

## Coping and preventing lateral violence in the Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> community in Adelaide

Yvonne Clark  
Martha Augoustinos  
*University of Adelaide*  
Merridy Malin  
*Adelaide*

*Lateral violence describes how members of oppressed groups direct their dissatisfaction inward. This inward deflection has been associated with the Aboriginal community in Adelaide, South Australia and has shown to be destructive. Interviews with 30 Aboriginal participants examining their ways of dealing with and strategising to prevent lateral violence in the community have been presented in a thematic analysis. Overall seven major interpretive themes emerged from these interviews: education is central; support provides unity; champions and role models are essential; culture and identity are empowering; avoidance of Aboriginal spaces by Aboriginal people can be protective; lateral violence can be challenged; and positively reinterpreted. Given that many participants drew on a number of coping strategies to deal with lateral violence, it is hoped that such information will benefit individuals, community, governments and funding agencies to support future research, education and services within communities in order for Aboriginal people to heal and prevent lateral violence.*

### **Lateral Violence and Disempowerment**

Definitions of lateral violence (LV) reveal that LV is a form of overt and covert dissatisfaction and disruption amid members of oppressed groups (Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA), 2008). Within Indigenous groups, overt physical violence coupled with covert behaviours such as bullying, harassment, gossiping and sabotage have been found (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), 2011; Derrick, 2006) along with stripping away of each other's Aboriginal identity (Clark, Augoustinos & Malin, 2016). Lateral violence with Aboriginal communities in Australia is linked to intergenerational and collective trauma that has its roots in colonialism. From colonisation Aboriginal people's lives were undermined and controlled through racism and oppression. Appeals and resistance were met with further disempowerment that has become multigenerational and continues to

be evident today (Milroy, Dudgeon & Walker, 2014).

Feelings of powerlessness and dependency have been further linked to poor health and life outcomes (Milroy et al., 2014). The effects of powerlessness in relation to LV have reportedly contributed to a blame mentality, lack of trust in others' judgment (Derrick, 2006), jealousy over possessions (Coffin, Larson & Cross, 2010) as well as physiological signs such as sleep disorders, weight loss or gain, depression (Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), 2015), and more recently potential links to high stress levels and wellbeing in Adelaide (Clark et al., 2016). In contrast, having a sense of control over one's life has been linked to better health and life outcomes, wellbeing and prosperity in many areas of Aboriginal life (Milroy et al., 2014).

### **Healing, Training and Empowerment**

Disempowerment has meant that many

Aboriginal people are in a continual state of healing, which has been described as a holistic process of physical, cultural, psychological and/or spiritual renewal (Mackean, 2009). According to Milroy et al. (2014) healing and redress for Aboriginal people needs to include processes of empowerment, community governance, resilience, restoration and reconnection with community life. Importantly, reclaiming the history, ancestry and community stories of family and country help to restore a sense of cultural continuity. One such example of cultural renewal in Adelaide is the cultural and language reclamation of the Kaurna language, which has enabled the Kaurna people to define themselves and transform their society in their own way rather than be defined by others (Amery, 2016).

Healing and empowerment can occur at various levels; starting with individuals clarifying and/or redefining their values and norms which permeates to the community for collective healing and goal setting (Dudgeon et al., 2014). Furthermore, empowerment needs to be strength based and on the premise that strength and tools lie within communities. Thus, training and information on LV appear to be increasing within Indigenous communities by Aboriginal people in Canada and Australia and appearing on websites. Examples of which include: *Chameleon strategies* (2016); *kweykwayconsulting*, (2016); *Aboriginal cultural workshops* (Ryan, 2015); *Koorreen enterprises* (2015); *Kornar Winmil Yunti* (2016); and *Lateral Love* (2014).

### *Coping, Resilience and Support*

#### *Collective vs individualistic coping*

Incidence of high psychological distress (ABS, 2016), racism (Stolper & Hammond, 2010) and poor mental health (AIHW, 2015) in Aboriginal communities means that coping is fundamental to survival. Much of the coping research and literature has been dominated by individualistic Western cultural paradigms (Kuo, 2011; Yeh, Arora, & Wu, 2006) with four broad coping styles: active or problem focused (i.e. confronting problems); denial-disengagement or emotion

focused (i.e. withdrawal); social support seeking; and positive reinterpretation (Mellor, 2004). Some researchers also suggest forgiveness of a perpetrator as a coping mechanism (i.e., Strelan & Covic, 2006). Research on collective coping emphasises “cultural” and “social” mechanisms as underlying the stress and coping process (Kuo, 2011). Collective coping responses or strategies can be: value-driven (e.g. forbearance and fatalism); interpersonal (e.g. family and social support); culturally conditioned emotional/ cognitive (e.g. acceptance and avoidance); religion and spiritually grounded (Fischer, Ai, Aydin, Frey, & Haslam, 2010); respecting authority figures; and relational universality such as belonging, sharing and identifying with others (Yeh, et al., 2006).

Individualistic cultures value independence and autonomy, where the focus of change is the external environment. Collectivist cultures emphasise group cohesion, interdependence, connection, harmony and conforming to group norms. Thus individuals in a collectivist society aim to change themselves (their minds, emotions or behaviours) to fit the environment and to protect it (Kuo, 2011). Individuals will generally use a range of collective and individualistic coping strategies in their daily lives, whether they are from an individualist or collectivist society. Some forms of coping are deemed more functional than others. For example, Yeh et al. (2006) indicate that active and internal coping (i.e., seeking support, taking concrete action or reflecting on possible solutions) is deemed as functional resulting in positive consequences. In contrast, dysfunctional coping (i.e., withdrawal, denial or repression, controlling feelings and having a fatalistic attitude), can result in negative consequences. However, Yeh et al. (2006) point out a cultural bias towards problem-focused coping and personal agency, which are concepts highly valued in individualistic cultures.

