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Immersion in Discomfort: At the Intersection of Worldviews Toward Co-Governing With Integrity

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Abstract

In the drive to embrace more inclusive, equitable, and respectful approaches to research, academics are increasingly encouraged to engage with diverse and alternate knowledges, including with First Nations and Indigenous Communities. Yet for those working at the intersection of different worldviews—known as the "cultural interface"—the experience can be accompanied by feelings of discomfort. We recognise discomfort as a personal, inner emotion of vulnerability that alerts us to unspoken, difficult conversations; to challenged beliefs and assumptions; and to the limits of our own knowledge. As a group of academics working at the cultural interface, we identify common themes across our collective experiences of discomfort, including fragility and guilt, helplessness, fear, ignorance, shame, challenged conceptions of time, and finally connection and relationality. By openly discussing and confronting our experiences of discomfort, we demonstrate that immersion in discomfort is a journey that provides opportunities for learning, understanding, and fostering co-governing partnerships with integrity.

Keywords

co-governance; cultural interface; discomfort; First Nations; Indigenous; integrity; knowledge; ocean governance; partnerships; worldview

1. Introduction

1.1. Positionality

We write this article from the perspective of settler- and migrant-scholar academics working in Australia. One author is an Egyptian-Australian with ancestral lineage from Kemet (Randa Sacedon [RS]), four authors are Anglo- and/or Irish-Australian (Michelle Voyer, Freya Croft, Elle McNeill, and Anna Farmery), one author is German (Tillmann Boehme), and one author is an Indigenous Maasai woman and scholar from the Kaputei Plains of Kenya (Makrita Solitei). We also invited the perspective of our Indigenous First Nations colleague who is a Yuin/Dharawal custodian, and academic (Jodi Edwards [JE]) to provide a response to our findings.

Whilst the authorship group comprises both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, the article is primarily focused on the perspectives of researchers who are not Indigenous to Australia. Recognising the need for equitable responses in this space, we maintain that it is neither appropriate nor just to rely on First Nations Australians to guide non-Indigenous Australians through the process of navigating discomfort (Hird et al., 2023). As settler- and migrant-scholars from diverse multicultural and multilingual backgrounds, we draw on our collective lived experiences while critically reflecting on our positionality within a shared settler-colonial context (Section 2). Embracing the responsibility of self-reflection, we actively engage in the "workload" of supporting Indigenous ways of knowing by confronting our discomfort (Hird et al., 2023). This process is vital not only to our research but also to advancing reconciliation across the broader Australian community (Habibis & Taylor, 2015).

References to "our," "us," and "we" in this article refer to the authorship team.

1.2. Article Overview

This article addresses the discomfort experienced by the authors when working with First Nations and Indigenous Communities and knowledges. We identify the location of this discomfort at the intersection of different worldviews, known as the "cultural interface" (Nakata, 2007).

The "cultural interface" as defined by Nakata is the concept of a contested space where two or more knowledge systems, Indigenous and Western intersect, creating a complex interplay of histories, politics, economics, discourses, social practices, and knowledge technologies that shape perspectives on the world (Nakata, 2007). When academics, Indigenous people, and local communities seek out partnerships, the "cultural interface" is often where the partnership begins, and where it can breakdown due to the diverse perspectives and knowledges shared within the space. The scope of this article addresses discomfort at the cultural interface of ocean governance research, as experienced by the authors located on the South Coast of New South Wales, Australia. It does not presume to apply universally to all situations of discomfort.

In recent decades, fisheries and ocean management policy research has been and continues to be carried out with local coastal communities and with First Nations and Indigenous Communities (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2016, 2020; Donda & Manyungwa-Pasani, 2018; Espinoza-Tenorio et al., 2013; Nalau et al., 2018; Vierros et al., 2020). Such collaborations are encouraged by the growing global recognition of the historical and ongoing processes of colonisation that lead to damage and marginalisation

of people, culture, environments, and relationships (Ford et al., 2020). Concurrently, there is an increasing appreciation of the value of knowledge and relationships—epistemologies and ontologies—held by First Nations peoples in ocean governance (Austin et al., 2018; Bundy & Davis, 2013; Gilbert, 2019; Hornidge et al., 2023; Salomon et al., 2023; Taylor & Parsons, 2021; Waldmüller et al., 2022; Zurba & Papadopoulos, 2023). These initiatives point to the potential for co-design, co-governance, and multiple ways of learning (Akins & Bissonnette, 2020; Ban et al., 2019; Butler et al., 2022; Chow, 2022; Country et al., 2022; Reid et al., 2020). However, this type of work is laden with inherent challenges. For example, from the outset, there is a tendency for researchers to avoid working in the space, there are ethical questions that are difficult to anticipate, and there is the frustrating prospect of projects being discontinued due to these challenges (Gilbert, 2019; Peters et al., 2018). Additionally, experiences of fragility are known to hinder conversations and research (DiAngelo, 2018). What is less often discussed is how these challenges are addressed in practice (Hird et al., 2023; Niner et al., 2024). This research explicitly engages with those challenges, recognising that whilst this may be taken as examples of "white fragility" it is important to open conversations about the practicalities of working in this space to build knowledge, understanding, and resilience to persevere. By immersing ourselves in discomfort through discussing and exploring the instances in which it arises, and by acknowledging it as a valid emotion, we aim to understand what discomfort means in the context of ocean co-governance partnerships. This objective is distilled into two research questions:

> RQ1: What role does immersion in discomfort play in fostering critical reflection and understanding between diverse cultural perspectives?
>
> RQ2: What practical approaches can be drawn from immersion in discomfort to assist researchers and practitioners working at the cultural interface?

As the lead author, I propose that discomfort signals an internal (personal) conflict when assumptions and beliefs are challenged, prompting critical reflection. This discomfort serves as an invitation to actively confront the inconsistencies within our assumptions and beliefs, fostering a deeper alignment with integrity. Recognising, as Boler (1999) suggests, that there is something to learn from our discomfort, we actively acknowledge and address the history of the settler-colonial, migrant, and multicultural society in which we are privileged—a critical first step in the inquiry into historicised ethics (Boler, 1999).

Building on this, Niner et al. (2024) underscore the need to address histories and embrace discomfort as a means of confronting power asymmetries within the academy in ocean biodiversity governance research. They argue that this process disrupts entrenched knowledge hierarchies that cast subjective, cultural, traditional, and Indigenous knowledges as inferior to "Western…rational and objective" knowledge systems (Niner et al., 2024, pp. 2, 15). Such reflection aligns with the broader call to critically examine the origins and impacts of these hierarchies within research, particularly the assumptions and beliefs upon which they rest.

