Inclusion/exclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students:
Understanding how 'We' matters

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ABSTRACT

The inclusion of Indigenous people in universities is an important policy issue, as evidenced by the Review of Higher Education and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which is currently underway. While the Review aims to collectively address access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in universities to ensure parity in the sector, a key contributor to those outcomes is that of participation. This article examines a focus group interaction in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are yarning about their experiences of participating in university life, using Ethnomethodology (EM) and its analytic methods. Premised on the understanding that language is action, the study examines the students' use of personal pronouns and particularly the first person pronoun 'we', using the inclusive/exclusive distinction. Applying this pronominal system here provides insights into the notion of inclusion/exclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian higher education, and for understanding how 'we' matter(s) in everyday university life.

Keywords: Indigenous higher education, interaction, pronouns, social inclusion/exclusion, Ethnomethodology

Brief Background on Indigenous Higher Education

Although the first Australian university began operations in the mid-1800s, it was not until the advent of mass higher education in the 1970s that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were given access to higher education institutions; in line with the social progressive 'Australian discourse of the "fair go"' (Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Rapley, 1999, p. 353). Since that time, a number of legislative (e.g., Aboriginal Education Policy), financial (e.g., Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme), academic (e.g., Indigenous Tertiary Assistance Scheme) and other support mechanisms (e.g., the National Indigenous Cadetship Program) have been implemented to promote successful educational outcomes and achievements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at the tertiary level. However, according to the Australian national census figures for 2006, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons make up 2.5% (i.e., 517,2000 citizens) of the total population of Australia (i.e., 21,017,200 citizens) (ABS, 2008),[i] they are under-represented in universities.

Table 1 shows the Indigenous higher education national performance indicators over the 2001 to 2006 period (available at the time of writing this paper). These performance indicators are determined by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), and are considered in relation to the indicator of equality between Indigenous and domestic students within Australia. These are 2.5% for the access and participation rates and 1.0% for the retention and success rates.

Table 1: Indigenous Higher Education Performance Indicators, 2001-2006

Performance Indicator	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Access rate	1.60	1.61	1.60	1.54	1.49	1.49
Participation rate	1.27	1.26	1.26	1.26	1.20	1.25
Retention rate	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.78	0.81	-
Success rate	0.73	0.75	0.75	0.76	0.76	0.77

Note: Statistics prior to 2002 are based on students undertaking units of study in semester 1 of each year, calculated at 31 March. Post 2001, these statistics were based on students undertaking units of study over a full academic year (DEST, 2005, p. 83).

The Table shows a drop in both the access and participation rates of Indigenous students over the 2001 to 2006 period. While the numbers show a decline in the access and participation rates of Indigenous students over that period, during 2001 to 2005, there was a slight increase in the retention rates for Indigenous students. There was also a slight increase in the success rate for Indigenous students over 2001 and 2006, which is good news for Indigenous higher education.

Although 'diversity' on Australian university campuses is said to promote 'understanding, prosperity and harmony' (Bishop, 2006, p. 394), the 2005 National Indigenous Higher Education Network (NIHEN)[ii] Report found that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on university campuses had been subjected to episodes of racist graffiti and slurs, and other offensive acts (Anning, Robertson, Thomas & Demosthenous, 2005, p. 49). Similar findings were previously reported by Anderson, Singh, Stehbens and Ryerson (1998) in their pioneering study into the structures of universities and Indigenous rights. Whereas Anderson et al. concluded that 'the university is still predominately an institution for the white person', Michael Dodson (1994), a former Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice, said,'[a]t the simplest level', Indigenous people do not enjoy the 'right to equal access to education'. He went on to say, 'the mere granting of rights … will not overcome the profound oppression we continue to experience, even when it appears that "we are participating"' (Dodson, 1994, np). While one's participation and experience of university can influence whether one 'stays in' or 'pulls out' of university, which has important consequences for outcomes in Indigenous higher education, it can speak volumes about the notion of social inclusion/exclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in university, which is the focus here.

The Framework

The empirical and conceptual framework informing this study comes out of Ethnomethodology (EM). EM is interested in understanding *how* ordinary members of a culture mutually construct a shared sense of order and intelligibility in everyday social life (Garfinkel, 1967/1984). EM provides understanding of social action, the nature of intersubjectivity and the social constitution of knowledge. Its analytical framework permits the documentation and examination of the commonsense knowledge that ordinary members of society use to 'make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstance in which they find themselves' (Heritage, 1984, p. 4).