*Coping and resilience within Aboriginal communities* Australian Aboriginal people are regarded as a collective culture where individuals are held

together through kinship systems involving a shared sense of identity, responsibility, care and control (Milroy et al., 2014). Examples of coping and resilience in relation to Aboriginal people in Australia have primarily been in response to racism (Mellor, 2004) and psychological stress (Kelly, Dudgeon, Glee, & Gaskin, 2009). Mellor (2004) indicated three broad themes of coping behaviours to deal with racism in his research which are *defensive*, *controlled* and *attacking*. Defensive (defend or protect the self) includes: passive (resignation of the situation); active (avoiding future encounters or individuals, venues or situations); reinterpretation of the event (to lessen the impact of racism); social support; and strengthening children (to help them cope with racism in the future). Controlled (control the self) is primarily about ignoring (which is a choice to not respond). Finally attacking (control the environment/perpetrator) is about contesting racist behaviours, confrontation of some kind (i.e., educating the perpetrators through factual information), asserting identity and pride, or seeking external controls (i.e. calling on those in authority). Yet, Mellor (2004), indicates that the Indigenous people in his study were reluctant to use regulatory or legislative bodies as they were seen as ineffective.

Coping in relation to psychological distress for Aboriginal people has been to identify risk and protective factors whereby protective factors shield against the effects of risk. Those who are psychologically overwhelmed or struggling to cope with multiple stressors are likely to effectively exhibit higher psychological distress (Kelly et al., 2009). Some of these risk factors include unresolved grief and loss, trauma and abuse, domestic violence, removal from family, substance misuse, family breakdown, cultural dislocation, racism and discrimination and social disadvantage. Protective factors include connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry and family and community (Social Health Reference Group, 2004). These factors can serve as a source of resilience and can moderate the impact of

stress on social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) of an individual, family and community. Merritt (2007), amongst others, has argued that exceptional resilience has enabled many Aboriginal people to survive and be shielded against the devastating effects of colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

*Social support* Coping in the form of social support is via bonded and bridging support. Bonded relationships are between intimate associates who are often from homogenous backgrounds; and bridging relationships are between less intimate associates usually from heterogeneous backgrounds. Both bonded and bridging relationships contribute to a well-developed social network (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010).

Research on social support within an urban Aboriginal community in Perth has reaffirmed the importance of bonded relationships which provide many protective resources for wellbeing and positive health outcomes (Waterworth, Rosenberg, Braham, Pescud, & Dimmock, 2014). Furthermore, bonded relationships similar to kinship relationships promote connectedness, identity, and a sense of belonging and empowerment (Waterworth, Pescud, Braham, Dimmock, & Rosenberg, 2015). However, in some circumstances, bonded relationships can have a negative effect and be psychologically stressful. For example, Aboriginal people can withdraw from bonded connections to protect themselves and immediate family, as the influences of extended family members and obligations can cause them physical or emotional harm. This withdrawal can contribute to fragmented kinship affiliations, isolation and reduced opportunity to develop new bonded relationships. Bridging relationships with non-Aboriginal people can also have positive effects, particularly if the interactions are with non-Aboriginal representatives from organisations that provide support, encouragement and information. Bridging contact with non-Aboriginal members are deemed less important within the Aboriginal community and rarely incorporated due to exposure to cultural distinctiveness,

discrimination and racism, which may prevent Aboriginal people from accessing this type of social support (Waterworth et al., 2014, 2015).

Lumby (2010) indicates that another form of support is social networking on Facebook. Facebook is becoming a popular vehicle amongst urban Indigenous young people in order to build, display and perform Indigenous identities. Facebook acts as a modern site for kinship activity of continuity connectedness and cultural belonging (Montgomery 2014). Facebook provides a means for both confirming Indigeneity by embracing some users but at the same time, denying Indigeneity by imposing penalties on others for 'faking' or being perceived as 'faking' (Lumby, 2010). Thus Facebook can be a tool of scrutiny and surveillance and can also be a platform for racial vilification external to communities (i.e., racism), and abusive and hateful messages from within (i.e. LV) Indigenous communities (Montgomery, 2014).

**Therapeutic interventions and counselling** In order to cope and heal, Aboriginal people may seek counselling and therapy for a variety of SEWB issues with the five most common during the 2012 to 2014 period being: depression, anxiety and stress, grief and loss, family or relationship problems, and family and community violence (AIHW, 2015). Various types of therapies and techniques are utilised to engage Aboriginal people in counselling. Some recommended therapies include: narrative therapy which enables a process of storytelling (Fredericks, 2006); an adapted form of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) (Bennett-Levy et al., 2014) where its suitability is still being reviewed and monitored (Dudgeon & Kelly, 2014); art therapy (Cameron, 2010); and Aboriginal traditional healing. In a Western Australian context traditional healers work with the ngarlu (spiritual life force located in the stomach) (Roe, 2010). In a South Australian context, traditional healers (Ngangkari) provide similar healing in remote, rural and urban areas (in Adelaide) via a "two way"

health care model (with Ngangkari and the health professional) (Panzironi, 2013).

