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EXPLORING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE’S CONNECTION TO COUNTRY TO STRENGTHEN HUMAN–NATURE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – Aboriginal people across Australia have diverse practices, beliefs and knowledges based on thousands of generations of managing and protecting their lands (Country). The intimate relationship Aboriginal people have with their Country is explored in this chapter because such knowledge is important for building insight into the relationship between social and ecological systems. Often in research Aboriginal views have been marginalised from discussions focused on their lands to the detriment of ecosystems and human health. This chapter aims to understand if such marginalisation is evident in Western human–nature relationship discourses.

In this chapter, ‘Aboriginal’ refers to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, as this is the preferred terminology of the peak body of Aboriginal community health (NACCHO, 2012). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are members/descendants of Aboriginal cultures of Australia or the Torres Strait Islands, through identification and acceptance by the community. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2013) notes that Aboriginal peoples are the first inhabitants of Australia and are diverse in geography, language and tradition. ‘Indigenous’ refers to Traditional Custodian groups in the international context in accordance with international law to represent over 350 million people (Stephens, Porter, Nettleton, & Willis, 2006). However, it must be acknowledged that Traditional Custodian groups worldwide have their own unique practices, beliefs and knowledge systems.

Approach – This chapter provides a critical literature review which examines whether Aboriginal people’s diverse understanding of their ecosystems have been incorporated into human–nature theories using the biophilia hypothesis as a starting point. Other concepts explored include solastalgia, topophilia and place.

Findings – Critiques of these terminologies in the context of Aboriginal people’s connection to Country are limited but such incorporation is viewed in the chapter as a possible mechanism for better understanding human’s connection to nature. The review identified that Aboriginal people’s relationship to Country seems to be underrepresented in the human–nature theory literature.

Value – This chapter emphasises that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into research, ecological management and policy can provide better insight into the interrelationships between social and ecological systems.
Keywords: Aboriginal people; human-nature relationship; biophilia; topophilia, solastalgia; place

INTRODUCTION
Reviewing Aboriginal people’s connection to the land offers new ways of researching ecosystem-based approaches to health as it allows for a more in-depth cultural exploration of the nexus between social and ecological systems. A challenge to Ecohealth research is how to appropriately incorporate diverse Aboriginal knowledges, which are often situated outside of current dominant scientific contexts. This is an important investigation as Aboriginal ecological perspectives have often been marginalised or rejected from discussion and debate, and have instead been framed as the ‘other’ (as ecological practices and opportunities to share and shape their knowledges. Foucault (1982) explores such power relations, viewing them as ingrained in the social nexus, ‘conducted’ as a form he terms ‘agonism’ (permanent provocation/taunting often rather than direct confrontation) and linked to social practices, including domination. Yet, Aboriginal ecological perspectives are based on some 70,000 years of experience in sustaining the Australian ecosystem, practices which continue to evolve and cultivate contemporary insights into the relationship between people and place. Clearly, there is value in reviewing such diverse knowledge both theoretically and practically.

Using the biophilia hypothesis as the starting point, this chapter provides an overview of nuanced human–nature theories and compares them to the diverse ecological knowledges that contextualise Aboriginal people’s connection to their Country. To explain the human–nature relationship, biophilia is used as it has to a degree cut across different academic disciplines. Biophilia suggests that attachment to the natural environment is innate, while other discourses examined in this chapter – topophilia, solastalgia and place attachment – frame attachment as built or damaged over the lifespan. By examining these human–nature theories through the philosophical lens of a population still strongly connected to nature, the hope is to understand and suggest ways in which these knowledges can be better incorporated in ecology and public health research and practice. This chapter does not aim to develop new research nor be an opinion piece but rather to serve as a review of literature and commentary. It draws mainly on Aboriginal people’s perspectives but also refers to Indigenous connections to traditional lands to fill knowledge gaps through a critical literature review.