This historical excursion allows us to navigate the "cultural and emotional terrains" that are occupied "less by choice and more by hegemony" (Boler & Zembylas, 2002, p. 108). Hegemony, in this context, refers to the mainstream, "everyday," "common sense," social practices, norms, and structures that are reinforced by entities such as governments, schools, media, and politics (Boler & Zembylas, 2002, p. 108)—where norms and structures are deeply tied to the very assumptions and beliefs that discomfort compels us to interrogate.

This article is structured as follows: Section 2 (context) outlines the shared research setting within the "cultural interface" of the authorship group. It provides an overview of historical policies and legislation that have led to hegemonic political and cultural divisions between First Nations peoples of Australia, settler-colonial Australia, and multicultural Australia; Section 3 (methods) describes three key strategies employed to immerse ourselves in discomfort. First, creating space for uncomfortable conversations. Second, explicitly engaging with subjectivity to conceptualise discomfort, and finally applying broad thematic analysis and critical reflexivity; Sections 4 (findings), Section 5 (discussion), and Section 6 (conclusion) outline the results of this process and its implications; Definitions of various terminology adopted herein is provided in the glossary (Supplementary File).

2. Context

2.1. Our Research

All project team members who participated (participants) in the reflections which underpin this article are listed as co-authors. All are involved in collaborative research projects that work at the cultural interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, to various extents. The relevant projects included grass roots collaborations aimed at supporting Aboriginal fishing and aquaculture businesses and sea country management planning. Two broader research projects funded by the Australian Research Council aim to explore how First Nation knowledges might inform broader ocean governance and food systems respectively. These projects are being undertaken in accordance with their associated ethics requirements. These ethical protocols were observed in the development of this article. Critically, many members of the team have undertaken repeated and ongoing cultural immersion, including formal and informal training and mentoring from Indigenous colleagues within our institution, through the Jindaola program (Kennedy et al., 2019) and associated activities. The reflections underpinning this article are therefore based on both practical experience in collaborative research as well as regular involvement in relevant training programs.

We recognise that multiple arenas in ocean governance are marked by power imbalances across the colonial divide, for example, regional and global ocean governance (Adewumi, 2021; Haas et al., 2023), deep seabed mining (Arato et al., 2024), data and global goals (Fisher & Fukuda-Parr, 2019), and research paradigms (Held, 2021). Although there is no explicit power imbalance within our co-authorship group, we acknowledge that the settler-colonial political landscape in which we are situated is inherently characterised by power disparities. This broader context influences our daily lives and, ultimately, our research. The following section unpacks this context further.

2.2. The Cultural Interface of First Nations, Settler-Colonial, and Multicultural Australia

This section provides an overview of Australian national events, legislation, and policies that influence decision-making regarding First Nations peoples, settler-colonial Australians, and multicultural Australians (Table 1). The events, legislation, and policies in Table 1 function as narrative elements, shaping broader societal understandings of cultural and hegemonic social practices, norms and attitudes toward First Nations people, as well as the status of settlers, migrants, and multicultural Australia. The history (and references) presented in Table 1 are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. Notably, a significant gap exists in the Table regarding the thousands of years of First Nations history prior to European exploration of what is now

known as Australia. For further details on historical events refer to the references in Table 1 (see Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Elias et al., 2021; Fozdar & Spittles, 2009; Goodall, 2008; Moses, 2005; Veracini, 2006).

In addition to Table 1, a summary of events of the past 125 years is provided to highlight the parallel development of privileging "white" Australia and creating opportunities for multicultural Australia, in sharp contrast to the historical trauma experienced by First Nations peoples.

Table 1. Historical events and policies influencing Australian social and political attitudes toward First Nations, settler-colonial, migrant, and multicultural communities.

48,000–63,000 BC
Ancestors of First Nations began arriving from south-east Asia 50,000–65,000 BC (Clarkson et al., 2017; Malaspinas et al., 2016)
1600s
Exploration by the Dutch to Australia previously named "New Holland" and Tasmania previously named "Van Dieman's Land" (Martins, 2022)
Early 1700s
Exploration by the British and French (Konishi & Nugent, 2013)
1770s
Captain James Cook expedition to *terra australis incognita* (in English: unknown southern land). Illegitimately claimed *terra nullius* (in English: nobody's land; National Library of Australia, 2024; The National Archives, n.d.)
1788
26 January, Captain Arthur Phillip established the first British colony at the recently named Sydney Cove, proclaiming British Sovereignty (Burdett Smith, 1888)
1788–1934
Frontier wars, massacres, and death by diseases (Clements, 2014; Connor, 2002)
Early 1800s
British navigator Matthew Flinders circumnavigates the continent and proposes the name "Australia" (Flinders, 1803)
1838 Jubilee / 1888 Centenary of arrival of first colony in Sydney Cove
26 January becomes a holiday for settlers (ANTAR, 2024; Burdett Smith, 1888)
1850s
Goldrush migration waves (AMES Australia, 2020)
1901
Federation: 1 January (Parliamentary Education Office, 2024.)
Immigration Restriction Act, Commonwealth 1901
"White Australia" Policy (Brawley, 1995; Jakubowicz, 2012; Martin, 2023)
1909
Aborigines Protection Act, New South Wales 1909
1915
Aborigines Protection Act, New South Wales 1909: Amended to enable thousands of First Nations children to be forcibly taken from their families on the basis of race (Section 13A).

Table 1. (Cont.) Historical events and policies influencing Australian social and political attitudes toward First Nations, settler-colonial, migrant, and multicultural communities.

1920's
Forced removal of First Nations children from their families (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997)
1930s
Forced removal of First Nations children from their families (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997)
1938
26 January becomes known as the "Day of Mourning" for First Nations and subsequently "Invasion Day" and "Survival Day" (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2023)
1940s
Forced removal of First Nations children from their families (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997)
Migration waves begin post World War II (Australian National Maritime Museum, n.d.)
1950s
Forced removal of First Nations children from their families (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997)
1960s
Forced removal of First Nations children from their families (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997)
Commonwealth Electoral Act, Commonwealth 1962
1966: White Australia Policy abolished (Australia's Defining Moments Digital Classroom, n.d.)
1967: Referendum amended the Australian Constitution to count the "Aboriginal race" in the population count and enable the Commonwealth parliament to make "special laws" for Aboriginals (Commonwealth of Australia, 1967)
1969: Aborigines Protection Act, New South Wales (1909) repealed
1970s
Forced removal of First Nations children from their families (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997)
Multiculturalism policies introduced.
National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week observed
Racial Discrimination Act 1975—Non-whites permitted to vote
1970s–1990s
Waves of asylum seekers, immigrants, and refugees known as "boat people," from South East Asia (AMES Australia, 2020; Australian National Maritime Museum, n.d.)
1980s
1988: Bicentennial of colonisation
Local Aboriginal land councils were established followed by the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, New South Wales, 1983; (New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, n.d.)
1990s
Mabo v. Qld (1992) High Court of Australia rejects *terra nullius* recognizing Indigenous land rights
"Bringing them Home Report"/Stolen Generations Report (1997; (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997)

Table 1. (Cont.) Historical events and policies influencing Australian social and political attitudes toward First Nations, settler-colonial, migrant, and multicultural communities.