Other national examples of healing and educational initiatives by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people include: the *We-Al-Li* program (Atkinson, 2012) to heal trauma; the *Seven Phases to Healing* targeting grief and loss, anger and violence (Wanganeen, 2014); Aboriginal men's healing such as *Red Dust* (Powell, Ross, Kickett, & Donnelly, 2014) and *Mibbinbah Spirit* (Bulman & Hayes, 2011) to address issues of racism, trans-generational trauma, and loss of culture and identity; and Women's healing initiatives include Aboriginal family violence programs that aim to safeguard, empower and to heal such as the *Nunga Mi:Minar* service in SA (Snell, 2009).

There is a lack of specific and tailored resources for Aboriginal people's healing, and often reliance on mainstream health and mental health services which fail to understand and address many Aboriginal healing issues. Aboriginal people have continually identified that what they need and want in order to heal themselves and their communities are preventative and holistic healing processes that promote strong, resilient communities focusing on restoring SEWB (Dudgeon et al., 2014). The success of therapeutic services also depends on cultural competency, cultural safety and relationship building. Cultural safety means that services must be culturally sanctioned so that everyone has the right to feel good about themselves and their identities (Frankland, Lewis, & Trotter, 2010).

### **Policy and Legislative Solutions**

Lateral violence as a concept does not appear to have legal standing. However, bullying, which is considered part of LV, has a number of avenues for complaints and redress under various legislations and laws. The creation of the *Fair Work (FW) Anti Bullying* jurisdiction, for example, provides readily accessible external intervention into workplace bullying without applicants having to exhaust internal organisational processes. However, defining and stopping bullying, whether in law, policy or research

remains a challenge despite good intentions (Worth & Squelch, 2015). Online bullying and cyber-safety is a growing concern, particularly for young people. For example, the most common form of communication between youth aged over 13 is social media. And around half of all youth between 8-11 years access and use some form of social media (Radoll, 2014). Now under the *Enhancing Online Safety Act, 2015*, the Children's e-Safety Commissioner was established as a complaints system for cyberbullying targeted at children and can direct large social media companies to remove offensive material (Young et al., 2016).

#### *The Current Study*

Lateral violence has been an under researched area within the Aboriginal context in Australia. Although there is increasing information and research on related concepts, such as racism, trauma, violence, family violence and SEWB, very few Indigenous people have been consulted about LV. Thus, this study aims to provide a voice about LV from local Aboriginal community members in Adelaide. Lateral violence may fit within the holistic healing and wellbeing framework for Aboriginal people, as it is a source of significant stress and can be destructive to one's identity and wellbeing. Therefore it is important to identify ways of dealing and coping with LV in order for Aboriginal people to gain a better understanding, be empowered and protect themselves from further distress.

### **Research Approach**

#### *Indigenous Framework*

This research is informed by an overarching Indigenous framework which advocates for cultural safety, respect, relevance and Indigenous world views (Rigney, 2001). An Indigenous methodology also considers Indigenous people's ontology; epistemologies; axiology (Smith, 2003); diversity; relationality and connectedness; and acknowledging Indigeneity (of participants and authors and the principle researcher) (Wilson, 2008). Moreover, an "insider" approach based on acknowledgement and experiences of

Indigeneity will be used in interpretations and analysis. At the same time "outsider" input via supervisory and collegial support is vital and will assist in further rigor.

### **Method**

#### *Participants*

Thirty Aboriginal participants consented to take part in the study. Inclusion criteria were identification as Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander, 18+ years of age, and residing in Adelaide. The majority of participants were female (63%). Ages ranged from early 20s to mid-60s with about 13% in the younger age bracket (30 years and under) and 10% in their late 50s to mid-60s. Furthermore, almost half (47%) of the participants in the study had a university level education.

#### *Procedure and analysis.*

Ethical approval for the research was gained by both the Aboriginal Health Research Ethics Committee and the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee. A recruitment flyer, with an invitation to "chat" about LV, was disseminated via various email networks with a request to circulate further. An information sheet was then distributed to interested people which provided background details of the researchers, the research, rights, responsibilities, risks, and incentives (i.e. \$,50 gift voucher). Prior to the interviews, brief demographic information, such as gender, age and educational background, was collated. Information was provided about counselling services with assurance of support upon any distress.

The interviews included broad questions such as: "Have you heard about LV?", "What do you know/understand about LV?", "Can you tell me about some of your experiences of LV?"; "How has it affected you?"; "What have you done to stop or curb LV in the past?"; and "What would you like to see happen to make changes in the community?" The interviews ranged from 15 minutes to an hour, and were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All participants were asked if they wanted to view the transcripts prior to analysis and

only one participant requested to do so. The transcripts were then de-identified and pseudonyms were assigned to all names mentioned in transcripts to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of participants. The data were coded using NVivo10 qualitative software and analysed using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

## Findings

### Overview

Many participants were aware of LV before the interviews and reflected on a range of strategies to cope and prevent LV at both individual and community level from both Western and collectivist perspectives. A common value was strength in unity. This is not surprising, as LV is a segregating phenomenon that can isolate individuals, families and groups from each other.

### Education

The most prevalent strategy discussed by participants was education and raising awareness. The participants learned about LV both formally and informally through training, workshops, work colleagues, the internet and research papers. Participants were eager to build on their knowledge of LV as well as to ensure others understood the damaging effects of LV.

*Formal training* Participants indicated that formal training, in the form of educational workshops can assist people to better understand LV, its effects on individuals, families and communities, and to work towards strategies for prevention. The extracts below exemplify the need for LV training.

