but I've noticed recently I've been having more conversations with people who are like, you know what?

**Beth:** It's great that you care so much about this because you've had personal experience with this, or, it's great that, and that's actually, I feel like that's changing a bit now. So, it's not so much, oh, we just have to be in our white coats saying numbers and facts with no emotional personality behind us. I think there's a shift now to be, oh, it's actually amazing that you can.

**Beth:** Relate to and understand these kinds of issues in your research as well

**Ava:** So older PhD students told me that it was really hard for them to get some of the stuff that they wanted to do, approved basically by some of their advisors or other researchers who are black scholars who wanted to study.

**Ava:** Black psychology would be told, oh, you have, you have too much, you care about this too much. And so, you're, there's no way you can be objective and there's no way you can actually study this as a scientist, [00:33:00] which I feel the complete opposite of that, where I feel, because a lot of the research that I'm currently conducting looks at Latino communities and Hispanic communities because we are in Santa Barbara and there's just the population demographics are 50% Hispanic here.

**Ava:** And I'm obviously not, I'm not Latina, I'm not Hispanic, and so, you know, it feels. in a sense. I can't study those groups and get a full picture of what it actually is with some of the questions that we're a asking because I can't understand it.

**Ava:** And to me, my positionality is, I sort of understand part of it as the child of immigrants and things like that, that I can relate to, I can relate to it from, you know, not being perceived as white or being mixed, but there's certain things that I definitely feel. A researcher who's actually from those communities would be much better suited to be doing that research than me.

**Ava:** And I feel it only lends credibility to a researcher if they're studying a community that they know well [00:34:00] because there's certain things that you just can't know without lived experiences. And even, you know, sometimes when we have meetings about research, they'll be questions, I had a friend who was doing research on mixed, mixed identity, and there were questions that some of.

**Ava:** The professors were asking that to us. As people who were mixed, we were so confused about why they were even asking them or they were doubting parts of the research that were just really surprising to us because it's we know that this is a real phenomenon. So, it just feels it's important to have both.

**Ava:** I think it's just important to have as many perspectives as possible. But it seems if you're criticizing someone for doing research, there's no way that you can't. at least half the picture. So, I think that's just an interesting shift that I've observed and maybe hopefully part of that, you know, comes from also Indigenous scholars being, look at all of the stuff that we can do and all of the advancement that we can do for our communities just like Cammi is doing.

**Ava:** And I think as she was saying, that does hopefully trickle out into other communities. And maybe also the methods can help trickle out into a way that's, that are of course, culturally sensitive and that [00:35:00] makes sense. For different types of communities, but I think that, yeah, this idea of positionality is shifting from what I've seen.

**Beth:** So, with your research on., young, urban, Aboriginal people in, in Melbourne what, so you used this yarning method. What did you find from that, from that study?

**Cammi:** Yeah, so I did, this is actually my PhD research and I wanted to build on that systematic review about wellbeing. And one of the findings from the systematic review was that a lot of research about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island, the people focused on older people or children and also focused on remote and rural populations, which essentially kind of fulfils the stereotype of Aboriginal people and doesn't reflect the reality that the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait [00:36:00] Islander people live in urban environments. They live in capital cities and here in Naarm, in Melbourne.

**Cammi:** There is a huge community of Aboriginal people that belong to a variety of different countries and nations and clans. And their history and their experience of wellbeing, their everyday life does look different to Aboriginal people that live in remote communities. And I thought it was really important to what the experience was here. And to look at it from the perspective of a young person because culture and wellbeing for Aboriginal people are intricately linked. And so, the study that I did used yarning, we spoke to 20 young adults between the ages of 18 and 28 here. And essentially, we just explored this concept of culture and culture's [00:37:00] relationship to well-being.

**Cammi:** and it was kind of guided loosely by a model that was developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists. Called the social and emotional wellbeing model. And this is typically represented in a wheel kind of imagery that defines that there are a number of different holistic domains that create wellness.

**Cammi:** And, to have positive wellbeing, you need to have connection to each of these domains. And those domains include things like your physical health and your mental health. But it also includes things like connection to your community, connection to your culture, connection to your family, connection to the land.