BACKGROUND
There is a power in country that radiates to all those who live there and becomes incorporated in humans by virtue of their spiritual makeup. (Taylor, 2012, p. 21) Aboriginal people have a deep spiritual connection to their lands known as Country (Weir, 2012). This connection governs social, economic and cultural structures, as evidenced by Aboriginal Law being based on the relationship between traditional knowledge and environmental interaction (Johnston, Jacups, Vickery, & Bowman, 2007; Strang, 2005). The knowledge and interaction with Country consists of every living and non-living element, whether that is land, fire, water, minerals or animals (Burgess & Morrison, 2007). Country is dynamic, having multiple meanings for Aboriginal individuals and communities (Nursey-Bray & Hill, 2010; Weir, 2012).

For Aboriginal people their Country represents a critical element of their health and wellbeing, with the management of their lands ensuring ecological sustainability. Improved
understanding of this relationship can offer new insights for public health research and practice by better incorporating humankind’s relationship with nature. Aboriginal people’s cultural obligation to manage land is often referred to as ‘caring for Country’. This practice is evidenced by Aboriginal customary behaviour, direct education through exposure to cultural practices and belief systems expressed through ceremonies, song, dance, story-telling, visiting sacred sites and taboos (Tonkinson, 2011). Often this knowledge builds over an Aboriginal person’s lifetime, based on reciprocity with and respect for the natural world through collective actions, with Elders being the major knowledge-holders. Caring for Country is rooted in hunting, harvesting bush food and traditional medical practices (Nursey-Bray & Hill, 2010). In Australia, landscape burning is an example of Aboriginal people managing ecosystems in a state of equilibrium through traditional knowledge and practice. Johnston and colleagues (2007) explain that Aboriginal Northern Territory communities deliberately burn the landscape to hunt animals, clear the land, assist travel and promote plant growth – a process embedded in spiritual, social and cultural systems refined over thousands of years.

Such relationships are often unfamiliar to Western environmental managers, who may not have intimate connections to places based on responsibility, identity and stewardship of the land, river and sea (Nursey-Bray & Hill, 2010). This does not mean that non-Indigenous people cannot have spiritual connections with the Australian landscape, but the relationships Aboriginal people have is based on a considerable longer period of time. Therefore, it is not surprising that evidence highlights the health benefits of involving Aboriginal people in caring for Country projects (Burgess, Berry, Gunthorpe, & Bailie, 2008; Campbell, Burgess, Garnett, & Wakeman, 2011; Richmond & Ross, 2009). However, Aboriginal people are often excluded from discussions and research, in respect to their Country, and Country is often viewed as no longer relevant unless financially viable (Palsson, 1995; Strang, 2005; Weir, 2012). Shiva (1995) highlights that the marginalisation of local knowledge is a necessary method of Western monocultural thinking/action (agriculture based on singular/intensive crop production), which consequently homogenises the environment. In Australia, exclusion from policy and action in environmental management has led to Aboriginal people feeling restricted in their access to Country and political rights (Nursey-Bray & Hill, 2010). Non-Indigenous academics and bureaucrats often dismiss Aboriginal paradigms by generalising and codifying such topics rather than viewing this diverse knowledge as relevant (Muller, 2012). There is also evidence of the exploitation of Aboriginal experiences and beliefs without involving the appropriate knowledge-holders or gaining their consent.

Internationally, there have been increased attempts by forestry managers, scholars and policy-makers to gain better understanding of Indigenous people’s connections to their lands (e.g. Karjala & Dewhurst, 2003). This is because the connection Indigenous people have with their land is based on community survival, guardianship of biological resources and livelihood, leading to reciprocal relationships with nature (Gadgil & Rao, 1995; Nettleton et al., 2007). For Indigenous people this connection is a basic human right (Heinamaki, 2009), acknowledged in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), which recognised the importance of Indigenous lands, knowledges and practices. Continuing these practices will build environmental sustainability, as traditional ecological knowledge has the ability to inspire, generate creativity and improve designs to enhance ecological management (e.g. Martin, Roy,
Biophilia Hypothesis

When Wilson (1984) popularised the biophilia hypothesis, he was essentially providing the first Western framework for the analysis of the ‘taken-for-granted’ knowledge that humans have an inherent connection with nature.