*Lila (age category 56-60): I think the lateral violence training that we did has helped me understand it more. [If] I see somebody who behaves really badly, well that's lateral violence. I see somebody else and I say that's jealousy. I see somebody else and that's incompetence. I can now separate it. That lateral violence training we did...it really did make a difference to a lot of people who came to the training. People talk*

*about lateral violence more often than not...I have a lot of respect for the lateral violence training. It was like a breath of fresh air that came in. It's a way we can make changes' cos if we don't work together we are never gonna improve. No matter what amount of funds they give us, no matter what fantastic technology they give an Aboriginal organisation, no matter... if we don't work together we are never gonna make the changes... People were talking to communities and they were saying we need to do it [LV training] here... I was just sad that it just wasn't ongoing. I know you didn't have the money and stuff. Rose (age category 41-45): It would be good to learn a bit more about lateral violence... If you ever run a lateral violence workshop let me know, I will love to go.*

These narratives identify that formal training is a feasible option for better understanding LV. Reference was made to the "Preventing Lateral Violence" PLV workshops (Clark, Glover & Butler, 2015) which Lila had previously attended and Rose had heard about and was keen to attend. The workshop helped Lila distinguish LV behaviours from others, enabled conversations and better unity within the workplace. Both the narratives reiterate the need for workshops within the community as an education tool. Other workshops on LV appear to be increasing around Australia (see for example Koorreen Enterprises, 2015; Korner Winmil Yunti, 2016; Ryan, 2015) which appears to be a reflection of workshop necessity.

*Understanding and awareness* It would seem that once participants understood LV, it enabled a process of self-awareness of values, behaviours and roles for preventing LV within the community. The narratives below exemplify this process.

*Eve (age category 31-35): I think we are all probably a little bit guilty of being perpetrators and exacerbating that [LV], but for me personally I think with the name of it actually*

*created an awareness ... of my own actions, how I may talk about people, how I might even think about my community. So for me it really created a self-awareness, which I think you've got to have that before you can create community or any other sort of awareness...taking responsibility for our actions..*

*Kelly (age category 41-45): Accept people for who they are, really, I think, they should really look at themselves inside, you know and really look at their values and... you know, what do they believe in and, you know... they say they like to be respected and this is how they like to be treated themselves, but if you've got a connection it can be really hard...it prevents you from moving ahead... Own it...and you know, if you own it, then...it needs to be clearly defined what it is and why you're doing it. Why are you doing it?*

Both Eve and Kelly indicated the importance of critical reflection of one's values, thoughts, beliefs, actions and accountability. For Eve this assists her to "create community" and for Kelly reflection meant that one can "move ahead" and "own it". Thus these participants hypothesised that such reflection allowed self-awareness, ownership of one's actions, and improved community connections that assisted with fair treatment and respect amongst community.

This process begins with awareness and naming LV (Clark & Augoustinos, 2015) through education, which can set in motion a process of self-reflection about one's own experiences and responsibility in acknowledging LV and accountability. This realisation process begins at the individual level to accommodate the collective community level. This is supported in the literature that indicates that individual change leads to community change (i.e. Dudgeon et al., 2014).

*A LV campaign* Participants realised

that education for the broader Aboriginal community and general population was needed to drive the message about prevention of LV as shown in the extracts below.

*Russell (age category 36-40): I think the media and NITV...maybe do a commercial but ...it has to be hard hitting, like see some of these drunk [sic] driving commercials...People need to understand what could come of lateral violence like suicide and all these other things... It needs to be put in their face. There needs to be some kind of shock value, shock education. Because if we sugar coat things people aren't going to, it's not gonna sink in. You need something that they'll talk about in the community. "Oh, did you see that commercial?" or "Did you see that show on this and what happened."*

*Rachel (age category 31-35): I can see a campaign, it would be great but I can see little kids saying, "Oh I'm naming it now' cos there's a name to it" ... Yeah need someone to get out and do a lot more workshops around it in community...I'd love to see more like a stall at NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week and stuff like lateral love, lateral violence, learn, something like that. You know that Quit Smoking campaign and all that, it would be good to see. I know it costs a lot of money but it's so good for community and not just Aboriginal workers but Aboriginal community young, old, talking about lateral violence "Let's stop it!" ....Yeah and have posters of local Aboriginal mob, it's got to be credible, it's hard' cos we've all had our frustrations where we will all have fights with our family and that and you don't want someone going "Oh hypocrite!"*

Both Russell and Rachel supported a visual educational campaign including television, film, posters and visual displays at community events. They acknowledged the

success of other campaigns on sensitive topics. Rachel, in particular, stressed the importance that the campaign be credible and foster community participation and ownership, be culturally safe and model respectful practices.

*Targeted LV education* Participants suggested that LV needs to be targeted to both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. However, the future of Aboriginal communities lies with the next generation and therefore a focus on prevention and unity needs to start with young Aboriginal people, as suggested in the extracts below.

*Eve (age category 31-35): I think it would be very hard for a non-Aboriginal person managing Aboriginal people in a team to sit down and name that [LV]. I guess it has to be promoted and talked about and spread about within the Aboriginal community, but I think you need non-Aboriginal people ... be aware of this because also it would stop non-Aboriginal people from perpetrating lateral violence as well, and you know they could do it quite innocently or non-intentionally, but that can happen ...*

*Maggie (age category 46-50): ... How do Aboriginal people do that [pull themselves up]...Because the next generation shouldn't have to wear lateral violence and shame... You know but now they've got a whole new ball game...they've got technology...Facebook and through the mobile phone.*

*Russell (age category 36-40): It needs to start with the young, 'cos they need to educate their parents. That's kind of ironic. It's supposed to be the other way around, but the young ones need to go back into their community and educate their parents...*

In these extracts Eve highlights the value of LV education for both Aboriginal

and non-Aboriginal people, especially in the workplace where non-Aboriginal colleagues and supervisors can inadvertently become involved or perpetrate LV. Both Maggie and Russell have concerns about the normalisation of the younger members of the Aboriginal community embracing LV. Thus participants highlighted the importance of LV education for all people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, young and old, in the workplace and the community as well as in schools (as identified in other extracts).