**Cammi:** So, it. a much more holistic idea than if we are talking about wellbeing as just physical and mental health. . . And it also incorporates the idea that wellbeing is both experienced and [00:38:00] expressed in the context of social, historical, and political determinants. So, you can't extricate that.

**Cammi:** Wellness exists in a context and we have to respect that context. So, I spoke to young people about that and. I produced a couple of papers out of that research and the first paper was actually a bit of a, stumble in the start of my research. when you, a lot of people do yarning you can kind of develop a bit of a yarning guide. Which kind of gives you guidance about your research topic. Has a few example questions. You don't want it to be like a script and formulate, you just kind of want it to give the research participants, the knowledge holders, the opportunity to explore what they want, where they want to go with wherever they want in this conversation.

**Cammi:** but one of the first questions I had was about what is culture to them? And within maybe the first four yarns I had with people, I very quickly realized that [00:39:00] the definition of culture was different. And I had made assumptions that we had a shared understanding. how they defined culture and we didn't.

**Cammi:** And so, after those first few yarns, I kind of amended it to start by exploring what and how they conceived culture. And the first paper that came out of the research kind of explored that what culture was to young Aboriginal people living in the urban environment of Naarm, of Melbourne. Which was really cool because I think as with minoritized people across the world, stereotypes, are often drastically different to the everyday lived experience.

**Cammi:** And that is the exact same for here in Aboriginal Australia. The stereotype is quite dark-skinned, living in a really remote community, practicing really traditional [00:40:00] forms of culture. and then the really shitty stereotypes like you know, alcoholics have no education, they don't work, just rely on welfare.

**Cammi:** And then the really, really damaging ones, things like, are abusive and violent are criminals. Petrol sniffers is a great one for Australia. . . And what we actually wanted to explore was, you know, especially living in an urban environment and for young people who a couple of generations after the initial invasion of Australia, what does culture look like?

**Cammi:** How do they experience culture? And of course, it was quite varied. And so, what we found was young people explored culture both from a traditional lens and from a contemporary lens. And it wasn't, a binary like that either. It was, a spectrum and it was all [00:41:00] interrelated. And so young people spoke about, Practicing traditional dance or traditional craft activities or, painting or music.

**Cammi:** But then they also spoke about going to political rallies. Or going to rap concert. But mostly what they spoke about was a timeless thing. And it's what I've spoken about before was that culture is based on relationships. And so, it was about relationships with their community and with their families, with their kinship systems.

**Cammi:** And that was culture. Practicing those relationships, being in those relationships, building and forming those relationships and nourishing them was what culture was. And it was really interesting because a lot of young people, expressed that they experienced this kind of feeling that they were disconnected from [00:42:00] culture which I think speaks to the power of a stereotype.

**Cammi:** And so, when they were expressing that they felt disconnected from culture a lot of the time, once you explored that a bit with them, they were actually talking about, well, I don't look like and don't behave., like the white stereotypes tell me I should. And they felt a sense of loss there. And it was really interesting.

**Cammi:** Those that felt like, you know, they had a little bit more positive wellbeing, were able to name and specify the different strategies I had to connect with culture. And a lot of it was, framed around this idea that connection to culture was a journey that they experienced. I know this is such a cliché, right?

**Cammi:** I hate this journey terminology, but it was really interesting way of framing this because it was, [00:43:00] Like there was a point that, that at which they started, you know, birth or whatever typically before that, it was a point at which their family, their parents, they started and it's something that they're working towards.

**Cammi:** But there was no end point to this journey. There was no, I've achieved connection to culture. It was a lifelong learning a, a receptivity to. Connecting to your culture at each stage in your life. And some felt that they were at different stages in that to others through a variety of factors and that connection to culture and their perception of being, connected to culture, that perception was what influenced their wellbeing. And so, it wasn't a, yes, I have good physical health or, you know, no, I've been diagnosed with depression or anxiety. It was a case of, [00:44:00] I think I am connected to culture and so., my wellbeing is good, but most concerningly was, I think my connection to culture isn't as strong as somebody else's, and this is harming my wellbeing.