Although biophilia’s broad concept of ‘love of life or living systems’ had been around since 1964, Wilson’s contribution was to propose that this human affinity with and attraction to nature is genetically based (Chapman, 2002; Simaika & Samways, 2010). Wilson (1993) emphasised that for 99% of our existence, humans have been hunters and gatherers. Hence, humans have a preference for natural environments based on the evolution of the brain as well as nuanced emotional responses to the environment conjuring both negative and positive emotions (Gullone, 2000; Kahn, Sverson, & Ruckert, 2009).

Wilson and colleagues justified these negative responses through the complementary biophobia hypothesis. Biophobia refers to the fear of nature and natural processes (e.g. the fear of snakes, spiders or being in nature) and offers insight into human’s embrace of, and dependency upon, urban spaces and technology (Kahn & Kellert, 2002). A more recent yet similar theoretical construct is that of urbanophilia. Félonneau (2004) focuses on human’s attraction (urbanophilia) or aversion (urbanophobia) to cities rather than focusing on relationships with nature. Since Wilson’s hypothesis, there has been a rise in urbanisation, with evidence indicating that this disconnection from nature leads to negative health outcomes (Maller et al., 2008; Pretty, 2007), possibly due to humans’ inherent need to connect with nature. Kellert (1993, p. 21) highlighted the daunting task of proving ideas such as inherent connection; nature as part of our ‘species evolutionary heritage’; ‘human competitive advantage and genetic fitness’; philosophies of nature’s meaning; and human ethics of conservation which seems intuitive within Aboriginal cultures.

Difficulties in explaining biophilia come down to whether the concept is based on human biology and genetics or affinity, cognitive, culture or learned experiences (Bird, 2007; Kahn, 1999). In The biophilia hypothesis (1993), biophilia is mediated through spirituality (Kellert, 1993); visual stimulation and engagement (Ulrich, 1993); aesthetic pleasure (Heerwagen & Orians, 1993); cultural engagement (Nubhan & Antoine, 1993); religion/tradition (Sagan and Margulis, 1993); environmental activism (Orr, 1993); and language symbolism, myths and environmental philosophy. Kellert (1996) noted that biophilia has nine distinctive tendencies (Table 1).

A concept that recognises humankind’s previous experiences with nature, reflected in biophilia, is that people prefer savannah-like environments as a consequence of their origins
in the East African savannahs two million years ago (Gullone, 2000). Diamond (1993) highlights that biophilia fails to address the notion of evolution, as this focus on savannah-like habitats ignores the fact that humans evolved from such environments thousands of generations ago.

Further, because of the complexity of biophilia, this theory is rarely tested (Simaika & Samways, 2010) with minimal recent studies (e.g. of studies include Delavari-Edalat and Abdi, 2009, 2010). Simaika and Samway reiterate ‘Indeed, biophilia has not been shown to be innate, and it should not be assumed heritable until demonstrated to be so. It is therefore beyond scientific reasony[to] assume biophilia is innate’ (2010, p. 903).

As evolution progresses, it seems reasonable that humans might adapt and become more urban beings, but advocates for the biophilia hypothesis view connection to nature as embedded in human biology (Nisbet, Zelenski, & Murphy, 2011). In Australia, Aboriginal people living in urban areas maintain a connection to Country in indirect rather than direct ways. This indirect relationship has been precipitated through a history of poor government policy (e.g. forced removal from Country, increased urbanisation and poor land management practices) causing ecological disasters. For example, current native fish numbers in waterways like the Murray–Darling Basin are around 10% of the levels that existed prior to colonisation (Ladson & Finlayson, 2004). Evidence indicates that even when Aboriginal people are physically removed or damage occurs to Country this connection remains (Kingsley, Townsend, Phillips, & Aldous, 2009). It is important to note, however, that not all Aboriginal people who live on their Country or in urban regions maintain or want to retain this intrinsic relationship.

In The biophilia hypothesis, a section titled ‘Culture’ is dedicated to Indigenous and local people’s connection to nature. By lumping Indigenous and local knowledges together, as is common throughout biophilia literature, Indigenous people are seen as just another group, rather than a culture with valuable knowledge to share. Nonetheless, in the ‘Culture’ section Nelson (1993, p. 224) acknowledged that biophilia is ‘a deep, pervasive, ubiquitous, all embracing affinity to life that lies at the very core of traditional hunting-fishing-gathering culturesy [Indigenous Interior Alaskan people] manifest biophilia in virtually every dimension of their existence’.