2000s–2010s
MV Tampa 2001
Formal expansion of Australia's offshore processing facilities for asylum seekers (Doherty, 2021)
National Apology 2007 Rudd (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997; Reconciliation Australia, 2018, 2020)
Closing the gap policy introduced in 2008 under the Rudd Government (Bond & Singh, 2020; Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations & Commonwealth of Australia, 2020)
2020s
2021: Census highlights increased cultural diversity (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022)
2023: Indigenous Voice to Parliament referendum results in a "no" vote (Australian Electoral Commission, 2023; Biddle & McAllister, 2024)
Shift to trauma-informed truth-telling practices (Bennett & Gates, 2024)

Note: Grey shaded text indicates event(s) occurred over multiple decades

Table 1 details the historical evolution of Australia's racial policies and national identity since the Federation in 1901. It highlights the early establishment of exclusionary measures like the White Australia Policy and the Aborigines Protection Act, which underpinned systemic racism, cultural erasure, and the Stolen Generations (Brawley, 1995; Jakubowicz, 2012; Martin, 2023).

From the mid-20th century, shifts occurred, such as the dismantling of the White Australia Policy, the 1967 Referendum granting greater legal recognition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the introduction of multiculturalism (Australian National Maritime Museum, n.d.; Commonwealth of Australia, 1967; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). These changes were juxtaposed with ongoing resistance to social inclusion and persistent inequalities for First Nations peoples. Significant milestones for Indigenous rights included NAIDOC Week, land rights activism, and the 1992 Mabo decision repudiating *terra nullius* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2023; Australia Law Reform Commission, 1977; Commonwealth Electoral Act, 1962; *Mabo v. Queensland*, 1992; NAIDOC, n.d.)

Efforts toward reconciliation, such as the 2008 Apology and the "Closing the Gap" policies (Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations & Commonwealth of Australia, 2020; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997; Reconciliation Australia, 2018, 2020), sought to address disparities but faced criticism for perpetuating systemic inequities (Bond & Singh, 2020; Dudgeon & Walker, 2022; Kendi, 2016; Sims, 2014). According to the most recent 2019 Closing the Gap report, just two of the "Closing the Gap" targets are on track 12 years after they were first set (Amnesty International, 2020).

Annual events like NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week commemorate progress and highlight ongoing challenges (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997; Reconciliation Australia, n.d., 2018). However, the 2023 referendum rejecting the Indigenous Voice to Parliament revealed enduring societal divides and resistance to fully addressing historical injustices (Australian Electoral Commission, 2023; Biddle & McAllister, 2024).

In the present day, Australia is a multicultural society (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022) that grapples with the legacies of its colonial past, racial hierarchies, and the tension between diverse cultural identities and the unresolved traumas of First Nations peoples.

This historical background is a critical context underpinning the experience of discomfort and the emotional journey experienced by the authors. As Maddison (2012) explains, Australia's setter-colonial history of violence and dispossession has left a deep, psychological legacy that hinders reconciliation.

The narrative of Australian post-colonial history is deeply politicised, influencing national identity and collective memory (B. R. O. Anderson, 1991; Shin, 2011). The dominant narrative of the past is shaped by the emphasis on certain aspects while others are overlooked or forgotten. Confronting a previously unacknowledged version of history can cause discomfort experienced as "collective shame and pain" (McKernan, 2016, p. 2).

2.3. The Role and Importance of Discomfort

Emotions, like history, are politicised as they reflect broader societal contexts (Ahmed, 2014; Bondi, 2005, p. 436). Whilst occurring on a personal bodily scale (K. Anderson & Smith, 2002; Davidson & Milligan, 2004) emotions can also extend beyond the individual by permeating physical and social environments, as they arise from and reflect broader societal contexts. Emotions, therefore, are deeply tied to the identity of place (Massey, 2011) and can be collectively experienced on a national scale. Ahmed (2014) argues that emotions shape societal "truths" and drive "othering," categorising those outside mainstream norms and evoking fear, anger, shame, and disgust, which can fuel racism, homophobia, and sexism.

By examining key historical moments, and the politicised nature of emotions, national identity, and collective memory, we emphasise that we (and our research) are shaped by context. Neither societies nor individuals and their emotions exist in isolation; past experiences are intricately connected to national history and collective memory, as well as the extent to which self-identity is intertwined with these elements. Thus, understanding the historical context from which this research emerges is critical in understanding the discomfort that arises in co-governance settings.

Advancing from here, the pedagogy of discomfort teaches us to go beyond mere spectating of our histories to the "collective witnessing" of ourselves within them (Mills & Creedy, 2021; Niner et al., 2024). It delves into the most challenging vicissitudes of human fears, requiring us to face an "ambiguous self" with courage and flexibility (Boler, 1999, p. 199). Courage is needed to confront the "ontological supremacist" who manifests fear, shame, and anger when ways of knowing and assumptions are challenged (Hird et al., 2023, p. 3).

This curious trepidation is accepted because discomfort frequently arises when multiple perspectives and knowledges are brought together in co-governance contexts. Thus, we must consider the role discomfort plays in fostering critical reflexivity, enabling us to better understand other cultures and adopt practical approaches from this immersion, ultimately moving toward co-governing with integrity. Guided by Boler's (1999, p, 199) assurance that "through education we invite one another to risk living at the edge of our skin," we can find the courage to embrace discomfort as it offers "the greatest hope of revisioning ourselves."

The following section describes how we made space for uncomfortable conversations and how we sat with our ontological privilege (techniques suggested by Hird et al., 2023).

3. Methods

3.1. Making Space for Uncomfortable Conversations

The data referenced in this research includes the collective research experiences of the authors and their broader individual life experiences. The process of drawing down data from this range of experiences was filtered through an interview process designed to facilitate the sharing of personal experiences of discomfort encountered during our shared research projects.