**Beth:** I think when you mentioned how, you know the stereotypes that white people have created, we know how damaging stereotypes are. Yeah. But the fact that then the stereotypes were influencing how people, their identity that I like that. That's really interesting. Cause you, I've just thought, you know, stereotypes awful. Cause we create, but I, and like really damaging on how we perceive people. But I haven't heard of how then that makes the people we're creating the stereotypes for their identity.

**Cammi:** There's a really, really cool quote that's included in, in one of my articles. I can't even remember. the quote is from a young woman and, she was on a train with her [00:45:00] cousin.

**Cammi:** and cousin in Aboriginal community could mean any kind of biological relationship, but there is, there is a cousin type relationship there. And they were going somewhere and the knowledge holder that I was speaking to had been reading a book on the train traveling into the city or something, and her cousin was visibly embarrassed and was talking to the knowledge holder and saying, why are you reading a book? We don't do that. Blackfullas, which is how we refer to ourselves in Aboriginal Australia. Blackfullas don't read, and this knowledge holder, she was absolutely dumbfounded., this perception that her cousin had about just this concept of reading and what Aboriginal people do and don't do.

**Cammi:** And she, was like, what do you mean Blackfullas don't read? We write books. What are [00:46:00] you talking about? And I think that speaks to the idea of the power of a stereotype. On someone’s identity and their behaviour within that identity. And so, this, young cousin was challenged by a stereotype that said, you know, you're dumb, you're uneducated, you don't read.

**Cammi:** Challenged by her black cousin saying, you know what? We write books. We are intelligent, we are educated, we are storytellers. And it clashing with this stereotype and then challenging, you know, who somebody thinks they are, which is like the very core of ourselves, right? Your identity is, is kind.

**Cammi:** Bound by the culture that you exist in, the beliefs within that culture, and that helps determine how you behave and the choices and, and thoughts and things that surround it. And I think it's one, one thing that I want to explore more how [00:47:00] we can strengthen a cultural identity. In order to strengthen somebody's wellbeing.

**Cammi:** Yeah, I think it's absolutely essential, particularly for a generation or generations that have experienced such disconnection from our culture, forced assimilation. You know, the loss of language, the loss of traditional practices, the outlawing of even associating with each other has caused such a disruption to culture and relationships that now there is, there's this real sense of being lost.

**Cammi:** And a lot of young people, particularly when you talk about the stereotypes of skin colour. Yeah. And this example exists across the globe. This, this colourism that exists alongside racism. And so, you've got profiling based on skin colour. [00:48:00] Between a community and another community, but then within communities you've also got an experience where different types of skin colour and, you know, physiological phenotypes can affect how somebody is perceived and therefore affect their identity. And especially when you're talking about young people who are in this, you know, pivotal time of their lives when they're figuring out who they are and where they fit in society. when they're challenged by, white Australia that are saying, you should look, behave, be this way.

**Cammi:** And then you're challenged by your own community that says you should look, behave, and feel this way. And they're offering differing things. Yeah. It's really difficult space for young people to navigate. And so yeah, that study really explored this idea of what is culture and how can young people.

**Cammi:** Explore the strategies that they have for [00:49:00] connecting to culture starting to be really practical about it. One of the young people shared this story that I found really lovely. And a few of them spoke about living in urban environments that are concrete jungles. Really challenged their connection to Country. Most young people lived off Country and in Australia that means that they weren't living on the lands of their ancestors. They had, you know, come, come to Melbourne to study or to find work or something like that, and it's this concrete jungle, and they struggled with being connected to Country.

**Cammi:** And this, young person shared with me this story of, you know, when I'm feeling. when I've got anxiety when everything just feels like it's bubbling around me. I need to centre myself. I need to ground myself. I need to calm. to do that in this urban environment. I grab a gum leaf on the way to work.

**Cammi:** I'm walking to work, grab a gum leaf, scrunch it up in [00:50:00] my hand, and smell that scent of eucalyptus and just that simple practice for her. You know, it's not going to solve all of her problems, but it gave her a sense of being connected to ancient place. Underneath the layers of her building, underneath the concrete, the footpaths, the cars around them still existed the lands of ancient peoples and the spirit of the Country. And, she can grasp that. By having a smell of a gun leaf on the way to work. Which I just thought it's, it can be this simple. When we kind of extrapolate these ideas in Australia, we've had for decades now, this discourse that there's a huge gap between the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous people in particular mortality rates, like 10 years different.

