

Chapter 22

Indigenous Methodologies in Social Research

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Introduction

The positioning of Indigenous peoples in social research is a contradictory one. Indigenous Australians have, and continue to be, the subject of much social research, especially in disciplines such as anthropology and history. The Indigenous subject is historically the object of such research; the research gaze aimed at Indigenous people, culture and lives is usually informed by Western traditions and conceived and interpreted by non-Indigenous researchers. There is a quantifiable absence of Indigenous knowledges, perspectives and understandings within the dominant research practice.

Contemporary social research practice has changed little. Indigenous history, culture and development remains the primary object of study, and, problematically, coherent methodologies informed by an Indigenous interpretative framework are absent or inaccessible (Martin 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2004; Nakata 1998; Walter 2005). Indigenous researchers can therefore face obstacles in articulating how Indigenous priorities and interests can be met or how research can be aligned with their own cultural protocols. For non-Indigenous research leaders, there is little opportunity for exposure to Indigenous research methodologies and epistemologies.

To address this absence, this chapter presents an outline of some of the core components of Indigenous methodologies. These include their distinctness as research paradigm and methodological framework, and its underpinning philosophical base. Two contemporary Australian examples of Indigenous methodologies are surveyed to provide an overview of how they are put into practice: Indigenous women's standpoint; and *nayri kati*, Indigenous quantitative methodology.

What are Indigenous methodologies?

Indigenous methodologies are a vigorous and active field of knowledge production involving Indigenous peoples from around the world, including Australia, applying their own lenses, perspectives and understandings to social research and methodologies. The reach of Indigenous methodologies is broad and divergent, with Indigenous scholars publishing work across a variety of disciplines. This diversity is evident in how many research spaces Indigenous methodologies are applied and how they inform the way scholarship is approached. Kahakalau (2004), for example, highlights the importance of Hawaiian cultural protocols in her integration of existing heuristic methodology and Indigenous epistemology. Similarly, Tuhiwai Smith (1999:185), writing on Kaupapa Māori Research, emphasises its connection to Māori philosophy and principles, its assumption of the validity and legitimacy of Māori, the importance of Māori language and culture and ‘the struggle for autonomy over Māori’s own cultural well being’.

Within Australia, Rigney (1997) articulates a set of interrelated principles informing his notion of Indigenist research: resistance as the emancipatory imperative, political integrity and the privileging of Indigenous voices. Rigney (2001:9) further argues that using an Indigenous methodological framework within research means pushing boundaries ‘in order to make intellectual space for Indigenous cultural knowledge systems that were denied in the past’. Nakata’s (1998) focus is the development of an Indigenous standpoint perspective as a way for Indigenous scholars to read Western systems of knowledge. This theorising emerges from the dilemma Indigenous scholars face when negotiating representations of themselves, their ancestors and experiences within Western texts. Nakata’s perspective allows Indigenous scholars the language and theoretical skills to articulate their own intellectual position in relation to such representations.

A shared methodological paradigm

Notwithstanding these multiplicities, Indigenous methodologies all have a common philosophical base. Returning to the definition of methodology outlined in chapter 1, Indigenous methodologies reflect our epistemologies (ways of knowing), our axiologies (ways of doing) and our ontologies (ways of being). This means that Indigenous methodologies make visible what is meaningful and logical in our understanding of ourselves and the world and apply it to the research process (Porsanger 2004). Indigenous methodological frames also recognise all knowledge as socially situated, partial and grounded in subjectivities and experiences of everyday life. This translates into a redefinition of traditional methodological meanings and values, generation of theoretical perspectives from which dominant knowledges are critiqued, and the development of new, Indigenous-centred methodologies.

Scholar Karen Martin (2003) summarises these shared positionings in four theoretical principles:

- 1 recognising our worldviews, our knowledges and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival, which serves as a research framework
- 2 honouring Aboriginal social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and in the lands of other Aboriginal peoples
- 3 emphasising the social, historical and political contexts which shape our experience, lives, positions and futures
- 4 privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands.

Comparing Indigenous and Western methodologies

Understanding Indigenous methodologies requires cognisance of the forces shaping Western methodological frames. The origin stories of Western methodologies can be traced back to the Enlightenment and the European scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At this time, the influence of the church as the dominant social structure in European societies was diminishing and a more secular, rationalist society began to emerge. Democracy became established as the new political system and capitalism replaced feudalism as the primary economic system. Academic disciplines also underwent transition, with the traditions of philosophy and medicine providing the foundation for establishing new specialised disciplines within the European knowledge system. As the Western economic and political systems became more broadly institutionalised, the knowledges system gradually became institutionalised within universities and the professions.