All co-authors (except JE) participated in one-on-one, half-hour recorded interview sessions with the lead author. These sessions were conducted over private, face-to-face Zoom calls, creating a comfortable space for discussing discomfort (Applebaum, 2017). Each recording was shared with the respective co-author but not with the rest of the authorship group. At the start of each interview, the questions were displayed using Zoom's "Share Screen" function. Participants were not required to answer all the questions (except for Question 7) or to address them specifically, directly, or in order; rather, the questions served as conversational prompts (Box 1).

Box 1. Interview prompt questions.

Please be aware of any potential to appropriate and please acknowledge where appropriate.

1. Have you met Indigenous knowledge holders?
2. When have you experienced discomfort?
3. What did it feel like?
4. What was being challenged?
5. Do you think about the thing that was being challenged differently? If yes, in what way?
6. What if anything did you do about the feelings of discomfort?
7. What would you recommend to other researchers?

Anything you would like to add? An anecdote to share?

3.2. Explicit Engagement With Subjectivity to Conceptualise Discomfort

The interviews were reviewed by RS within a 12-month period, and reflexive thematic analysis was conducted by RS to identify themes of discomfort (Braun & Clarke, 2013; The University of Auckland, n.d.-a; Section 3.3). It is acknowledged that the identification of these themes was influenced by RS's subjectivity, including RS's personal experiences of discomfort and understanding of each participant's exposure to discomfort. Therefore, RS's subjectivity is considered a valuable resource for both interpreting and reconstructing the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; The University of Auckland, n.d.-a). RS's subjective reflections in interpreting and presenting the interview data are included in Box 2.

Box 2. Subjective reflection.

- My position is both as a migrant-settler as well as an Australian scholar who has grown up in Australia. My responses to each participant's comments are included in Table 2, labelled "RS response." These responses are primarily made in hindsight, though some were offered during the interviews themselves.
- The interview data is divided into two groups: A and B. Group A consists of participants whom I perceived had more interactions with First Nations and Indigenous Communities and more opportunities for reflection. Group B includes participants I perceived to have had fewer interactions.
- I perceive myself positioned across Groups A and B, acting as an intuitive observer and empathetic researcher who draws upon my personal experiences of discomfort. The challenge of quantifying the emotions underlying discomfort was not one I could address empirically, so I relied on intuition to guide my findings, conceptualising discomfort as a journey. Additionally, empathy plays a crucial role in understanding how others experience discomfort, which is essential for its conceptualisation. Maintaining empathy requires moving beyond strict adherence to objective neutrality. In this type of research, it is often more desirable and legitimate to have a researcher who can relate to participants and shares "common wounds" (Gair, 2012, p. 138).
- The conceptualisation of discomfort as a journey emerged from the sense that the emotions experienced by Group B were similar to those already experienced by Group A. Group A participants also often expressed having moved beyond fear-driven experiences, such as fragility, and into relationality. Some participants also explicitly described being on a journey. To visualise this, I created a basic conceptual model, which I presented to the participants (Figure 1). Validation of this intuitive finding came when participants confirmed the conceptualisation of discomfort as a journey.
- I also engaged in a separate discussion with our First Nations colleague JE (Box 3). Edwards' agreement with the journey conceptualisation further validated this intuitive finding.
- Subsequent discussions with co-authors focused on the juxtaposition of the emotions underlying discomfort: how they are experienced simultaneously, how the journey is not linear but rather marked by emotional spikes and spirals, and how the order of emotions does not necessarily follow the sequence depicted. In response, a spiral model was developed to capture the dynamic nature of this emotional journey (Figure 2).

3.3. Broad Thematic Analysis and Critical Reflexivity

The themes from the interview data were derived using a critical-realist perspective aligned with Braun and Clarke's (2013) experiential inductive thematic analysis, which emphasises understanding the purpose of analysis before determining the methodology (see The University of Auckland, n.d.-a). The flexibility of reflexive thematic analysis supports this approach (The University of Auckland, n.d.-a, n.d.-b) and is complemented by subjective engagement (Section 3.2). Quotes from the interviews that offered expressions and/or impressions of personal significance that triggered discomfort were selected to identify themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013; The University of Auckland, n.d.-b).

Interviews were interpreted using critical reflexivity through a "threefold" analytical framework described by Gonda et al. (2021), which acknowledges the role of affect and emotions as a way of learning that can help shift attention from the individual to collective responsibility. According to Gonda et al. (2021), this shift can be achieved by: (a) creating a sense of interconnectedness and emancipation through a shared vulnerability, (b) dealing with uncertainty and (c) challenging hegemonic knowledge politics. An iterative process of reflecting and writing up findings and discussion was led by RS with co-authors. As a further step, we sought

the perspective of our First Nations colleague, JE (Box 3) to offer insights and a response to the discomfort journey (Figure 1). This step aimed to incorporate a First Nations perspective and enrich our understanding of the responses and findings.

4. Findings

The findings are presented as follows:

Section 4.1. Presents the interview data, detailing participant sentiment and thematic analysis (Table 2).

Section 4.2. Provides critical reflexivity and broad thematic analysis of the interview data (Table 3).

Section 4.3. Describes the conceptualisation of the discomfort journey arising from the interview data (Figure 1).

Section 4.4. Presents JE's response to the findings (Box 3).

Section 4.5. Incorporates the importance of time and reflection in the processing of discomfort (Figure 2).

4.1. Presentation of Interview Data Detailing Participant Sentiment and Thematic Analysis

Table 2 captures the dominant sentiments observed by RS of each participant. The participants were not interviewed in the order presented. As noted in Box 2, the findings are presented in two groups: those perceived to have more exposure to discomfort at the "cultural interface" (Group A) and a second group perceived to have less (Group B). Themes and supporting quotes are shown in Table 2, along with participants' recommendations for other researchers who may also be confronting discomfort. Additionally, the interviewer/lead author responses to participants' reflections are also documented.

Table 2. Participant sentiment and thematic analysis.

Group A		
Participant 1: helplessness, journey, and fear		Theme
1.1. Supporting quotes	a. "[I felt] helplessness because I was not in a position to help so [I] had to stand aside and that is not characteristic of me"	Helplessness
	b. "It felt like hard marsh swamp land—mushy ground, mosquitoes, hard to walk forward, water weighing it down, bad smell, flies. Every move was hurt and met with hurt"	Helplessness
	c. "There is no sounding board, who do you talk to? Where do you go? It is also a question of leadership and how to deal…we were made [to] carry on as normal"	Relational-governance
	d. "Feeling of fear to step inside cultural space and then back out again"	Fear
	e. "The journey is just being re-directed and not ending"	Journey
	f. "Who am I being integral to?"	Integrity

Table 2. (Cont.) Participant sentiment and thematic analysis.