**Cammi:** Yeah. And., you know, there's been money thrown at it. There's been policy after policy [00:51:00] targets all over the place. National strategies and frameworks that have really gotten nowhere, realistically. And one of the reasons I believe is because the people in power that have this decision-making capacity aren't listening properly to Aboriginal people. who can give you strategies like, I need to crush a gum leaf. And one of the other young people, she got really riled up and she was like, this is so stupid. You know, we've got there's Medicare in Australia that is meant to provide funding and support for all of these different medical and healthcare services.

**Cammi:** Why can't we get Medicare to fund something like going back on Country. Yeah. You know it. What does that look like? I don't know. Maybe it's a day's leave to go back to your home country [00:52:00] and connect. And kind of back build up that relationship with Country, with your community back home, that kind of thing.

**Cammi:** Because we know how important that is to our wellbeing. That's so much more important., then a trip to a white psychologist that I've been waiting six months to get into. That has no idea about the impact of racism on my everyday life. Why can't we use something cultural? Why can't obviously, but why can't a white institution support something like that?

**Cammi:** And I think the overall finding from my PhD research was that young people have autonomy, they have the strategies, they have the voice. We're just not giving space to learn from those things. Which I think it's just, it's so obvious. It's so obvious to a lot of the problems we have across society we're not listening to the right people in the right [00:53:00] ways and then actioning it.

**Beth:** It's so interesting cause in terms of, physical health and everything, we know how much wellbeing and happiness and all those things contributes to that. like, we know that. So, if there's this missing thing of, you know, feeling connected to your culture or identity it makes sense to foster that and support that. So, the other things, Can, you know, more fall place?

**Cammi:** This idea about success and measurement, and I spoke about it in that first systematic literature review. This also kind of translates over into what we determine as success within academia and the preference for big money to come into white institutions and for high citations in Q1 journals.

**Cammi:** And that are, pay rolled and monetized and outcomes of research. Profit driven., we talk about research institutes [00:54:00] and universities now being businesses, essentially profit-making ventures, with the side effect of maybe some, good progress within insights. And as a black scholar, as an Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander scholar, it's incredibly challenging to work in this space.

**Cammi:** Not only do we have to push back about the value of our methods, the validity of our methods, but also, we have to push back about the priorities in terms of outputs. And the, the measurements of success. I lead a group of Indigenous graduate students here, and one of the things that I was learning from an Elder of one of the things that I now promote is if you have to do what the university tells you to do, okay, great. Do it. Because you know, you still have to exist in this environment, but your obligation and your [00:55:00] priority needs to be the benefit of your community. Building those relationships, supporting the wellbeing of your community.

**Cammi:** And that means that, okay, go and get your journal article ticked off, whatever, but perhaps, you should also be running a workshop with community about your findings. Maybe your publications shouldn't be pay walled. Maybe you should use accessible language. That's maybe, maybe it's about directly challenging government policy.

**Cammi:** And saying, you know what, okay, this is my finding. What are you going to do about it now? How is this going to create change and create progress and create movement? Because research without action is nothing. It's, an egotistical venture that sits on somebody's shelf somewhere that makes you look good, cause you're a published author.

**Cammi:** That means nothing to my community. They don't give a rat’s arse that I have a fancy qualification [00:56:00] and I sit in a nice office in a big university. What that means is I have extra responsibility to use my position and the vast privileges that are offered me to create better solutions for my community.

**Cammi:** And that means that I need to challenge the metrics of success. And I think this is something that a lot of scholars of any background end up being really challenged by. A lot of people go into research, particularly with this idea that they're going to create positive change in some way, and they end up being drowned by an institution.

**Cammi:** And, you know, you can get so easily burnt out. And so many people leave research. Because the, it's not aligning with their values. And I think there is a big [00:57:00] opportunity building on the incredible work of Indigenous scholarship across the world to say, you know what? There are better ways of doing this.