EM's Analytic Methods

EM's analytic methods, Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) emerged out of the collaborative work of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (e.g., Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), and especially Sacks' *Lectures in Conversation* (see, 1992a, 1992b). In a lecture to his students on conversation, Sacks explained,

> [t]he kind of phenomena we are dealing with are always transcriptions of actual occurrences, in their actual settings (1992a, p. 113).

Sacks (1992a, 1992b) aimed to show his students how categories could be heard or seen to be, according to Schegloff (2007, p. 463), 'articulated embodiments

of "anyman's" vernacular or common-sense understandings'. For instance, anyone hearing the utterance 'the baby cried; the mommy picked it up', would common-sensically interpret that the mother who picked up the baby was the mother of that baby. In other words, categories (such as 'mother' and 'baby') are organised into collections of categories (e.g., 'family') because they 'go together' (Schegloff, 2007, p. 467) as paired-categories or standardized-relational-pairs (SRP) (Sacks, 1992a, p. 218).

Sacks (1992a) also showed that any collection of membership categories contains at least a category that can be applied to some population containing at least a member, and that a single membership category is adequate for describing a member, as the economy rule maintains. This means, for example, that if a person has been categorised as a 'mother', providing an extended list of the membership category is unnecessary. He further identified 'a class of category sets' - 'which-type sets', which are made up of a set or a group of two or more categories 'where each set can classify any member of the population' (Sacks, 1986, p. 134). The class of category sets are said to be Pn-adequate, and include 'sex, age, race, religion, perhaps occupation' (1992a, p. 40). Schegloff (2007, p. 468) explained,

> it is a fact of major importance that there are at least two Pn-adequate devices in every language/culture we know … because anyone who can be categorised by some category from one device …can be categorised by a different category.

It is not a knowledge of individual or specific persons that generates a projection common to members but 'the features of a perceived *class* of persons that is relevant' to the incumbents of the category (Jayyusi, 1984, p. 23). Further, Sacks (1992a, p. 590) explained,

> [t]he application of the categories of some collection to a population, is an operation that can be talked of as "partitioning" a population into various categories. One consequence of that operation - in the first instance for analysts, but then perfectly obviously as a matter that's oriented to – is that we get a population that can be considered to be composed either of co-members or cross-members of some category, or of all co-members or all-cross members.

So, for instance, application of the categories of the collection 'university' to any population can give the partitions 'student/lecturer' or 'undergraduate/postgraduate' or a range of other categorial partitionings. There might be three people, two students, who are co-members to each other, and one lecturer, who is cross-member to the students, and vice versa. Further, Sacks found that persons do not simply talk about being co-members in a category, but may talk about being co-members by reference to other collections' categories, such as 'mother' from the collection 'family, or 'Indigenous' from the collection 'race'. Co-membership and cross-membership can

be relevant for all sorts of activities. Sacks (1992a, p. 590) explained, '[s]ome things are not appropriately done unless persons are cross-members, other things are not properly done unless persons are co-members'. While expectable categories in this study relate to the category, 'students', which belong to the collection 'university', and 'Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander/Indigenous', which belong to the collection 'race', an exploration of the types of collections that participants orient to can provide insights into matters relating to social inclusion and improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in universities.

Personal Pronouns

A key focus in this paper is that of personal pronouns. While pronouns can substitute for noun phrases and are used in the grammatical classification of words, their projection can serve to express varying sorts of solidarity and differentiation as they invoke collective identities and group memberships. The notion of collective identity has also been taken up by McHoul (1997, p. 317) in his investigation on the production of 'we' in sport. In the case of swimmers, McHoul explains that while swimmers mostly compete alone, they also compete in teams. What that means is that the non-swimmer parties to the swimmer such as the coach, swim crew and the swimmer's family can be included in a particular projection of 'we'. So, 'we' can be summative or made up of a finite list. However, there can also be a categorial or premitive usage of 'we'; to refer to an infinite group of people that includes spectators, the audience, fans, or virtually any person, including persons of the same nationality, particularly in the case of international sporting events.