Group A		
Participant 1: helplessness, journey, and fear		**Theme**
1.2. Recommendations	a. "If there were more academics in this space we could help each other out of the marsh and tag team and then it would be easier to navigate rather than be hushed and also have leadership from someone who understands it is a hard place to be but it is a space of learning but then elasticity to navigate it"	Support network Relational-governance
	b. "There should [be] space to say 'I feel angry, I feel sad, I feel defeated.' When we say 'I feel' we can then have direction to where we need to go because the logical approach becomes unrealistic because it does not come near the issues that the feelings go to the heart of"	Vulnerability
	c. "In governance there is no space to STOP and question what is happening to address the discomfort, the hurt, the pain. There is just a new policy and just move on without touching what is happening. But we need to touch it we need to face it"	Relational-governance
1.3. RS response	a. Research leads working in co-partnerships, co-design, and toward co-governance require empathy and experience in handling discomfort	Support network
	b. Transparency about emotional dimensions at the cultural interface needs to be acknowledged and engaged. Logical and rational approaches do not reach the core of the issues, whereas emotional engagement can resonate more deeply	Relational-governance
Participant 2: fragility to relationality, time, ignorance, and journey		
2.1. Supporting quotes	a. "Discomfort changed over time…common for non-Indigenous researchers is 'white fragility' I'm going to say the wrong thing, I'm going to offend, white guilt. I definitely felt that at first and it evolved"	Fragility Fear Guilt
	b. "[I was] trained to be 'impartial,' distant, objective, don't get personally involved, [and] don't let feelings get involved. A more relational approach challenged that, I was excited about it but also uncomfortable"	Relationality
	c. "The other area of discomfort is the temporal aspect of time as being not linear. I really don't know what to do with it. I love that discomfort. It's challenging in an intellectual sense, uncomfortable in quite different ways"	Time
	d. "It has been learning and unlearning and relearning. And there is still so much that I don't know. I adjust the way I think and act and it took me so long"	Uneducated Ignorance
	e. "We were not given a true history of this country"	Uneducated Ignorance
	f. "I don't feel responsible for what predecessors have done but I do feel responsible for my own ignorance"	Ignorance
	g. "A relational approach needs to involve more-than-human healthy relationships not just with each other but also with our environment. I think that is the fundamental shift we need"	Relationality

Table 2. (Cont.) Participant sentiment and thematic analysis.

Group A		
Participant 2: fragility to relationality, time, ignorance, and journey		
2.2. Recommendations	a. "Rather than managing the environment we are in relation to it. Managing sounds very transactional. Take the good and bad and navigate it"	Relational-governance Journey
	b. "To be more engaged with 'trauma-informed research' and we are dealing with trauma in the landscape so perhaps a relational approach requires us to think more compassionately"	Trauma-informed research Relationality
2.3. RS response	a. Why can't we engage in more relational governance approaches?	Relational-governance
	b. We need to take on the responsibility of educating ourselves about the First Nations history of this country as the education we received at school was misleading and redacted	Self-education
	c. Avoid being hindered by fearful feelings: continue on the path one step at a time	Journey
Participant 3: connection and relationality, time, and journey		
3.1. Supporting quotes	a. "I understood that all things are equal and that you have to go beyond your brain capacity and use your other senses"	Relationality
	b. "How you feel and how to engage the interconnectedness of your heart, gut and head it was a way different way of being in the world and then it was very discomforting spiking in and out of that way of being"	Connectedness
	c. "Some circles are short—the week the month. Some circles are much longer—over thousands of years"	Time
	d. "We don't have a 500-year strategy or 1000 years. We have 3–4 year strategies based on election cycles. And then we lose sight of the causes of the problems and fires we are trying to put out. So we become reactive because the ability to pick up signs early on is becoming lost. Longitudinal data exists in those cultures but in 250 years we managed to f*** it all up"	Time
	e. "By accepting journey and looking back to who I am and where I am going…now I feel very comfortable. A lot of underlying anxieties have gone so I have a level of comfort in myself"	Journey
3.2. Recommendations	a. "Being genuine, being yourself, don't go in with a hidden agenda, investing time with people and being okay with however long it takes"	Connection Transparency Give time
	b. "Relationships are built over time, they need time to develop and to build trust"	Relationality Give time

Table 2. (Cont.) Participant sentiment and thematic analysis.

Group A		
Participant 3: connection and relationality, time, and journey		
3.2. Recommendations	c. "Instead of rush rush rush it is about having a yarn, being someone who is willing to listen to their story and willing to invest their time in them. Rather than it being transactional. Are you devoted or is it a tick-box exercise? You can't go halfway. Either you're all in or you're not. If you don't believe in it, don't go there, just don't do it. If you go halfway and then get distracted by another grant and then come back later because there is an opportunity, you won't be able to, you will have closed the door"	Give time Relationality Committment
	d. "You need to devote time to it and let it sink in. Just busy busy busy does not allow you to go for a walk and even just let the subconscious sort it. Have an anchor at home"	Give time Reflection
3.3. RS response	a. How can we know that tactile and bodily knowledge is valid when we have been brought up to dismiss it? Recognise and find ways to validate tactile, and bodily knowledge and responses. Ask knowledge holders who have not forgotten this part of ourselves	Validate subjectivity
	b. Take time. It is a long journey	Give time Journey
	c. Committment	Committment
	d. As a Western-trained scholar, I find it challenging to discuss connection without also discussing relationality	Connection Relationality
Group B		
Participant 4: naïvety, ignorance, and time		
4.1. Supporting quotes	a. "The main source of discomfort is naïvety and being out of depth and how to handle a situation out of respect and in an appropriate way"	Fragility Ignorance
	b. "I walk in feeling uneducated about how to handle myself appropriately and naïve"	Uneducated Fear
	c. "Growing up in Australia it feels like the way to deal with discomfort is to brush over the surface and avoid it"	Uneducated
	d. "I took time to look at short comings in terms of history, racism, [and] cultural insensitivity"	Uneducated Time
	e. "We haven't been educated in a way that allows open questions and [we] avoid discussing cultural differences"	Fragility
	f. "It's interesting to live overseas and have people recognise that you are Australian and then bring up that you are racist….But it's not me….I had to accept, yes, the culture is racist and then come home and sit in that discomfort"	Fragility
4.2. Recommendations	a. "Pre-reading of context before coming together, to enter the space with more empathy"	Trauma-informed research

Table 2. (Cont.) Participant sentiment and thematic analysis.