Facebook and the mobile phone were mentioned by Maggie, and it was a concern in many of the extracts given its utilisation by young people (Radoll, 2014) and can be an avenue for both affirming and questioning authenticity of Aboriginal identity (Lumby, 2010). The literature indicates that practices of non-affirming identity can affect a young person's self-esteem and contribute to adjustment problems (Phinney & Chavira, 1992). Hence, by targeting education towards the young, the intergenerational cycle of trauma and violence can be prevented and in turn, an avenue for accountability for parents to stop modelling LV for their children.

#### *Support*

Four types of support were recognised by participants as central to coping for LV: social and family; workplace; legal; and counselling support. Such support can assist to promote unity and work together towards common goals within Aboriginal communities.

*Family and social support* Support from family and community was salient, even though it can also be the most likely place where LV occurs. The extracts below indicate the importance participants place on support within families and communities in response to LV.

*Peter (age category 26-30): Um try and support each other. I mean like if someone's got a problem, try and help them out in the community and try not make it harder for them so they think about, you know, these people and their families as well... Um maybe try to explain to them the importance of sticking together.*



*There's a lot of bigger problems out there.*

*Russell (age category 36-40): And I feel that by then putting lateral violence on their siblings of all people they should be supporting... And I tell them that. They should be supporting each other... Not running each other down.*

The participants alluded to the desire for family and community support consistent with the literature that indicates that bonded (kinship) support is more common than bridging support within the Aboriginal community (see Waterworth et al., 2014). Peter reiterated the need to “stick together” for support as the absent but implicit message is that the community is divisive. Russell indicated support rather than “running each other down”. Being put down and division are two aspects of LV, and thus family and community support is vital to alleviate problems and strive for improved outcomes.

**Workplace support** Many participants worked within an Aboriginal organisation or service where LV was an issue and discussions about workplace support featured prominently in interviews. The two extracts below exemplify the importance of workplace support for improved outcomes.

*Beau (age category 36-40): I mean personally here we're pretty supportive of one another and I think we stand sort of united and I think should be within reason without...Yeah we all stick up and support one another and we can debrief.*

*Kelly (age category 41-45): What makes it work here is that everyone talks about it, you know, if they notice something they are on [to] it pretty quick and its open and ... [Non-Aboriginal] manager is really good with support in that way... And she's really at the forefront with supporting Aboriginal workers here...it's really good. And we have our own set*

*groups and its specific for us to do, to work with the community ... clients that we work [with] here...it's flexible but you can sort of like feel confident in working...*

These extracts exemplified positive support within the workplace. Beau reiterates that when there is support there is unity amongst colleagues. Kelly indicates that an open and communicative environment with the support from a non-Aboriginal supervisor helped with unity, confidence and service provision. Thus these findings show that a supportive working environment is necessary and can utilise both bonded and bridging support (see Waterworth et al., 2014, 2015).

**Legal support** Many participants advocated for legal support avenues which could be via legislation, workplace policy or guidelines pivotal for combating LV in the workplace.

*Eve (age category 31-35): ... so I mean there probably has to be some guidelines around I don't know...I think it would be good to have some guidelines around [lateral violence in] workplaces.*

*Brett (age category 51-55): ... You know, where I give the example of how the young girl was treating her mother [perpetrating LV]. Even legislate against it as well...really it becomes a bit of a criminal offence.*

*Beau (age category 36-40): To me, we've just sort of gone through as an organisation, gone through a lot of our policies and still are continuing as part of our ...quality improvement stuff in making them more user friendly... So it's pretty clear....approaching managers and following their bullying and harassment policy and stuff, so...*

All three participants reiterated the need for legal avenues for LV. For example, Beau indicated that his workplace has recently undergone a review of many policies and procedures for clarity. There ought to be potential avenues within a

workplace for policy development, guidelines and codes of conduct to enable people to feel culturally safe and not be oppressed by the system, supervisors or other Aboriginal colleagues. Franklin et al. (2009) advocates for the alignment of cultural safety processes with workplace policy and practice.

It seems that LV education needs to be inclusive of information on legal support, such as the FW anti-bullying jurisdiction, and through the children's e-safety commissioner for cyberbullying. Yet it is difficult to know how many Aboriginal people will use these external sources and as discussed in the literature Mellor (2004) indicated that participants in his study felt that regulatory or legislative bodies were ineffective.

*Counselling support* Many participants indicated that support from a culturally responsive counsellor or psychologist was important to alleviate distress associated with LV.