Further, whereas the English language contains only one non-singular first person plural pronoun (i.e., 'we'), to refer to collective or group membership,[iii] over half of the Indigenous languages of Australia (e.g., Torres Strait Island Kriol) and many languages of the world (e.g., Chechen) make a distinction between the 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' varieties of 'we' (Dixon, 1980). Dixon explained,

> [t]here will be two separate duals – inclusive 'you and I' and exclusive 'I and someone other than you' – and plurals – inclusive 'you and I and one or more others' and exclusive 'I and two or more others, not including you' (1980, p. 277).

The inclusive form refers to the inclusion of the addressee in the collection being established, whereas the 'exclusive' form refers to the exclusion of the addressee from the collection being established. Dixon (1980) has shown that many languages make a further distinction between varieties of 'we' - dual and plural. The dual system includes a maximum of two persons in the collective (i.e., the speaker and one other person), while the plural system includes more than two persons in a collective (i.e., the speaker and two or more persons).

Although there is no grammatical category of this system in English, these distinctions provide (i) a tool for distinguishing different uses of 'we' that are

otherwise hidden in English, and (ii) are of relevance because these distinctions exist in the first languages of the group (Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander languages and Kriol), so the distinctions are likely to be more salient to them.[iv] Further, application of this linguistic repertoire here distinguishes persons and complements of persons as members, into categories of members, which is can provide insights into issues of inclusion and exclusion, and an understanding of how people participate in institutions, such as universities.

Research Design

Selection of Sites and Participants

The data for this study was collected from a single focus group interaction conducted in an Indigenous Higher Education Support Centre in an Australian university. The method is understood as an important 'key starting point' in CA/MCA research, as it is 'sufficient to attract attention and analytic interest because the instance is an event whose features and structures can be examined to discover how it is organised' (Psathas, 1995, p. 50) and 'orderly for its participants' (Schegloff, 1968). In other words, in CA/MCA studies, a single, focus group event is a consequence of its being talked-into-being and is thus an interactional achievement of the practical actions of participants.

While most research provides a snapshot of participants in terms of macro-sociological variables (e.g., educational background, income) and personal background, the researcher has elected not to provide such a snapshot, as it is incommensurate with the analytic method employed here. Participants' 'missing data' (ten Have, 2000, p. 55) is provided only when made relevant by a participant in their talk and only where their local procedural relevance is demonstrated. In other words, it is the aim of this research that '[t]he existence and relevance of such identities are, strictly speaking, to be discovered in the analysis, as products of the local practices of participants' (ten Have, 2000, p. 55), which fits with the ethical requirements for conducting culturally appropriate Indigenous research.

Ethical Clearance

This study is underpinned by the ethics, values, principles and themes for ethically-appropriate research practices with Indigenous people, as recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2003/2007). Further, this project has satisfied the requirements of the principles of ethical research set down by Griffith University's Ethics Committee.

Transcription Procedures and Conventions

Recording interaction is a fundamental aspect for CA/MCA studies. The starting point for analysis is to engage with the data in an unmotivated way; that is without pre-conceived notions or ideas of what one might find, because it is the features of the interaction itself that are of relevance to the analysis. Noticings and discoveries for

how people take turns talking, how they emphasise their talk, what they say when they talk, how they talk, and other features are made possible through the close and repeated listening to the recorded data and in the process transcribing (e.g., Jefferson, 1989; Sacks, 1987). Further, the transcription conventions for representing details of talk used in this study are based on, and simplified from, those provided in Jefferson (1989), which Liddicoat (2007, p. 14) has explained,

> is well suited to detailed analysis of talk and it has proved to be both a robust and useful tool for understanding the ways in which language is used in social interaction.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability is a key issue for research because reliability establishes consistency and truth and objectivity of the findings (Peräkylä, 1997). With regard to the advantages of using tape-recordings, Sacks (1984, p. 26) said:

> I could get my hands on it and I could study it again and again, and also, consequentially, because others could look at what I had studied and make of it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to be able to disagree with me.

The validity of the data was ensured through the gathering of authentic, naturally occurring (that is, not-experimental and not co-produced with the researcher), which were audio-recorded and later accurately transcribed to represent the social phenomena to which it refers. In CA/MCA studies the validity of the interaction is not a problem of the research design because the validity of the talk and actions, as trustworthy, are determined by the participants themselves (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967/1984; Sacks et al., 1974). Every instance of talk warrants its own analysis and 'the truthfulness of the analytic claims that are being made about those recordings' (Peräkylä, 1997, p. 201) are determined by, and through, the participants' utterances of the claims.