Group B		
Participant 4: naïvety, ignorance, and time		
4.2. Recommendations	b. "I would go forward with transparency and honesty of gaps of knowledges and understanding of other people's perspectives. I'd love to be able to…walk in and say I don't know…[it] adds humanity and humility to the space"	Transparency Vulnerability
	c. "Acknowledging that it will be uncomfortable"	Vulnerability
4.3. RS response	a. Acknowledge ignorance, discomfort, and naïvety as normal experiences in this space	Vulnerability
	b. I also felt uneducated about the First Nations people of Australia even though I went to school in Australia. I felt cheated and misled on the education I received in Australia's history. I was compelled to do something about it when I realised I was not the only one who felt this way	Self-educate Support network
	c. I also did not know any people who identified as Aboriginal growing up	Support network
Participant 5—guilt, fragility and journey		
5.1. Supporting quotes	a. "I remember a meeting where the knowledge holder was talking about ongoing trauma and I felt so overwhelmed I wanted to cry in the face of my unrealised complicitness in the whole mess. I didn't want to cry because I'm not the victim—that was one of the most powerful instances of guilt, I didn't know what to say"	Fragility Ignorance Guilt Helplessness
	b. "Realising that my family has helped build 'white Australia' and my family has always had money; and learning that these things continue to happen in the modern day was very confronting"	Fragility Guilt
5.2. Recommendations	a. "Early engagement is important because entering with pre-conceived ideas about what should be done, the response can be—hang on you haven't consulted us—and then you have to backtrack and re-think how it could work or might look like in the community"	Relational-governance Trauma-informed research Co-design
	b. "You don't really come out the other side, you just start and keep growing. Think of it as a journey. If you can find a shared and personal path with the Aboriginal community then that is a good outcome"	Journey
5.3. RS response	a. Experiences of fragility can be quite acute for persons who have grown up in societies that held a strong legacy and imprint of the "White Australia" policies of the early 1900s	Trauma-informed research
	b. Before initiating co-governance partnerships it is important to engage in cultural education. Additionally, consult partners about project expectations to facilitate authentic co-design	Relational-governance Co-design
Participant 6: shame and ignorance		
6.1. Supporting quotes	a. "[I felt] discomfort on a personal level being ignorant not knowing earlier. And then discomfort on a broader lever about the structures that facilitated that, and ongoing racism. And this comes across as shame"	Ignorance Uneducated Shame

Table 2. (Cont.) Participant sentiment and thematic analysis.

Group B		
Participant 6: shame and ignorance		
	b. "[Tutoring] Indigenous students…[I] had to reconcile the fact that I was not Aboriginal….And…keep things respectful…humble, transparent, about who I am, what knowledge I have and what I still have to know"	Transparency
	c. "It is sad and a shame that I did not have engagement with Aboriginal people and knowledge growing up. It was not until university honours even though I studied history as an undergrad"	Shame Ignorance Supported networks
6.2. Recommendations	a. "Be okay with making mistakes, be okay with not knowing, be open to changing and being told you are wrong"	Vulnerability
	b. "Put aside the shame and fear of being wrong and ask questions even if they are stupid"	Vulnerability Transparency
6.3. RS response	c. Discomfort, shame, and fear are common reactions in this context, and can be acknowledged to facilitate progress	Support network Relational-governance

4.2. Broad Thematic Analysis and Critical Reflexivity of Interview Data

Eight themes (emotions) of discomfort are identified: (1) fragility and guilt, (2) helplessness, (3) fear, (4) ignorance, (5) shame, (6) connection, (7) relationality, and (8) time. Table 3 summarises these eight themes with reference to interview data in Table 2. Whilst each theme warrants individual unpacking, for the purpose of this publication the themes are discussed concisely (and some jointly). Moreover, the emotion of guilt was not standalone, rather it traversed fragility, helplessness, fear, ignorance, and shame and is discussed in the context of those themes (where relevant). Together, these themes represent the "emotional landscape" of discomfort within each of us, capturing the journey one navigates when engaging with discomfort.

Table 3. Broad thematic analysis and critical reflexivity of interview data.

1. Fragility and guilt	Some participants implicitly expressed discomfort when confronting their race and the overwhelming sense of guilt that accompanied it (5.1a and 5.1b) Guilt was expressed with respect to not knowing Aboriginal protocol, the true history of Australia, and for the trauma experienced by Australia's First Nations people (2.1a, 4.1a, and 4.1e–f)
2. Helplessness	In certain situations, participants expressed feelings of being ill-equipped and un-supported (1.1a–c and 4.1a–b). Examples of helplessness can occur when confronted with conflict within Indigenous Communities and having the inability (lack of standing) to speak up and participate in its resolve. As one co-author described in interviews, it was like moving through a dense swamp (1.1b). Helplessness also occurs when there is a lack of infrastructure or process in the wider institutional setting to discuss situations of discomfort and conflict (1.1c) Some participants also expressed helplessness as not-knowing, particularly, when realising the enormity of colonisation in Australia and their ignorance about it (2.1d and 5.1a)

Table 3. (Cont.) Broad thematic analysis and critical reflexivity of interview data.

3. Fear	The feeling of fear was expressed by participants as a fear of entering cultural spaces (1.1d), of making mistakes, and of saying or doing the wrong thing culturally (2.1a and 4.1a–b)
4. Ignorance	Notably, the participants who grew up in Australia, collectively witnessed ignorance, naïvety, and lack of education regarding First Nations peoples and the concealed truths about their treatment, which remains largely absent from public awareness in the Australian community (2.1d–f, 4.1a–e, 5.1a–b, and 6.1a). This finding was not associated with those participants who did not grow up in Australia Ignorance can also be closely related to fragility when one becomes aware (previously ignorant) of one's own culture as racist; a realisation which can be confronting (4.1f)
5. Shame	Ignorance often links to shame, as was expressed by participants when they felt shame not knowing the true history of First Nations peoples of Australia (4.1c, 6.1a, and 6.1c). The experience of shame was expressed as both personal and national (4.1c)
6. Connection	Connection was expressed as an awareness of one's interconnectedness with other sentient beings (3.1a), as well as an awareness of the interconnectedness of one's cognitive and other tactile ways of knowing (3.1a–b)
7. Relationality	Relationality was expressed as a necessity for vulnerability to engage emotionally with core issues, moving beyond neutral objectivity (1.2c and 2.1b). It was also expressed, as a dimension of connection to the more-than-human elements of life (2.1g, 2.2a, and 3.1a), and a desire for empathy and compassion (1.2c and 2.2b)
8. Time	Connection and relationality were interlinked and contextualized within time. Fostering relationality requires connection, which in turn demands an investment of personal time and commitment (3.2b and 3.2c) Time is also required for self-education and self-reflection (4.1d and 3.2d) Discomfort with time, emerged in attempts to engage with non-linear conceptions of time (2.1c), alongside an unfamiliarity with longitudinal time scales (3.1c and 3.1d)

4.3. Conceptualisation: A Journey of Discomfort

Reflecting on the interview data (including the subjective reflection, see Box 2) it was considered that the eight themes comprise a journey of discomfort. Incorporating cyclical conceptions of time and iterative processes, a circular diagram was generated "mapping" the eight emotions (Figure 1). Contrary to the cyclical appearance of Figure 1, one's journey through discomfort can begin with any of the eight identified emotions and does not necessarily follow the depicted order. Furthermore, the journey is not as smooth as the conceptual diagram suggests, nor does fragility necessarily follow relationality. Discomfort was also described as involving a "spiking" in and out of these emotions underscoring its dynamic and non-linear nature.