*Kelly (age category 41-45): ...I have experienced lateral violence...you need to have someone you can talk with and someone that will listen, someone that understands it, so you know, like you're not having to explain about it ... someone, you know, you go in there to their professional help to...that they can understand what you're saying and how you experience, and if they have no concept of what you're saying and you've got to explain it to them, you're hitting a wall... and they need to understand the cultural...and they need to be sensitive about that, and [if] they don't have it... They're only going by textbook...They haven't lived it, they haven't breathed it, and they... don't understand it, and so, how can they really call themselves a counsellor if they're not appropriate for what you're saying?*

*Paul (age category 41-45): I got two actually; I got a psychologist through mental health... Now I get*

*psychologists and getting it out. Dreaming about it. I saw people get shot but I was 19 years' old when I saw them die but it seemed real, like it just happened... Counselling but not everyone will want to do that or even if it's available. If you can't do all that, go out for a nice walk or fish, have a good breather...*

Kelly highlighted the importance of cultural competence for counsellors. Paul's counselling was via an Aboriginal community controlled service which presumably includes cultural aspects. Without cultural competency and appropriate practices, counselling may be of little value to Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal people in Adelaide pursue counselling services in the Aboriginal primary health care sector (AIHW, 2015). Within Aboriginal services, traditional healers (Ngangkari) may also be accessed. However, the scope of this article does not allow for a report on other counselling options utilised by Aboriginal people in Adelaide such as private, government or Employer Assistance Programs (EAP).

#### *Avoidance of Aboriginal spaces*

According to many participants avoiding or disengaging with family, community or Aboriginal workplaces was a common strategy in dealing with the effects of LV.

*Belle (age category 31-35): Yeah, I don't want to be around black fellas because they're all like this and .... But yeah, I'm very strong about that sort of stuff. I mean it's easy to get like that when you've just really been slapped in the face by your own people so I can understand that. They're probably just venting, but that's really sad to me when they're like that.... Whilst I totally understood what they were saying and where they kept coming from, but I just thought I don't want it to be like that. You should be able to be proud and you shouldn't have to say that everyone's like that and you don't want to be around your own people*

*or your own family.*

*Russell (age category 36-40): I've removed myself from family that sit around the kitchen table and gossip about people... it's about removing myself from the mob and being surrounded by good people.*

*Leanne (age category 51-55): ...My uncle always told me "never work for a nunga [Aboriginal] organisation Leanne". I said I will just try and keep on hearing that all over the years. I thought I would just try this job anyway then about three months ago it all started happening. God I should have listened to him. I am thinking it's good being up there but you have to treat people how you expect to be treated yourself. It would be a happy place if we all work together. I don't like [it] when people don't work together, especially nungas [Aboriginal people]. All want the same outcome.*

These examples illustrate the active avoidance of people and places such as family, community and Aboriginal organisations. These extracts reveal that Belle avoids other Aboriginal community people in order to cope with LV as excessive contact might mean taking on others' detrimental behaviours. Russell has disengaged with family when they perpetrate LV and tries to engage with positive people. Leanne was warned by her uncle and others to avoid working in Aboriginal organisations because of LV, even though she enjoys working in an Aboriginal service. The literature indicates that LV is an issue within some Aboriginal organisations contributing to its demise (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, 2010). This aligns also with research in Perth, whereby some participants removed or disengaged themselves from community in order to protect themselves. This consequently fragmented relationships, isolating people (Waterworth et al., 2014, 2015).

*Become proud and strong in identity and culture*

Cultural maintenance, connections and identity for participants appeared essential and this was linked to empowerment and pride as can be perceived from the extracts below.

*Beau (age category 36-40): ...My mum was Aboriginal and sadly not with us anymore but my father, he was Swedish, so anyhow growing up with mum she struggled with alcoholism but she was still very passionate about her people and that we should stand up for our rights and be counted and all this type of stuff, so even though I was sort of unhappy with how I grew up around alcohol, violence, drugs and stuff like that I still absorbed her passion around Aboriginal rights, so from that like I still draw on that to this day to inspire [me] ...*

*Dianne (age category 26-30): I guess my real cling to my culture, it probably stems from, I lost my grandmother in 2008, and she was the one who I got all the culture from, and everyone went to her house, and she was sort of the matriarch of the family. So, I always looked up to her and if I had any questions, or if I was confused, or...I'd sit down and listen to her stories. And then she passed away, so I was kind of a bit lost for a little bit, and...I guess my strength comes from her, because I know that she would want me to be strong. So, I try and be true to her, and what she taught me, and try and use her strength...because she was a very strong Aboriginal woman, and I would be lucky to be like her. So, I guess that's my push...I want to be a strong Aboriginal woman, and I want to give young girls someone to look up to, too. So, I want to be strong like my grandmother, and then when my kids come along, I want them to be able to be like me.*

Both Beau and Dianne drew cultural strength and inspiration from their Aboriginal ancestry in order to maintain Aboriginal identity while at the same time acknowledging other non-Aboriginal ancestry. Beau “absorbed” his mother’s passion and recognised her importance despite her struggles with alcohol. Dianne accessed her culture and strength from her matriarchal grandmother and wants to continue her legacy by passing on culture and strength to the younger generation. Cultural maintenance and reclamation are extremely important to ensure this legacy continues for Aboriginal people as custodians for future generations (see Amery, 2016). When culture becomes lost or fragmented there can be feelings of grief and loss; but on the flip side there can be pride in what is retained and reclaimed, no matter how big or small. The literature indicates the important protective factors of cultural and ancestral renewal (see Kelly et al., 2009).

#### *Role models and champions*

Participants also referred to role models and or champions of the cause to assist in preventing LV within the Aboriginal community. These are highlighted in the extracts below.