Analysis

Recall that the data for this study were collected from an interaction in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are yarning about their experiences of university.

All Aboriginal Persons in a Tutorial-Class

In Extract 1 (below), Ronnie takes up the floor to give an account of an 'unbelievable' (line 399) experience that she shared with 'all Aboriginal persons in a tutorial-class'. The talk is produced as an upgrading of the accusation made by other members of the focus group event, who have complained about biased treatment of persons who are Indigenous.

Extract 1: Lines 397-408

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397    Ronnie:    [as I wen' through university my↓sel↑f=fair while ago now,
398               >I graduated in ninety-nine<, when I first started .hhh over
                  at
399                ((university)) (.) it w'z unbelievable what {we} 'ad to put
                  up
400                ↑with.
401               {We} were sitting there in one one section and ah >all the
402                Aboriginals were sittin' in the fron' row<, 'nd  this
403                bloke  (.) would of'en say to us in sociology yihknow, 'bout
404                the Aboriginals dyin' out and everything,
405                en' 'e'd look straigh'- at us an' I'd  go, '↑woo↓oo ↑{we}
406                still ['ere:!
407    Gerard:        [((laugh))
408     Frank:           [((laugh))
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The talk begins in overlap, with Ronnie producing an action that informs co-participants that she will be sharing a personal experience, '[as I went through university my↓sel↑f' (line 397). Without pausing, Ronnie adds, '>fair while ago now<' (line 397) and '>I graduated in ninety-nine<' (line 398), which she hurriedly produces. Ronnie then produces an assessment of the yet-to-be-told experience, 'it w'z unbelievable what we 'ad to put up ↑with.' (lines 399-400). The utterance not only informs co-participants to listen out for that thing assessed as 'unbelievable' (lines 399), it makes explicit that the treatment that she was subjected to was something she endured with others.

What is hearably 'unbelievable', as self-assessed by Ronnie in her initial formulation, might not be attributable to the speaker's claim of having had such an experience, but to the fact that '↑we still 'ere:!' (line 405), that is that Aboriginal people did not die out. In prefacing the next bit of her utterance, ''bout the Aboriginals dyin' out and everything' (lines 403-404) with the phrase, 'yihknow' (line 403), Ronnie 'appeals to [the] intersubjectivity' of her co-participants and does not have to 'spell things out' (Edwards, 2003, p. 36) for them.

Following a brief pause, Ronnie provides some background to her story by way of a scenic description, 'We were sitting there in one one section and ah >all the Aboriginals were sittin' in the fron' row' (lines 401-402). The utterances, 'we were sitting there in one section' (line 401) and 'sittin' in the fron' row' (line 402) signal a shift in the scenic background of Ronnie's story from the more general grounds of the 'university' to that of 'sitting' in a 'class room' or 'lecture hall'. Mobilising this series of place-indexical terms is a method that Ronnie uses to bind together her experience and connect the topical events of the experience as a coherent unit. Further, they enable the speaker 'to put in information that has as its heard motivation that it enables recognition to take place, but where you can also put in information that you want to convey for the story'(Sacks, 1986, p. 133).

That said, it appears that Ronnie's specification, 'fron' row', is significant because of 'who it is' that is said to conventionally sit in the front row of an educational classroom. Conventionally, those occupying the front row are normatively positioned as 'A-students' or 'bright students' and not their SRPs, 'D-students' or 'under-performing students', who are taken to conventionally sit *up the back*. Hence, Ronnie's selection of the recognition-type description is one way in which she displays and challenges a particular institutional understanding that normatively downgrades the scholastic aptitude of incumbents of the modified category, Aboriginal-student.

Further, in referring to her tutor/lecturer as 'this bloke … in sociology' (lines 402-403), Ronnie is using 'bloke' - an informal category for all males under the collection 'sex', rather than the expectable, category 'tutor/lecturer' under the collection 'university'. In so doing, Ronnie can be seen to 'downgrade members' (Sacks, 1992a, p. 249) of the category 'tutor/lecturer, and call into question the category-bound knowledges that members of that category 'requiredly possess' (Hester & Eglin, 1997, p. 7). This is made explicit as she goes on to say, "en' 'e'd look straigh'- at us an' I'd go, '↑woo↓oo ↑{we} still ['ere:!' (lines 405-406).

