Transgender People in the Northern Territory
Dr Stephen Kerry
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TRANS DILEMMAS
Living in Australia’s Remote Areas and in Aboriginal Communities
Stephen Kerry

Darwin
Newcastle
'The Internet now provides the ability to recruit a geographically diverse, non-clinical sample, where such individuals may not otherwise come into contact with researchers’ (p. 246).

Digital Divide

‘Are quickly adopting new digital technologies’


Used by Aboriginal people in help-seeking & help-giving, especially around issues of death, mourning, and suicide

Sisters & Brothers NT
3 Sistergirls
1 Brotherboy
3 Sistergirls
1 Brotherboy

First person narratives
18
11 Sistergirls
7 Brotherboys

Tiwi Islands

Crystal (sistergirl, 45)
‘There must be something in the water’


Australian transgender literature

Economic instability, social exclusion, illness, & abuse

Living in remote areas

Social isolation
Difficulties accessing health care
Social isolation

‘Seek support from similar peers to normalize & validate emotional experiences related to discrimination’ (p. 282)


Social isolation - Peer support

Belinda (transsexual woman, 37)

‘You end up having to work on yourself & end up finding specialists on your own. It doesn’t help when you are struggling mentally as well’

Hamilton* (FtM, 37)

‘To be around others like me - queer, weird. I feel like a fish out of water around “straights”’

Sianne (transgender woman, 43)

‘You don’t see a lot of transgenders around […] there is nothing here. The ones that do stay are usually the ones who are born here and have that connection’

*Prefers feminine gender pronoun
Social isolation - Peer support

Felix (transman, 29)

‘Small private groups of trans friends that catch up to offer support’

Ivan (transman, 47)

‘I have lots of FtM friends in the NT & we’re all doing well here’

Patricia (transwoman, 65)

‘I only see them every six months’

Social isolation - Dating

Starlady (transfabulous, 38)

‘It’s fucking impossible to get a date in Alice Springs because of the stigma around dating trans people’

Julia (transgender woman, 29)

‘A lot of guys are ok with you, if you’re discrete. Not many would openly date transwomen. They’d happily sleep with them’

Brianna (sistergirl, 32)

‘It can be very hard for trans women to even date, to find somebody to love. Finding a partner who identifies as a cisgender straight male who doesn’t care’
Social isolation - Blokey

‘Boasts a tradition of being a frontier town [it is] rough & male dominated’ (p. i).


Sianne (transgender woman, 43)

‘There is an ocker feel, and there is a workman culture’


Nell (transwoman/intersex, 52)

‘Never lived in such a suppressed state in my whole life as I have in the NT’

Social isolation - Blokey

Julia (transgender woman, 29)

‘I’ve got nothing against transpeople, or gender diversity’

‘But, if I got with a girl and found out she was trans I would probably beat her or fucking kill her’

‘He didn’t know and that in the future you should tell guys. Because … I’m ok with it, but I’m not sure a lot of straight guys would be’

Difficulties accessing health care

Kelvin (transman, 28)

‘Lack of resources in Darwin’

Catherine (sistergirl, 30)

‘Hardly any doctors [who] deal with Sistergirls’ issues’

Julia (transgender woman, 29)

‘I feel like there’s not enough resources here. And I’d be better off going to [southern capital city] for that’

Sianne (transgender woman, 43)

‘Yeah, a lot of them do eventually leave. Because of medical reasons. There is nothing here’

Difficulties accessing health care - Ignorance

Mary (transwoman, 20)

‘Had not even heard of the transgendered let alone knew how to treat them’

Patricia (transwoman, 65)

‘They just didn’t know how to sort of approach me. They just didn’t know what to do’

Starlady (transfabulous, 38)

‘You have to go advocate for yourself every time & you have to educate, & as a client, that’s not right’
**Difficulties accessing health care - Transphobia**

Kelvin (transman, 28)

‘Finding gender-friendly medical help’

Hamilton* (FtM, 37)

‘I saw a doctor about a tooth ache and was asked whether I had had phalloplasty surgery. The relevance escaped me’

Leah (transwoman, 52)

‘Why would you want a big hairy guy on you?’

**Difficulties accessing health care - Fly-in-fly-out**

Patricia (transwoman, 65)

‘They had to get the main doctor who they were training under & get him to come and see me & explain to him what was happening’

Sianne (transgender woman, 43)

‘It’s just horrific. Always going back, restarting’

Belinda (transsexual woman, 37)

‘It shouldn’t be a continuous training facility’

Brianna (sistergirl, 32)

‘Here long-term and get some training in diagnosing a transgender person’
Difficulties accessing health care - Mental illness

At least, likely to be experiencing a mental illness

Unreported or unacknowledged mental illness

Sistergirls and brotherboys

‘White man’s disease’
Historical accounts and oral history

‘Yimpininni’ - Tiwi Islands
‘Gwarregwarre’ - Arrernte language (Alice Springs)
‘Kungakunga’ - Luritja (Western Desert)
‘Karta-pia’ - Warlpiri (north and west of Alice Springs)
Sistergirls and brotherboys

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Crystal (sistergirl, 45)
Stolen Generations, 1920s & 1930s

Kooncha Brown (Wallaga Lake, New South Wales)

‘Is a self-adopted term, recognising that western definitions of transgender […] do not reflect the culture & lived reality of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander transgendered people’


Sistergirls and brotherboys

Kai Clancy (Waka Waka/Wuli Wili, Queensland)

‘Couldn’t find anything about brotherboys’

‘They have a boy’s spirit and they live through that boy spirit […] Being a brotherboy encompasses your gender identity as well as your cultural identity’

Sistergirls and brotherboys

Racism in the trans community
*First National Indigenous Sistergirl Forum, 1999*

Kai Clancy (Waka Waka/Wuli Wili, Queensland)

‘And this is in the trans community!’

Sianne (transgender woman, 43)

‘The whole sistergirl thing, it’s not even transgender, they’re just little gay boys who dress up in their community’


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Sistergirls and brotherboys

Transphobia within Aboriginal communities

Brianna (sistergirl, 32)

‘The majority of it does come from Indigenous men. And that experience is pretty common with other sistergirls as well’

Kai Clancy (Waka Waka/Wuli Wili, Queensland)

‘Would I lose my culture for this transition?’

*First National Indigenous Sistergirl Forum, 1999*

‘Without family and country we are sunk’

Sistergirls and brotherboys
Transphobia within traditional Aboriginal communities

Crystal (sistergirl, 45)
2012, elected to the Tiwi Island Shire Council

Payback

‘My father thought that putting me through men’s business would change me, but it didn’t’

‘All of my family committed suicide. But it’s not suicide, it’s family guilt’
Sistergirls and brotherboys

Transphobia within traditional Aboriginal communities

Crystal (sistergirl, 45)

‘I see people suffer everywhere, right around the world, & I am suffering in Australia, land of opportunity. Where was human rights for me? Where was the gay movement for me?’

‘Silence is not the way to go because people die from silence. Silence is a killer’

‘These things have to be told & document. I document my life’

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Sistergirls and brotherboys

Suicide

Jo Stott (Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory)

‘For 15 years now, we’ve been talking & talking, & we still haven’t been heard’

Tiwi Islands