The clockwise representation of the emotions suggests a possible pathway starting at fragility, moving clockwise with the hope of arriving at connection and relationality. However, paralleling this suggested movement through discomfort, the emotions may also move in an anti-clockwise direction. For instance, a person may enter a discussion/forum with an open sentiment of relationality and connection but leave with a sense of fragility when their opinions, voice, and knowledge are not validated.

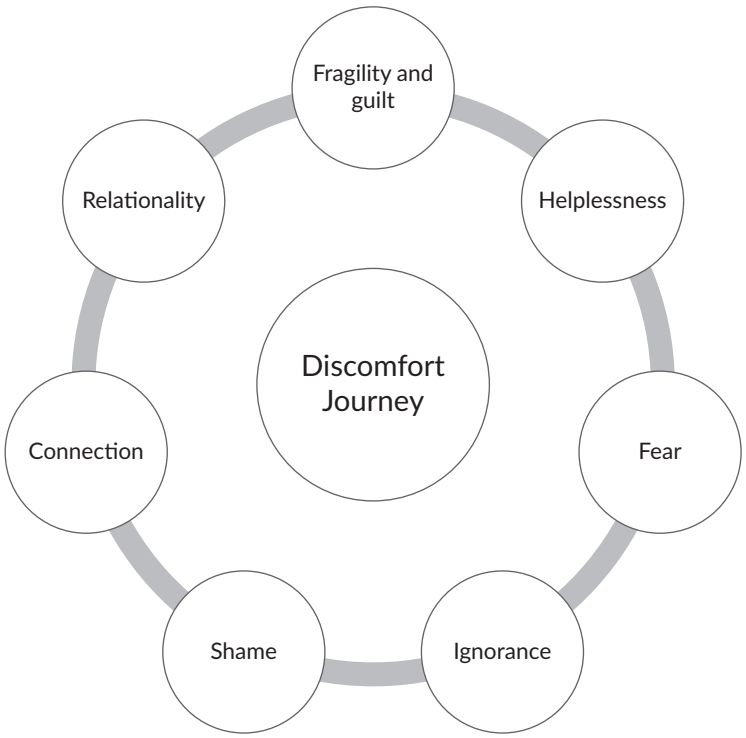

Figure 1. Conceptual journey of discomfort.

4.4. Response to Findings From Indigenous Voice

The conceptual journey of discomfort was presented to JE and her response welcomed. A brief statement on JE's background and the interchange between RS and JE is recalled at Box 3.

Box 3. Response from Indigenous voice JE.

> JE's expertise encompasses Aboriginal cultural practices, with a particular emphasis on language and story sharing. In particular, stories that are embedded in Land, Sea, and Sky Country and whale migrations. Her work includes a focus on story sharing and its intersection with science and traditional ecological knowledges, particularly through the enactment of these narratives in interactive public space installations (Informit, 2023; O'Brien, 2023; Shellharbour Civic Centre, n.d.). JE and I engaged in an informal, unrecorded dialogue in which I presented the conceptual journey of discomfort (Figure 1). During our discussion, I elaborated on the participants' experiences of navigating the various emotions associated with discomfort, particularly the notion of "spiking in and out of" these emotions. I sought JE's opinion on this conceptualisation, drawing on her knowledge as an Indigenous scholar to provide critical insights and broaden our interpretive framework. Our discourse is recalled as follows.
>
> JE immediately related to the discomfort journey, stating: "I experience this from the other side." She recounted how, each time as an Aboriginal person, when stepping into a colonised space, discomfort was experienced especially as fragility, fear, and vulnerability, simultaneously. "I feel all of these emotions….I jump between them and feel them all at the same time."
>
> JE is often invited to attend community meetings to represent Aboriginal stakeholders. At meetings, when contemplating whether to speak up or stay silent, she "reads the room" to know whether she will be supported by others present. JE carefully chooses spoken words and when to utter them. JE endures her discomfort whilst it goes unnoticed by the rest of the room. JE interprets and sits with her discomfort to

defend Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal values. In this setting, JE explained that she must figure out how best to protect herself from being accused as an aggressor (should she say anything that triggers "white fragility") whilst still addressing the best interests of the stakeholder she has been called in to represent.

A striking response from JE is that she resonated with the discomfort journey conceptualisation (Figure 1). There was no criticism or suggestion to modify it. JE's response reminds us that discomfort is also experienced "from the other side." When we feel discomfort, an opposite, magnified measure of our discomfort is simultaneously experienced by the Indigenous person(s) in the room. We are not alone in our discomfort.

What is disquieting about these observations is that, when colonised spaces make tokenistic gestures to include Aboriginal stakeholders, they often ignore what is truly at stake: the knowledge and cultural practices of First Nations peoples, especially when these spaces overlook their discomfort.

5. Discussion

5.1. Big Time Journey of Discomfort

A key finding in the interviews is the importance of time, giving time, taking time, and time to reflect (Theme 8–Time, Table 3). Each emotion on the discomfort journey warrants processing as it arises, they are not trivial sentiments. The colloquial phrase "big time" is commonly used as an intensifier across various cultures, including among Australia's First Nations people. Adopting its usage here, it denotes the intense emotions associated with discomfort, as well as the significant commitment in personal time and personal growth on the discomfort journey. Its usage across cultures also enhances its relevance in this context.