Ronnie's productions of 'we' are of the exclusive variety and the summative type. They include 'all the Aboriginals' (lines 401- 402) 'over at' another university' 'in sociology' (line 403), but not the Aboriginals from focus group event. This 'all co-member' set includes 'all Aboriginals persons in a tutorial-class, but excludes all Aboriginals persons from this university here and addressee/s' category under the tutorial-group collection. Further, the 'time references' (Sacks, 1986, p. 130) that are sprinkled throughout Ronnie's talk imply that the treatment that she tolerated as a member of that collective at that time was worse than other Aboriginals suffer at this time, as she says, 'it w'z unbelievable what we 'ad to put up ↑with' (lines 399-400).

In this small bit of talk, the production of the exclusive-like 'we' provides a resource through which Ronnie identifies her incumbency in the category 'Aboriginal', as she explicitly states, that 'we', Aboriginals, have not died out and are still here. Further, it is one that alludes to that socio-historic form of organisation in which the extinction of the Aboriginal race was promoted as a part of the normative racial discourse in Australia (e.g., Whitehead, 2007), that is without having said it in so many words.

All Persons from Thursday Island

In Extract 2. Lorna self-elects to join in the talk. In first taking up the floor, Lorna momentarily holds the floor with the utterance 'My um' (line 695), which she repeats, and which is followed by a brief silence. With a high pitch onset, Lorna starts to produce a personal experience about her first year at university, which she informs 'has been ve:ry different to everyone here'ya↑' (line 695-696).

Extract 2: Lines 695-706

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695    Lorna:    My um, my um (.)↑I suppose my time at uni has been
                 ve:ry
696              different to everyone here'ya↑ 'cause I do journalism
                 and pr.
697              An:d=um, first year w'z a bit rocky because I come from
698              Thursday Island and I've never been to like Brisbane
699              beforehand um >living life< so it w'z a big it w'z a
700              big jump fa me= an' although, like, although I'm not dark
                 in,
701              like, my colour of my skin it's still inside (.)
702              like (1.0) the way {we} live back home is very diff'rent to
                 the
703              way {we} live down here, and I just foun' thad I stuck to
704              Islanders and Aboriginals down here because (.) other
705              people outside our culture didn't respect like thuh
706              morals that {we} had and I didn't find them to↑.
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Lorna reports that her experience is 've:ry different to everyone here' (lines 695-697) because she (i) studies 'journalism and pr' (line 696), (ii) comes from 'Thursday Island' (line 698), and (iii) had never been to Brisbane, 'living life' (lines 698-699). In other words, Lorna begins her turn-at-talk by informing co-participants that what she is reporting is not something she shared with others, but something that she experienced alone, as indicated by her production of the singular forms of the first person pronouns, 'My' (line 695) and 'I' (lines 695, 696, 697, 698, 700). However, as the telling unfolds, Lorna can be seen to be making different pronominal choices, as she selects a summative type 'we' to give a background to her experience.

In the sequence, the first 'we' (line 702), second 'we' (line 703) and third 'we' (line 706) all refer to the racial group 'Thursday Island' (line 698). In all three utterances – (i) 'the way we live back home' (line 702), (ii) 'the way we live down here' (lines 702-703), and (iii) 'thuh morals that we had' (lines 705-706) – 'we' makes explicit all Thursday Island people. Here, an all co-members 'all persons from Thursday Island, but excluding all Non-Thursday Island persons' category is being produced under the racial-group collection. This category can be seen to be of the exclusive variety because there are no other persons in the focus group event that are from Thursday Island.

In her production of the pronoun in the possessive case, 'our' (line 705), in the phrase, 'other people outside our culture' (lines 704-705), Lorna alludes to 'or hints at' (Sacks, 1992a, p. 595) the relevance of 'culture' with regard to 'we'. Lorna talks-into-being a set that makes a sharp distinction between members making up the category 'Indigenous', as it includes, 'all Islanders and Aboriginals down here and all persons from Thursday Island'. In alluding to the category, 'culture', as a sub-set of the category, Thursday Island, and comprising all Thursday Island persons and 'Islanders and Aboriginals down here', Lorna is indicating that the categories

'Islanders and Aboriginals' shared greater membership ties with 'Thursday Island' people than people 'outside our culture' (line 705).