Indigenous knowledge systems, of course, do not share this historical heritage. Rather, Indigenous peoples have developed their knowledge systems over millennia living on and alongside the land. Indigenous peoples' knowledges are therefore predicated on societal relations with country. Thus, knowledge is experiential, holistic and evolving, and Indigenous knowledge systems are an integral part of living in the world. Epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies are interwoven into this knowledge system. While European colonisation of certain countries and peoples disrupted Indigenous ways of life and ways of living, Indigenous knowledge systems remain intact and continue to develop as living, relational schemas.

Therefore, while Indigenous and Western knowledge systems have different beginnings, they each are aligned with a characteristic way of approaching the world.

Each also contains in an identifiable and distinctive form the different elements that make up a research methodology. As shown in table 22.1, the epistemological, axiological and ontological frameworks that inform Indigenous and Western methodologies emerge from their respective knowledge systems.

Table 22.1: Indigenous and Western methodological philosophical underpinnings

Indigenous methodologies	Western methodologies
Epistemology: our way of knowing	Epistemology: theories of knowledge
Legitimacy is based on connectivity, physical and spiritual nature of life, knowledge and existence.	Legitimacy is based on objectivity of rational knowledge and other ways of knowing are dismissed.
Connectivity is integral to knowledge production—knowledge cannot exist outside social relations to country.	Reason is the apex of the hierarchy of knowledge production and knowledge is abstract—separate from the world.
To be connected is to know and knowing is embodied and connected to country.	To be a person of reason is to be disembodied and removed from the land and place.
Social relations and blood line to country determine who can be a ‘knower’.	Knowledge status is limited to the educated and social elite and linked to how and where knowledge is acquired. The highest status is given to that acquired from knowledge institutions.
Knowledge is revealed and belongs to the group. It can be used, shared but not owned.	Knowledge is discovered/invented and owned by individual knower or pursued and gained.
Knowledge status is context-, place- and relationship-specific and earned through the life cycle.	Status of knower is earned by formal process.
Status of knower is conferred and bestowed through ritual.	Status of knower is conferred and bestowed through ritual.
Traditional processes and practices underpin ritual and status around knowledge.	Traditional processes and practices underpin ritual and status around knowledge.
Axiology: our way of doing, embedded in Indigenous values systems	Axiology: theory of values, extrinsic and intrinsic
What is valued in Indigenous knowledge is observation based on being in the world. This knowledge is tested and verified.	What is valued in Western knowledge is ‘rigour’ established via measurement, explanation, causality, classification and differentiation.
Valued knowledge is communicated, generated and re-generated.	Knowers of valued knowledge are ‘experts’ and knowledge is owned.
Indigenous knowledge is valued because it provides connection to the world.	Knowledge is valued for itself and divided into disconnected spheres.

Valued knowledge comes from many sources including dreams, the ancestors, stories and experience, and is embedded in the land.	Valued knowledge comes from disembodied theories rationally considered.
Knowledge-holding subject produces knowledge through connection.	Knowledge-holding subject produces knowledge through the study of the object.
Hierarchical relationship between subject and object is relational and context-specific.	Hierarchical object/subject split with the subject also positioned to define the object.
Ontology: our way of being and belonging	Ontology: theories related to the nature of being
Indigenous ontological framework is based on connectiveness to country.	Western ontological framework is hierarchical and provides for understanding of what constitutes reality.
Knowledges and realities exist beyond us as humans. Both men and women are knowledge holders.	Ontology predicated on a hierarchical gendered and racial dichotomy of the mind–body split: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • white men: the disembodied creators of culture and knowledge • others: in nature, governed by their emotions and their bodies.
Realities are predicated on being embodied and connected. Reality is not immutable and there are different layers of reality that are contextual and related to being a knowledge holder.	Reality is perceived as immutable and the Western framing of that reality is invisible to the perceiver.

Indigenous methodologies in practice

Two very different Indigenous methodologies are used by the authors in their day-to-day research: Indigenous women’s standpoint, developed by Aileen Moreton-Robinson; and *nayri kati*, developed by Maggie Walter. Each is described in personal terms to reinforce the subjective experience of social research and social researchers.

Indigenous women’s standpoint: Aileen Moreton-Robinson

Indigenous women’s standpoint is centred upon Indigenous women’s knowledges, and is informed by the feminist methodological paradigm.

The heart of my methodology is shared positioning as between Indigenous women. Although individual experiences differ, the worldview and reality of being an Indigenous woman is intertwined with lived experience. The intersecting oppressions of race and gender and the subsequent power relations that flow from these into the social, political, historical and material conditions of our lives is shared, consciously or unconsciously. These conditions and relations discursively constitute us in the everyday. As Indigenous women, our lives are framed by the omnipresence of patriarchal white sovereignty and its continual

denial of our sovereignty. But, as Indigenous women, we are not powerless. Our lives are also constituted by us through the simultaneousness of our compliance and resistance as we deploy a ‘tactical subjectivity’. This enables us to, as Sandoval (2004: 203) argues, to ‘re-enter ourselves’ depending upon the life circumstances being confronted.