Upon reflecting on the findings with the authorship group, it was proposed that a spiral more accurately represents the trajectory of the discomfort journey. Figure 2 incorporates the time and reflection required to process each of the strong emotions (into a spiral), emphasising the need for flexibility in agendas and time

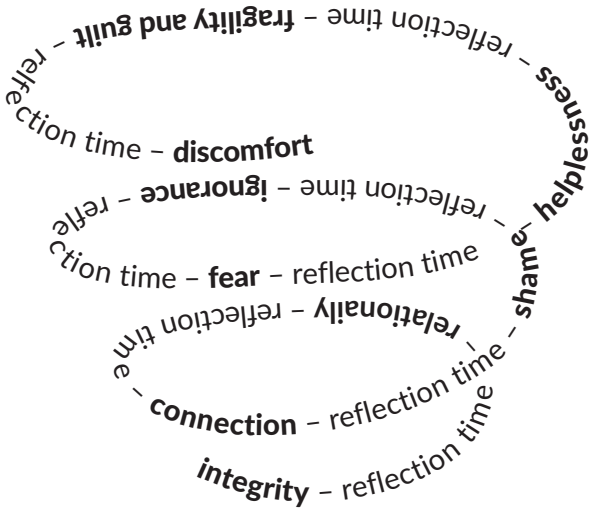

Figure 2. Big time journey of discomfort.

frames. The spiral representation illustrates how emotions coexist, moving from the outermost layers of discomfort toward integrity. Additionally, the aspect of a three-dimensional spiral further highlights the dynamic process of vertical spiralling—up and down—as well as the "roller coaster" spiking in and out of emotions that we navigate until we reach an inner core of integrity.

5.2. Recommendations

For researchers engaged in ocean governance partnerships involving multiple cultures and worldviews, participants proposed the following recommendations to address discomfort and engage effectively.

- Foster support networks: Researchers, particularly research leads, should approach discomfort with compassion and empathy, such as building support networks to understand Indigenous and First Nations cultures and histories. This can be done through initiatives such as cultural immersion programs, collective historical witnessing, and establishing meaningful relationships with Indigenous and First Nations communities (Table 2: 1.2a, 1.3a, 4.3b–c, 6.1c, and 6.3a).
- Create space for uncomfortable conversations: Establish judgement-free environments where participants can openly discuss emotions, concerns, fears, and discomfort, particularly in the context of co-design and co-partnership initiatives (Table 2: 1.2b, 4.2b–c, 4.3a, 6.2a–b, and 6.3a).
- Implement relational-governance models: Move beyond strictly rational and logical frameworks by incorporating and validating emotional responses and relational values as integral to governance practices (Table 2: 1.2c, 1.3b, 2.2b, 2.3a, 5.2a, 6.2b, and 6.3a).
- Adopt trauma-informed research practices: Ensure researchers are informed about the trauma experienced by Indigenous and First Nations communities, as well as their own communities, and employ empathetic strategies to engage with others while prioritising self-care in this context (Table 2: 2.2b, 4.2a, 5.2a, and 5.3a).
- Promote self-education: Encourage researchers to actively learn about the histories, contexts, and cultures of the Indigenous and First Nations communities they collaborate with to cultivate informed, respectful, and empathetic engagement (Table 2: 2.3b, 4.2b, and 4.3b).
- Recognise the discomfort journey: Acknowledge that feelings of discomfort are natural in this work. Confronting and embracing discomfort is a critical first step in fostering connection and relationality within partnerships (Table 2: 1.1e, 2.2a, 2.3c, 3.1e, 3.3b, and 5.2b).
- Transparency: Be transparent about personal gaps in knowledge, areas of expertise, and intentions. Openly acknowledging ignorance and limitations builds trust and authenticity (Table 2: 3.2a, 4.2b, and 6.2b).
- Commit time and recognise alternative temporal frameworks: Dedicate time to self-reflection, relationship-building, and long-term engagement. Researchers unwilling to invest such time should reconsider their participation in this work (Table 2: 3.2b–d, 3.3b–c, and 4.1d). Additionally, researchers should embrace diverse temporal frameworks and longitudinal time, recognising time not solely as linear but as encompassing seasonal rhythms, migration patterns, and co-existence (Table 2: 2.1a, 2.1c, and 3.1c–d). Appreciating time in this broader sense reinforces the relational approach, fostering trust and mutual understanding in collaborative efforts.
- Validate subjective ways of knowing: Recognise that human understanding extends beyond cognitive abilities. By embracing holistic ways of knowing and connecting with one's entire self, researchers may foster a sense of interconnectedness within themselves, the environment, and others, leading to more wholistic outcomes (Table 2: 1.2b–c, 1.3b, 3.1a, and 3.3a).

5.3. Further Research

A further consideration of this study would be to include more explicit interview questions addressing sentiments related to integrity. While integrity remains a concern, the focus of this article primarily reflected experiences of discomfort at the cultural interface and the negotiation of that space.

Communication of the complexity of the discomfort journey could be enhanced through qualitative and artistic techniques, like qualitative mapping (Brennan-Horley & Gibson, 2009) and emotional mapping via artistic expression (Caquard & Griffin, 2018; Qutub, 2012).

6. Conclusion

In this article, we proposed that immersion in discomfort is a learning journey headed toward co-governance partnerships with integrity. We encouraged researchers, starting with ourselves, to engage with discomfort to better understand the challenges at the cultural interface. We started by asking, "What role does immersion in discomfort play in fostering critical reflection and understanding between diverse cultural perspectives?" (RQ1).

First, we made time and space for uncomfortable conversations and reflecting on our discomfort (immersion). Our findings then led us to answer RQ1 with, "The big-time journey of discomfort" (Figure 2). Recognition of intense emotions of discomfort as embedded within a journey enables us to continue moving through them rather than remaining static or hindered by them. Continuing to navigate discomfort opens opportunities for reflection, learning, reckoning with historical wrongs, and challenging hegemonic knowledge and politics. These important processes are crucial to fostering authentic and committed co-governance partnerships with First Nations and Indigenous Communities—and in the Australian context to advancing reconciliation across the broader community. Another important finding was the need to allocate sufficient time to support these processes effectively.

Our second research question asked, "What practical approaches can be drawn from immersion in discomfort to assist researchers and practitioners working at the cultural interface?" (RQ2).

As each participant shared their recommendations, we identified nine practical insights for navigating the cultural interface (see Table 2 and Section 5.2): fostering support networks; cultivating spaces for uncomfortable yet necessary conversations; implementing relational-governance models; adopting trauma-informed research practices; promoting self-education; recognising the discomfort journey and its transformative potential; ensuring transparency; committing time and acknowledging temporal frameworks; and validating subjective epistemologies.

By fostering engagement with these recommendations and practices, we envision pathways for addressing structural inequities and nurturing meaningful partnerships that honour both cultural integrity and relationality. Integrity arises not from avoiding discomfort but from embracing it as part of a transformative journey. True commitment to co-governance and relationality demands an ongoing willingness to reconcile internal discomfort and to dedicate time to the reflective, inner work required of us. This iterative process not only fosters personal growth but also strengthens our capacity to engage authentically and ethically in complex, relational spaces.

Recognise discomfort. It is a feeling. It is the seat of learning. You are in the right place.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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