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<tr>
<th>Tendencies</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Utilitarian value</td>
<td>Material/physical benefit gained from nature in terms of consumption, protection and security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naturalistic value</td>
<td>Satisfaction associated with contact with nature through feelings of joy, fascination and wonder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecological-scientific value</td>
<td>Knowledge and recognition of material uses of nature through direct exploitation. The human willingness to learn and study about nature believing nature can be understood by science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aesthetic value</td>
<td>The pleasure of visually viewing nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Symbolic value</td>
<td>Nature as a form of symbols, through language and communication of ideas, religion and stories that build cultural identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humanistic value</td>
<td>Emotional attachment to elements of nature, expressed in feelings of love</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moralistic value</td>
<td>Ethics and norms around the treatment of the non-human world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doministic value</td>
<td>Feelings of domination/mastery of nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negativistic value</td>
<td>Feelings of fear of certain forms of nature, associated with biophobia</td>
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Nelson (1993) reflected that Indigenous people respected the land, with ancestry leading them in the right direction by offering codes and beliefs that engendered respect of nature. Direct experiences Indigenous people have of their lands can provide insight into how to incorporate biophilia and sustainable ecological relationships into current practice (Cajete, 1999). Deb and Malhotra (2001), however, note that this biophilic symbolic recognition of nature (Table 1) was clearly evident in Indigenous populations but not commonly valued in Western culture. In Australia, biophilia for Aboriginal people has been loosely applied by Rose (2004), Kingsley et al. (2009) and Babaian and Twigg (2011) to reflect connectedness to place, belonging, stories of creation, sustenance of life, identity, sacred geography and ancestry. Aboriginal people are inter-connected with nature, unable to separate themselves from their Country because of its ancestral significance (Strang, 2005), demonstrating a biophilic connection. McKnight (1999, p. 176), an anthropologist who spent 40 years studying Aboriginal people, highlighted that for this population ‘nature is humanized. Frilled lizards, lightning, moonyact like human beings, and like human beings, they speak language’. This connection with Country is explained as transcending generations, tying Aboriginal people to their ancestry based on some 70,000 years of history (Muller, 2012; Rasmussen et al., 2011). This connects Aboriginal people back to place, and can take many forms beyond being just human or animal, as objects within the world take on meaning and connection to the past, present and the future (Kingsley, Townsend, Henderson-Wilson, & Bolam, 2013; McKnight, 1999; Muller, 2012). Preserving these biophilic elements is fundamental to Aboriginal people’s identities and the maintenance of their traditional knowledge generates an intimate understanding of Australia’s harsh climate and how to live sustainably within it (Packer et al., 2012). Perhaps an increased recognition of theories such as biophilia could strengthen acceptance of Aboriginal people’s connection to nature and lay a framework for understanding that relationship to place and health intertwine. Such recognition might result in a fundamental shift in attitudes called for by Cajete (1999, p. 190):

Implicitly is the importance of moving beyond idealization and patronization of Indigenous knowledge, something that inadvertently can lead to marginalization of the most profound epistemology regarding the interaction of human beings and nature. Indigenous people must be supported in their collective attempts to restore their traditions while also revitalizing themselves in ways they feel are appropriate in contemporary society.

Biophilia could be a medium to explain Aboriginal ecological knowledge, as it provides researchers with a tool to indicate how humans connect with nature and a means to test empirical questions around whether this connection is innate, cultural or learned. In Australia, Aboriginal people’s deep connection to nature underpins their genealogical, social and cultural responsibility to protect and pass onto appropriate others knowledge of their interminable relationship with their ecosystems. This intrinsic connection remains true for both Aboriginal people living remotely and in urban environments, and may offer methods of improving both ecosystem management and urban development/design.