Therefore, the social positioning aspect of this methodology recognises the diversity of Indigenous women’s individual experiences and how they might perceive themselves in the world. My own positioning as a Goenpul woman is intertwined into how I approach social research. The ontology, epistemology and axiology of Indigenous women’s standpoint are also built on shared positioning.

Indigenous women’s standpoint ontology

Indigenous women’s ways of being and belonging are derived from their relationship to country and ancestral beings. During the origin time, ancestral beings created the land and life, animals, plants and the physiographic features of the country and are associated with particular tracts of country. Because ancestral beings gave birth to humans, we share a common life force with them, which connects us with the earth. Our belonging is based on blood line to country. As such, Indigenous women’s bodies are tangible evidence of our sovereignty, and our embodiment as Indigenous women is evidence of our ontology; it is born of the interrelationship between ancestral beings, humans and country.

Indigenous women’s ontology is not destroyed by colonisation. The knowledge system and beliefs tied to the origin time inform the past, present and future, changing in interpretation through dreams and lived experience. This knowledge system also continually establishes Indigenous ways of life, providing a moral code, rules and laws for behaviour based on the principles of respect, reciprocity and obligation.

Indigenous women’s standpoint epistemology

Indigenous women’s epistemologies differ according to respective cultures, age, roles, sexuality and experiences of colonisation. But all are informed by relationality; we are related to others by descent, ancestors, country, place and shared experiences. Flowing from a world that is organic, alive and inhabited by ancestral beings who guide and shape life, Indigenous women’s standpoint ways of knowing explicitly recognise that one cannot know everything, that everything cannot be known and that there are knowledges beyond human understanding. Indigenous women’s ways of knowing are also shaped by our shared experiences and these ways of knowing inform the problematics of Indigenous women’s standpoint. Indigenous women share:

- the experience of being mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts, grandmothers and leaders within our communities

- experiences of racism and sexism and of living in a society that depreciates us as Indigenous women
- the experience of dispossession and oppression and the continual denial of our sovereignty
- experiences of having no epistemic authority within the academy
- the experience of negotiating public and private spaces that are non-Indigenous
- a political commitment to examining and challenging Western ways of knowing us.

Indigenous women's standpoint axiology

Indigenous women's standpoint ways of doing are an extension of our communal responsibilities. Our communities and other Indigenous contexts provide knowledges that shape our work. We are therefore accountable to our respective communities for our knowledge production, and the values we bring to our research are bounded by our understanding that all things are connected. This provides our framework for observing, engaging and being in the world. This different way of being human and our colonised status provides us with what Harding calls strong objectivity; our location within society provides a unique advantage point to analyse colonising power. This way of doing social research entails an Indigenous heuristic approach to knowledge production involving a circuitous process of listening, talking, observing, thinking and clear-sightedness in order to generate a 'problematic'.

Indigenous women's standpoint method, outlined in box 22.1, is framed around its methodological standpoint and involves a six-step iterative process of listening and talking, observing, thinking, clear-sightedness, reading and writing.

Box 22.1: Indigenous women's standpoint method

- 1 **Listening and talking**
Conversations in the everyday, either as participant or observer, provide insights into our concerns and what is meaningful to us. I listen to what is said or written by Indigenous women, which speaks about and to our lives. By listening and hearing I am informed by knowledges and shared experiences.
- 2 **Observing**
Watching Indigenous women and their interactions in the everyday informs my consideration of the meanings of their conversations.
- 3 **Thinking**
This is a time of deep reflection to process what I have heard and observed. It requires immersion in what I am being told and the reasons why. I look for signs

from the ancestors about the direction my thoughts are taking me. This process of deep contemplation takes days, weeks, months or even years, and I attempt to fully identify shared meanings, consider differences and contradictions and incorporate insights drawn from my epistemology and ontology as a Goenpul woman.

4 Clear-sightedness

After a considerable period of deep thinking, and usually anxiety, I find I have made sense of what I have heard which leads me to then explore the problematic that has unfolded during this process.

5 Reading

The next stage is to track and gather literature pertaining to the problematic that is now the focus of my research. This involves reading, contemplating, evaluating and developing an interpretive framework and method for the research project. It is here that the conceptual framework of my research fully emerges.

6 Writing

The writing time is one of creative synergy, where my findings are brought together in the form of explanation, argument and analysis addressing the problematic.

Indigenous women's standpoint in action: the *Yorta Yorta* native title case

Indigenous women's standpoint is the location within the academy where our shared knowledges and experiences from inside hierarchical relations of ruling converge to shape research questions regarding the problematic we have identified. My standpoint informs the research work that I undertake.