**Cammi:** We can still make great progress using Western methods if you want. Okay. But you know what? Making money off some scientific finding not, not a great outcome, making change to somebody's health. Great outcome. Where is the translation there and where is the priorities there? It's a bit of a challenge for, people of colour in, the university and academic sector.

**Beth:** Yeah, and so, so much of success is measured by citations and what gets cited. These kind of quote unquote sexy things that like Alzheimer's, you all this stuff in, in Nature, I mean that, ends up being the measure of success, but there's all these different things that we need to explore and help with, what if we measured the outcomes of that in like how many people in different communities [00:58:00] benefited from that research and felt understood, or educating people?

**Cammi:** Yeah, exactly. Like it could, go into so many different spaces and I see great value within academic institutions for positions whose sole focus is to action that research in some way, because it is a skill to be able to translate, you know, academic jargon and quantitative statistics and all of this kind of stuff into language and outputs that community, everyday public understand. That it is a very specific skill. And I don't think everyone has the capacity to do it.

**Cammi:** But I think part of that, the reason behind that is because we're not trained to, the value isn't given to that. And, you know, my promotion potential rest upon my ability to bring in big bucks to the university [00:59:00] and you know, have my name splashed around in its, it's wild. So, one of the things that our research institute and university values is international collaboration. Which I have no problem with. This is a great thing. There's great things to be learned just like this podcast from other cultures and, and other countries. My research is in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in Naarm Melbourne., you know what, there's not a great amount of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that live in international context.

**Cammi:** So yes, there are lessons that can be shared particularly from, other Indigenous communities that have been colonized., but the specific and localized findings are for my community. My collaborators need to be community members. And yes, it is valuable having these international collaborations, but [01:00:00] they're not my priority.

**Cammi:** Q1 journals not my priority. My community's not gonna gain anything from me getting published in one of those. So, we really need to rethink the principles on which our academic actions lie on, and it's hard, but I think we have to push back and challenge a lot.

**Beth:** Because, I mean, it's stating the obvious, but if your goal of your research is to help your community, then it's best if your research can fulfil that. You know what I mean?

**Cammi:** Yeah. like this should be obvious, but we've got so wrapped up in this warped idea of capitalism and colonization, which is so intricately tied together. And even democracy, right? So intricately tied to colonization and capitalism that our [01:01:00] priorities are skewed, you go and ask an academic researcher. what's important to you? And they're a human being. What's important to them? You know, their kids being happy, them, you know, having a connection to themselves. This isn't about these, weird ideas that like money skewing this idea of success. I've read a fantastic quote the other day. You know, you don't actually want to be rich, you wanna be free.

**Cammi:** Money buys a lot of freedom these days, but money is not the thing that people want. Yeah. People want the freedom and we've lost sight of that, and I think we've lost sight of that within science. But I think there are some incredible First Nation scholars across the world who have done some really hard work.

**Cammi:** Challenging these systems [01:02:00] at times through great detriment to themselves. And I, I pay my respects to, those people. and not just scholars, like community leaders, young people that are standing up at rallies and putting their lives on the line. These are the people that are actually creating progress. Yeah, and actually creating change.

**Ava:** So, one of the other things that I found really interesting about that your conversation with Cammi was the idea that the way that our science is structured, it's just so counter to being able to engage in this type of slower research, this type of research that uses Indigenous methodologies.

**Ava:** And that to me, that felt like one of the fundamental clashes is the way that our incentive structures are built versus the way that this type of research, this these Indigenous methodologies are, should be done ethically. For example. And there was one [01:03:00] interesting thing that I'd read in a Nature like op-ed, that I'll, I'll link in our show notes where someone was talking about the fact that they, they were also A Native American, and they were working with a tribe in Arizona, I believe, and they had been working to build links with this group between the group and the university specifically for several years.

**Ava:** And that the tribe has to obviously agree to have this research done. And that takes time because they, those leaders have to engage with their communities and make sure that that's okay. And the only ethical way to do this type of research is to get consent, full consent. But because that's such a long process, it’s impossible for a PhD student who's expected to graduate in four to six years, to wait for three years to be able to conduct ethical research.