**BEYOND THE BIOPHILIA HYPOTHESIS**

Beyond the biophilia hypothesis, academics have tried to identify how humans relate with nature. Three complementary concepts are explored in this section: solastalgia, topophilia and place attachment.
Solastalgia

Across Australia, recent droughts, environmental degradation and dryland salinity have been associated with poor mental health (Spedewinde, Cook, Davies, & Weinsteins, 2011; Stain et al., 2011). Solastalgia refers to the grief and negative distress associated with changes to a local environment for an individual or community who has an attachment with that locality (Albrecht et al., 2007). Albrecht (2005) refers to the pain, distress, suffering and psychological consequences experienced by Aboriginal people and also residents of Australia’s Hunter Valley, with coal mining development of the land they call home. These psychological consequences are described isolation (Albrecht, 2005; Connor, Albrecht, Higginbotham, Freeman, & Smith, 2004). Kingsley and colleagues (2009) question whether the loss of identity described is complete, noting that since colonisation Aboriginal people have viewed environmental destruction, and although hampering biophilic attachments and causing considerable pain, can still remain attached to Country.

By focusing on the negative psychological consequences of environmental destruction, solastalgia in some ways (but for different reasons) relates to the distancing of people from the natural environment, which relates to biophobia. Orr (1993, p. 419) highlighted that ‘biophobia sets in motion a vicious cycle... caus[ing] people to act in a fashion that undermines the integrity, beauty and harmony of nature’. Soliphilia is the antidote to solastalgia, defined as the love, responsibility and unified effort to protect our home and planet (Albrecht, 2011). Interestingly, Albrecht (2005, p. 55) draws a link between solastalgia and biophilia, noting that ‘the innate desire to be connected to life and living things, what...Wilson calls ‘biophilia’...is, in part, an innate desire to overcome solastalgia by finding an earthly ‘home’ in connection with living things’.

While solastalgia is a relatively new concept, Aboriginal people where considered by Albrecht as an example of distress felt as a result of a home being destroyed. However, like all cultures, Aboriginal culture is evolving and these connections remain critical no matter the colonial history as they do for non-Indigenous people who may also have attachments to their local environments. Since colonisation, Aboriginal people have experienced genocide, forced assimilation and removal from their Country, hampering their capacity to manage the ecosystems on which they, and all Australians, depend. As Country is central to the existence, education and governance of Aboriginal people, a notion often denied by non-Indigenous people, such removal is an attack on their belief systems and has been linked to poor social, health and ecological outcomes (Richmond & Ross, 2009). Such experiences seem evident for non-Indigenous people living in rural/regional areas where health outcomes are poor, possibly due to the degradation of land.

Despite literature identifying the impact of the destruction of Country on health, wellbeing and identity, there are few studies that focus on solastalgia in relation to Aboriginal people. Some examples include that of McNama and Westoby (2011), who interviewed Torres Strait Islander women about the solastalgic impact of climate change, noting it caused a sense of sadness, fear, distress and lack of identity. Another example focused on Aboriginal and non-Indigenous artists collaborating to interpret the concepts of solastalgia, describing the sadness of local environmental changes (Kirker, 2012). This phenomena reiterates the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which emphasises the importance of Indigenous people having the ability to control the management of their lands and negotiate what happens on them in a more sustainable/equitable way. This would allow Aboriginal people to strengthen their capacity to participate in a global market to improve health and to ensure self-determination over their own futures.
Another concept similar to solastalgia is ecological identity. Ecological identity refers to how individuals perceive themselves within natural settings. Perceptions that individuals hold about their local area and ecological systems have implications for their health, whereby ‘damage of the planet is seen as damage to self’ and to biophilic continuity (Nisbet et al., 2011, p. 304). Connor and colleagues (2004, p. 50) suggest that ecological identity/solastalgia may be fundamental to understanding place attachment and may ‘mediate relationships between ecosystem distress and human health’. Reviewing Aboriginal people’s solastalgic experiences may provide insights into this integrated health topic.

**Topophilia**

Topophilia refers to the ‘love of a place’ (O’Hare, 2007) and is often used to explain the importance that spaces and structures hold in everyday life (Ruan & Hogben, 2007). Topophilia not only focuses on the natural environment, emphasised in biophilia and solastalgia, but also on urban settings and how to make physical structures more accommodating. This approach is significant in light of increased urbanisation, as people need to understand how to make urban spaces health promoting, attractive and green (Ogunseitan, 2005). Topophilia focuses on the affective relationships people have within the settings they find themselves in, which in turn builds their identity (Kohane, 2007). Ogunseitan (2005, p. 143) described topophilia as ‘a vivid and personal experience, but research is scarce on the determinants of individual preferences and on the potential health benefits derived from such experience’.