*Eve (age category 31-35): ...when we think about lateral violence I think the work that Brian Butler is doing is fantastic... Like I see his posts that he will put up on Facebook ...loving words...there is always encouragement for our communities, but I think what’s the next step...and with him being an elder who’s going to be following in his footsteps; who’s the next young champion... So for me a lot of the time we do need champions...whether it be wearing the t-shirts; flying the flag; whether someone is going to be vocal...getting the people out there who...I believe we have got such an untapped workforce. We have got many talented Aboriginal people who aren’t working for whatever reasons but for them to be able to volunteer, to be in a paid position, to want to*

*have the kitchen table discussions, to want to have the backyard discussions and let’s talk about this and then formalise it...however, that happens in a way that other people can pick it up and go you know this is really great stuff that’s happening.*

*Rachel (age category 31-35): ...But we’ve got to role model all the elders and people my age and that too, got to role model it for our kids and nieces and nephews and stuff and each other.*

Many participants identified Brian Butler<sup>2</sup> as a strong formal advocate for LV and in attempting to improve relations within the community by advocating for love rather than destruction. Eve was particularly concerned about who would step up, speak out and become champions when particular elders no longer do it. Rachel indicated the importance of role modelling positive behaviours and relationships to direct the younger ones in the Aboriginal community to prevent LV. Both formal and informal avenues are needed, which included public forums as well as backyard discussions and role modelling. When there are controversial or sensitive topics, such as LV within the Aboriginal community, silence can maintain the status quo. Yet there are always champions that will speak out regardless of a silent veil, even if it contributes to further stress and unwelcome attention. Gorringer et al. (2009) highlight those who break the silence to speak out against sensitive issues face reprisals.

#### *Challenging lateral violence*

Participants indicated that challenging LV was one way to curb it. Challenging behaviours were described in a context of respect rather than confrontation.

*Leanne (age category 51-55): Yeah ’cos there are two people in this organisation that use it [LV] a lot. I have pulled one of them up and don’t expect to be spoken to like that. I actually put in a report to the manager three times. The first time I went to him and he said maybe she*

*was having a bad day and I said it doesn't matter. I don't expect to be spoken to like that...It can make you out to be a bitch... I can't help it. I was a mouse right through. But I am an adult now and in my 50s and if I don't like something I will say it and say it nicely. They don't like the boat being rocked, if I don't like something according to my J&P, because my old manager said to use your J&P. I carry it around with me wherever I go and always reflect on it. As well as the work plan. I have a lot of tools to back me up.*

*Beau (age category 36-40): ...there's no greater feeling... when you can put someone back in their spot without sort of bullying them or being really nasty, but with statistical evidence to go well actually did you know that blah, blah, blah...they're quiet.*

*Rose (age category 41-45): This day I came in and a work colleague said "I have to tell you something. Something happened and I addressed it. ...They were talking about you. That's right you are friends with Rose"... She said "Stop I don't want to hear this rah rah rah." Which is good on my part that she shut those people down and she said, "It was inappropriate and you shouldn't be saying that about such and such [Rose]."*

In these extracts Leanne asserts her rights when disrespected and uses education by showing her J&P<sup>3</sup>. She has reclaimed her power given that she was previously silent (i.e., "mouse"). However when she challenges others, she is consequently met with reprisals and can be labelled a "bitch". Beau finds a way to challenge people ("put someone back in their spot") by presenting factual information rather than retaliating. Rose gave an example of collegial support from others who defamed her. Challenging is a problem solving skill that is positively evaluated as functional within individualistic societies (Yeh et al., 2006). In this case it is difficult to determine the level of

functionality in relation to other coping skills presented by participants. Challenging was rarely discussed, but it appears to have empowered participants to assert their rights. *Turning a negative into a positive*

There were a number of participants who turned a negative into a positive. In other words they reframed negative information into positive information in order to lessen its impact. The narratives below exemplify this positive reinterpretation.

*Ralph (age category 31-35): And I've learned stinking thinking and stuff like that .... Like when you're gonna think negative and that you're gonna do negative things... But now I um just take a negative and turn it into a positive. A lot of people want you to fail but you've just gotta, you've gotta keep soldiering on. You know in yourself that you're doing the right thing, especially in the Aboriginal community all over Australia.*

*Russell (age category 36-40): ...I've had blatant lateral violence and there's been times where I just go with it. 'Cos I know that will annoy them more...And if they say something, I just say, "Yeah. Why are you stating the obvious?" That's even lateral violence to myself to a certain degree. Like when somebody says, like, calls you a name [word deleted] ... And I said, "Yeah, thanks for stating the obvious, like, as in a smart ass way... You know? They expect for me to get all defensive and blah, blah, blah and I always found that if I go with it, it actually annoys them more and then they're more inclined to pull back. I did it a lot in school. [It is used to] ...take the power out of the words...So the power, we're turning that word from a negative into a positive.*

In the examples, Ralph relies on "stinking thinking" methods to guide aspects in his life. When people have negatively evaluated Ralph he reinterprets their efforts

into the positive, which helps him to keep “soldiering on”. Russell gets called derogatory names and takes “the power out of the words” when he turns the information back on the perpetrators rather than reacting negatively. Positive reinterpretation is a cognitive process and described as one of the major coping skills in the general literature as well as a method used to protect oneself against racism (see Mellor 2004).

### Discussion

#### *Overview*

This article has drawn on participants’ resilience, strengths and abilities to cope and strategise to prevent LV. Education and awareness was empowering and a key strategy and was initiated by self-reflection and understanding the role one plays in sustaining or preventing LV. This self-understanding enabled participants to take responsibility for making changes in their lives. This is indicative of collective cultures where individuals change the self to protect the group or community. It also suggests the bonded and caring nature of Aboriginal people to want to ensure that Aboriginal people unite and heal as a group.