Although Lorna talks-into-being an 'all persons from Thursday Island' category that seems to exclude the addressee/s, her talk around the category 'culture' alludes to a category in which Islander and Aboriginal persons in the interaction (i.e., Ronnie and others) can be seen as strongly aligning with those participants as people *inside* our culture, that is, as members of 'our culture'. Characterising people 'outside our culture' (line 705) as lacking 'respect [our] morals' is not something that can be disputed because it is something that Lorna personally experiences, as marked by her shift back to the first person singular, where she says, 'I didn't find them to↑' (line 706).

Discussion

Overall, with regard to the inclusive/exclusive dual/plural pronominal distinction that was applied here, all productions of 'we' were exclusive-like, which means that participants did not include the addressee(s) of the talk in their projections of 'we' (i.e., participants in the focus group event). Participants' productions of the exclusive plural-like 'we' produced a variety of all co-membership categories that were made up of finite categories. In other words, the categories 'Aboriginal' and 'Thursday Island' were produced through the productions of the summative type 'we' in the sense that the projections of 'we' comprised a finite list comprising (i) 'all the Aboriginals' (lines 401- 402) 'over at' another university' 'in sociology' (line 403) and (ii) 'all persons from Thursday Island, but excluding all Non-Thursday Island persons' (see, lines 702, 703 & 706). In so doing, the participants align themselves with members of their own race, and not necessarily members of the categories that typically make up university collections, e.g., 'students'.

Recall that Sacks found that persons do not simply talk about being co-members in a single collection (in this case, 'race'), and may talk about being co-members by reference to other collections' categories. However, this was not the case here. While the collection 'university' and its categories 'student' might be expectable categories in a discussion on experiences of university, both participants only mention the Pn-adequate categories belonging to the collection 'race'.

In orienting to the categories 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander', both Ronnie and Lorna make race relevant to their experience of university. While Ronnie's account about the reportedly racist sentiment produced by 'this bloke…in sociology' harks back to the racist eugenic history in this country, Lorna's account reveals the isolation that she felt when leaving her remote, island home to study in a big city. Though it is not biased treatment against Indigenous persons *per se* that is the topic of Lorna's account, it is a perceived or experienced lack of 'respect' from 'people outside [her] culture' that sees her form relationships and experience university with only 'Islanders and Aboriginals', and not non-Indigenous members of the university. Further, whereas Ronnie's account appears to challenge some of the

dominant negative theorisations and myths about Aboriginal students in universities, Lorna's account reveals that there is a long way to go to creating a university culture in which Indigenous students themselves can feel included.

Conclusion

This small scale study drew on EM's analytic methods to explore an interaction in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were discussing their experiences of everyday university life. The methodological approach adopted here showed that an investigation of the first person plural pronoun 'we' is a 'powerful resource' for gaining insights into issues of inclusion/exclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; at least from the point of view of these students, *in situ*. It further showed that the relevant identifying category that these participants used to provide their retrospective accounts of university life was couched in terms of racial group membership, and that one's race can impact the way in which one participates and experiences university. The findings indicate that more needs to be done to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to experience university as co-participants and co-members of the broader university community. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to speculate on how this might be achieved, it is hoped that this small scale empirical study will focus attention on the importance of participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education, and open this up for further debate and research

Notes

[i] The figures show the Indigenous Australian population under three racial groups, (i) Aboriginal only (total, 463, 900 citizens), (ii) Torres Strait Islander only (total, 33, 100 citizens), and (iii) both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (i.e., 20, 200 citizens) (ABS, 2006).

[ii] NIHEN is a national representative peak body committee of the Indigenous higher education sector.

[iii] English makes a marginal distinction through the inclusive, 'let's'. The directive, 'let's eat' can include the person addressed, and therefore be an invitation to the addressee to eat (i.e., 'let you and I eat'). Alternatively, 'let us eat' - formal usage - can exclude the person addressed, and be a request to leave the speaker alone, (i.e., 'go away so that I – and one or more unnamed others – can eat').

[iv] Note, this study is not suggesting that these distinctions (i.e., inclusive/exclusive or dual/plural) exist in English grammar, but are a useful tool to uncover the various referents of we/our/us.

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