The relationship individuals have with urban spaces refers to places they interact within and the social/cultural characteristics of the physical environment (Murphy, 2007). As with biophilia, topophilia too has a phobia, described as the negative experience of a place ‘overcome by a sense of insecurity and dislocation’ (Jenner, 2007, p. 115). Topophobia is referred to as the lack of freedom, mobility and security within a place (Ruan & Hogben, 2007). Tuan (2007) notes that for some people, dread and fear of nature (evident in biophobia) causes people to want to distance themselves from it through structures that have been built, such as skyscrapers. However, humans enjoy having nature in their grasp in a controlled manner, such as courtyards, tourist beach resorts and holiday homes (Como, 2007; O’Hare, 2007). Contradicting this, West-Newman (2008, p. 166) identifies the topophilic attachment New Zealand Maoris have to beaches: it ‘flows in our veins: the chemical composition of our blood is a reminder of our remote ancestry in the primordial oceans’. This seems to be the only study in topophilia focusing on Indigenous knowledge and biophilia.

Topophilia has relevance to Aboriginal people’s relationships to places. However, few (if any) studies use the lens of topophilia theory to focus on Aboriginal peoples’ relationships to place. Embodiment theory, which focuses on understanding knowing, being and acting, could potentially identify what experiences/relationships to place look and feel like for Aboriginal people as embodied in their daily practices and rituals. It has been recognised that place-making for Aboriginal people must incorporate the experience of place-based ancestry, Aboriginal identity and colonisation (Faintin, 2003). Faintin (2003) highlighted that Aboriginal cultural production is usually interpreted from the perspective of non-Indigenous people. For topophilia to capture Aboriginal people’s experiences of place it should be understood through an Indigenous worldview.
**Place Attachment**

'Place' is a complex term. White, Virden, and Riper (2008) acknowledge that human–nature experiences in place are categorised as place identity, place dependency, place attachment, place bonding or sense of place. Fried (2000) and Cresswell (2004) highlight that place is often viewed as static rather than fluid, dynamic and always changing. Identity and place in Aboriginal cultures are intertwined with ancestry, and although fluid and dynamic, are often linked to a locality (Burgess & Morrison, 2007). People everywhere are involved in ‘place-making’, which can be progressive, declining or frozen in time. In the context of urban Aboriginal Australians that have weathered a history of cultural assimilation, connection to Country is constantly evolving, as is building sense of self, cultural identity and place (Kingsley et al., 2013; Souza & Rymarz, 2007). However, Aboriginal perspectives have been difficult to integrate into the Australian context, especially in school settings (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). Sutherland and Swayze (2012, p. 87) note that the context of place varies considerably in Aboriginal communities and ‘requires distinct methods of facilitating “cultural-border crossing”’. Therefore, Indigenous place literature needs to be considered from a place based contextual perspective (Willox et al., 2012). White et al. (2008, p. 649) point out, Aboriginal people ‘may see a place as part of the self and simultaneously as a resource for satisfying goals of explicitly felt behaviours’.

Fried (2000) highlighted that functional place attachment is hampered by physical destruction, but identifies that the social aspect of a community is as critical. Accordingly Aboriginal people’s disconnection from land is associated with powerlessness, not only for the individual, but also in terms of social structures (Burgess & Morrison, 2007). However, Aboriginal people live in a global world and not all Aboriginal people feel disempowered when being off Country, and should be allowed to orbit between the two worlds they find themselves in order to engage in cultural practices and their own self-determination (Cape York Partnership, 2013). Although place is embodied by physical characteristics, these attachments are affected by ‘product of risks and opportunities, the nature of the social organization attached to the locale, its political, social and economic relationships with other places’ (Frumkin, 2003, p. 1451). Attachment to place can be cultivated through different forms and may extend beyond one’s home to a wider locality where a sense of belonging is developed (Fried, 2000). Aboriginal people’s sense of place has symbolic meaning seen in place-based rituals, knowledge, values and ceremony (Lowan, 2009), which is evidence of the biophilic symbolic tendency.