Social support via bonding and bridging modes were reported by participants, with bonding support being more prominent in their daily lives. This support assisted in sustaining culture, identity and unity, which are all important for wellbeing. However, there were instances of stress and LV, which meant participants needed to protect themselves. They often did this by disengaging in various ways. Examples included not working in Aboriginal organisations, staying home, and deliberately staying away from the influences of other Aboriginal people. This appeared to be functional to protect the self and community from further disharmony, or as a form of resilience which propels one to seek out alternative and positive support from like-minded people (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). Yet disengagement or avoidance may be a dilemma because if Aboriginal people disengage from community and culture their ability to maintain and pass on culture may be compromised.

Disengagement could inadvertently add to LV, particularly for the younger generation, where affirmation of identity is important and tested on a regular basis. Disengagement in the workplace could also be a dilemma where Aboriginal recruitment, particularly in Aboriginal services, is needed to ensure appropriate cultural service responses to the community.

Instead of disengagement some participants ensured they were culturally grounded and took inspiration from elders, ancestors, within the family and role models from within the community for empowerment. Aboriginal people have different means to access culture depending on their circumstance. For example, many Aboriginal people were removed from culture and family through policies, and therefore access may be different to those who grew up with family and community. Furthermore there are many instances of language and cultural reclamation of individuals, families and groups to increase identity and pride.

Other ways of coping include standing up against LV. This is done at various levels – as a leader, elder, champion of the cause, a positive role model, or individually to challenge LV in daily life. Challenging is aligned with problem solving and seen as functional from an individualistic standpoint as participants felt empowered by this process. A final way to cope and lessen the impact of LV was to reinterpret a negative into a positive, that is, “take the power” out of the words. This appears a helpful cognitive process, which is about changing the self to fit the environment, which is useful for collective societies.

Participants in this study displayed a range of skills conversant with both individualistic and collective coping styles. Many of their coping strategies appeared to correspond with Indigenous research on racism (Mellor, 2004) in order to protect the self, educate others and assist the younger generation to cope. This is not surprising, given that LV is so divisive and damaging to wellbeing, as is racism. Thus the protective factors in this study serve as tools that

empower and assist in LV prevention. This broader education can ensure participants' positive legacy can spread throughout the community.

*Implications for health policy intervention and further research*

There are many implications from his broad-based research which constituted a first attempt to have in-depth dialogue with some of the Aboriginal community in Adelaide who were primarily female, in the mid-age bracket (41-50 years) and well educated. Firstly, it needs to be recognised and respected that Aboriginal participants volunteered to educate the broader population about LV. As part of the overall study these participants have assisted in endorsing the label of LV (Clark & Augoustinos, 2015), and in setting LV in a broader and holistic healing framework along with racism, trauma and wellbeing (Clark et al., 2016). Participants have now revealed their coping skills, ideas and strategies which are part of healing and as an enabler to empower others. The message about LV has been proliferating slowly within communities (Clark & Augoustinos, 2015); however a broad educational process has not been undertaken in many parts of Australia. The participants advocated for a broader educational campaign with resource materials and educational and healing workshops to nurture the strengths within. Perhaps further research, exploration, replication is needed and further documented discussion on the topic of LV could serve to encourage conversations, attract resources, and empower Aboriginal people to develop additional resources to contribute to the prevention of LV within their families, workplace and the community.

There are currently laws, policies and processes for complaints and restitution for bullying for both adults and children. However, protection from LV as a whole concept is lacking. It appears that many organisations and government departments have policies, procedures and strategic frameworks but lack cultural frameworks. In the workplace, in particular, LV prevention could be included within a cultural safety or

respect framework Franklin et al. (2010) suggest organisational realignment of current policies and processes with a cultural safety framework in order to ensure resilience, empowerment, and greater wellbeing for Aboriginal people. Such a framework would also rekindle Aboriginal values of cultural renewal, and sanction cultural competency training for non-Aboriginal staff. Thus, in the workplace, guidelines and processes aligned with cultural safety that include an understanding of and mechanisms for prevention of LV can ensure unity, resilience and wellbeing, which in turn can greatly add to an increased service to the community.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The term 'Aboriginal' is used as the research is about Aboriginal people in Adelaide. This will be interchanged with the word 'Indigenous' when quoted and at a national or international level.

<sup>2</sup>William Brian Butler and Nicola Butler are the individuals behind the Lateral Love and Spirit of Care for all Humankind 2012-2022 process. See <https://lateralloveaustralia.com/>

<sup>3</sup> A J&P is the Job and Person Specification which is a description of the duties, qualifications, skills, experiences, knowledge and other attributes which a person must possess to perform the job.

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### Address for Correspondence

Yvonne.clark@adelaide.edu.au

### Author Biographies

**Yvonne Clark** is a Kokatha and Wirangu woman from South Australia. She is a registered Clinical psychologist and is a lecturer in Psychology at the University of Adelaide and PhD student. Her research interests include topics on culture, health, social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, racism and lateral violence within the Aboriginal community.

**Martha Augoustinos** is Professor of Psychology at the University of Adelaide. Martha has published widely in the field of social psychology and discourse, in particular the nature of racial discourse in Australia. Her research interests are on political discourse, rhetoric and persuasion, racism, social categorisation, stereotyping and prejudice, identity and nationalism.

**Merridy Malin** was a university academic for 20 years and an experienced researcher. She has worked in the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health and the Aboriginal Health Council of SA where she developed and taught in an accredited research course and led the 'Rising Spirits Community Resilience' research project. Merridy has recently retired from employment.