**Ava:** Right. And you're just not gonna get paid if you can't do the research that you said you were gonna do. Similarly, if you're a tenure track professor, so if you're an assistant professor, you basically are auditioning for your job for like six years or five years. And if you can't [01:04:00] get those metrics out, if you can't pump those metrics out, then you're not gonna get a job.

**Ava:** So, if you wanna do really valuable research with an Indigenous community, that incentive structure is just not there for you. And there's so many examples of this incentive structure that we've built around science. Completely clash with doing ethical research in lots of domains, to be honest.

**Ava:** Like not even just these Indigenous methodologies. But I think it's so stark when we think about the way to do research and repair some of the damage that has been done over the years with science and Indigenous communities.

**Beth:** And I was thinking when I was speaking to Cammi I thought it was really interesting, this idea about, so how do you get grants and all of these things?

**Beth:** Well, it's by publication, so you need to be cited a lot. But as she was saying, if you're studying, you know, an Indigenous community in Melbourne, that's probably not gonna be cited a lot compared to some, I don't know, nanomedicine study or something. So, what I was thinking when I was thinking about this, I thought, okay, so I'm doing this PhD and I [01:05:00] wanna get publications and everything, but are the publications really representative of what I wanna achieve? Like what, what are my goals as being a scientist? My goals are I really wanna help other people.

**Beth:** I want science to feel accessible. I want people to feel empowered. Those kinds of things are what I care about. Will my publications that other scientists read, reach that goal? No. What will reach that goal? One of the things is doing this podcast. I really, really love doing the podcast because I love being able to explore research in this way that then you know, you guys can all engage with as well.

**Beth:** And that's a part of the. that I love, or if I wanna study mental health, I wanna be able to get tools and things out there that people can use to improve their lives. But that doesn't necessarily mean that that will be a paper that's highly cited, and I'm same with the podcast. This is never gonna be cited.

**Beth:** So, if we wanna be in research careers, these things that we do that are actually achieving our goals aren't gonna contribute to that career. [01:06:00] Which, yeah, I just was thinking a, a lot about that and, and what our outputs are and, and what matters to us.

**Beth:** If there's anything exciting that you're working on, that you'd like to share with us?

**Cammi:** Yeah, I think I've been really honoured to be the recipient of a fantastic new grant through the Monash Centre for Consciousness and Contemplative Studies that is going to focus on Indigenous wellness practices. So, over the course of the next few years, I'm going to be working with my community and exploring what different kinds of practical modalities we are using now having drawn on traditional practices to create these connection strategies.

**Cammi:** Things like Wayapa Wuurrk, which is kind of looks like, a physical modality of movement that encourages contemplation of your connection to the country. So, exploring some of these different [01:07:00] modalities and practices that we can then build on the strategies that young people already have and, highlight these, provide these to people that are feeling a little bit lost.

**Cammi:** I'm feeling a little bit disconnected and say, okay., you're struggling here. Your mental health struggling, your wellbeing is struggling. Here are some things that we know work. How can we support you to join in these different things? What are they going to do for you? Create an evidence base that my community can use to advocate for these things to be supported.

**Cammi:** To be supported by a government to be supported by philanthropy to be encouraged by the business community. Like these things exist. We just don't know about them enough. And I think it'll be quite interesting to actually see how much [01:08:00] recognition of value there is of these different modalities and practices by non-Indigenous community and hopefully it isn't just consumed and tokenistic. Hopefully we can draw out the base foundation and values that underlie these practices and bring about a little bit more change, bring about a little bit more reflection on things like the relationship between humans and our environment and how it has to be a symbiotic nature to, be sustainable.

**Cammi:** This idea that you know the environment and being an environmentalist and being a sustainable living human. There is so much to learn from the way First Nations peoples across the world have done this for generations upon generations, upon generations. My goal is that we can [01:09:00] take, these lessons and listen to these voices from Aboriginal community to support our own wellbeing and to support the growth and progress within our own communities. Hopefully we get a little bit of engagement across the next few years and with a little bit of agitation on the side, we might see some change.