'Sense of place' refers to this psychological attachment to a place (Creswell, 2004). Massey (2005) develops a notion of ‘progressive’ sense of place that reconstructs the way we view place, combining bodies, objects and flows to explain the multiple meanings of place not frozen but immersed in change. This resonates with Aboriginal understandings where nature is often the embodiment of oneself and therefore are always re-creating their sense of its meaning. Massey’s sense of place refers to a place as process defined by the outside; a site of multiple identities and histories defined by its interactions. It focuses on many elements such as landmarks, movement, orientation and body configurations within the places people move between. Expressing a similar idea, Gesler and Kearns (2002) highlight that place attachment is influenced if one is considered an ‘insider’, ‘outsider’ or ‘somewhere in between’.

Spartz and Shaw (2011, p. 346) point out that ‘personal connection[s] to land tend to come through in stories told about meaningful places and convey something deeper than basic attitude’. Larsen and Johnson (2012) acknowledged that Indigenous geography and place-
based theories are caught ‘in between worlds’. With increased globalisation there has been a loss of local cultures and ‘homogenised global spaces’ leading to a loss of sense of place (Creswell, 2004). This may be represented through rainforests turning into massive treeless cattle stations that have no biophilic connection. Perhaps it is represented by Indigenous people’s connection to nature being viewed as the ‘other’ rather than integrated into research appropriately. Their connection to Country then posits Aboriginal people as the other—easy to erase as a people, as is the Country they care for, rather than as the rich and evolving sustainable cultures that they are and intend to be in the future.

CONCLUSION
This chapter uses the biophilia hypothesis as a catalyst to consolidate and explore theoretical concepts investigating the human–nature relationship to illustrate the connection Aboriginal people have with their Country. Currently, the application of the biophilia hypothesis in the research arena seems limited, perhaps due to this theory being contested. When reviewing four complementary human–nature theories, it is evident that Aboriginal perspectives and insights vary in the degree to which they are integrated into these approaches. It is the belief of the authors that by incorporating Aboriginal understandings of Country into health and ecological literature, we will better understand humans’ relationship with nature.

Theories such as the biophilia hypothesis have gained popularity in academic circles in the last three decades as a way to explain the human–nature relationship. However, a central premise of modernity is its foundation in reductionism, duality and linearity, which is unable to cope with or accommodate the diversity and life-producing capacity of nature. This premise has supported the urbanisation movement across the globe. There may be reasons for this, like access to amenities, social contact, employment and impacts of climate change, but there also seem to be underlying conflicts with human–nature relationships. Overall, although there are ways of having incidental contact with nature in urban spaces, there seems to be a prevailing disconnect from nature in these spaces.

There may be innate, learned, social and ecological reasons for destroying or keeping some forms of nature, but to ensure a consistent and justifiable response academics, policymakers and communities must thinking about long-term approaches and question what nature means. As Gesler and Kearns (2002, p. 75) note, ‘names are often used to classify, to put the often jumbled items or concepts we encounter into some kind of order’. However, perhaps by doing this (by calling something ‘biophilia’ or ‘solastalgia’) people are ignoring the complexity of the issues being addressed. This can create homogenisation and difficulty in describing the diversity of views, approaches and ways of life in this space. Advocates in the Ecohealth field need to be strategic in the way they promote such approaches so it is compelling enough for populations to want to protect plants, animals, diverse ancient environments, and to engage in land management that is health promoting, ecologically sound and socially just. One strategy would be to integrate Aboriginal knowledge into contemporary ecology management by adopting and adapting existing theoretical frameworks to support a clearer understanding of the links between connections to nature and human health.

Biophilia and theories focused on human–nature relationships, perhaps as a consequence of their complexity or because of the perception of being ‘unscientific’, have struggled to gain traction in political agendas, often overshadowed by other environmental issues. It is the authors’ belief that the human–nature relationship is crucial to debates on issues such as
climate change, public health and sustainability, because if people have no relationship with the natural environment, they will no longer see the point of protecting the planet and in turn the health of the human species as a whole. Better integration of Aboriginal perspectives of connection to nature into such theories will correspondingly enhance understandings of Aboriginal health and provide new insights in the interrelationship between society and ecology.

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