For example, during the 1990s my community became involved in pursuing a native title claim for part of our country. Over the years, several court decisions impacted on the burden of proof required to obtain a successful determination. The one decision that caused anxiety, distress and disbelief amongst community members was the High Court's ruling in the *Yorta Yorta* case, which effectively increased the burden of proof so that Indigenous people had to show that they were exercising the same native title rights in the present day that their ancestors did at the time of British settlement. We as Indigenous men and women talked about how every time we think we are about to receive some crumbs from the table of white men, they 'shift the goal posts' and 'up the bar by changing the rules' while continuing to deny their theft of our lands. Indigenous people were upset by this decision but many talked about how our lands will

always be our lands irrespective of what courts say or do. Others commented that the High Court decision was racist. These comments were also reflected in conversations amongst Indigenous men and women outside my community. Clearly, there was something about the decision that warranted investigation from an Indigenous woman's standpoint.

Thinking about what the conversations inside and outside my community revealed to me, I wanted to know how white possession circulated within the law to deny Indigenous people's rights to their land. My conceptual framework, informed by critical race and whiteness studies, was that the world is raced but whiteness has remained invisible in analyses because 'race' is deemed only to belong to the non-white. Whiteness as an invisible racial marker has been integral to the development of law within 'settler-colonial' countries but it has remained invisible as naturalised and normative.

Choosing a method for this research was also guided by the conversations which informed the problematic. Critical discourse analysis was the logical choice for exploring the ways in which non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people talked about the *Yorta Yorta* decision within unequal power relations. The critical discourse method I deployed involved exploring texts for patterns of meanings, their repetition, action and interactional moves and strategies, rhetorical devices and their relationship to hidden discourses. I began to research the academic literature about the *Yorta Yorta* decision as well as reading the transcript of the High Court's findings and media reports about the case. What became evident from the data was that certain sets of meanings about white ownership of the nation were circulating about the Yorta Yorta people's native title claims. White possession was naturalised within commonsense knowledge, decision making and socially produced conventions and therefore also within the court's rationale for why the tide of history had washed away native title. This led me to extend my conceptual framework in order to analyse, understand and explain how white possession functions within legal decision making.

In this paper I reveal how the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty works ideologically, that is, it operates at the level of beliefs, and discursively at the level of epistemology, to naturalise the nation as a white possession. Australia was acquired in the name of the King of England. As such, patriarchal white sovereignty is a regime of power that derives from the illegal act of possession and is most acutely manifested in the form of the Crown and the judiciary. The crown holds exclusive possession of its territory, which is the very foundation of the nation state. The nation state in turn confers patriarchal white sovereignty on its citizens through what Carol Pateman argues is the sexual contract (1988). However, not all citizens benefit from or exercise patriarchal white sovereignty equally. Race, class, gender, sexuality and ableness

are markers that circumscribe the performance of patriarchal white sovereignty by citizens within Australian society. The possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty is predicated on exclusion; that is, it denies and refuses what it does not own—the sovereignty of the Indigenous other. Here I use the concept ‘possessive logic’ to denote a mode of rationalisation, rather than a set of positions that produce a more or less inevitable answer, that is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation state’s ownership, control and domination. As such, it is operationalised to circulate sets of meanings about white ownership of the nation, as part of common sense knowledge, decision making and socially produced conventions.

The possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty is deployed to promote the idea of race neutrality through concepts attached to the ideals of democracy such as egalitarianism, equity and equal opportunity. This allows patriarchal white sovereignty to remain transparent and invisible—two key attributes of its power. Yet as the premise of white national identity it defines ‘the human condition ... it alone defines normality and fully inhabits it’ (Dyer 1997:9–10). The law in Australian society is one of the key institutions through which the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty operates. White patriarchs designed and established the legal and political institutions that control and maintain the social structure under which we now live. White, heterosexual, able, middle-class males are overly represented in government, legislatures, bureaucracies, the legal profession and the judiciary where ‘they shape legislation, administration and judicial texts in their own image and to their own advantage’ (Thornton 1995:88).

For over 200 years, the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty has served to define the attributes of personhood and property through the law. The theft of Indigenous lands was ratified by bestowing and ‘acknowledging the property rights of whites in [Indigenous lands]. Only white possession and occupation of land was validated and therefore privileged as a basis for property rights’ (Harris 1995:278). The possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty was deployed in defining who was, and who was not, white, conferring privilege by identifying what legal entitlements accrued to those categorised as white. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this same logic was operative, making whiteness itself a visible form of property in Australian law through the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901, and at the commencement of the twenty-first century it continues to function invisibly, informing the legal exclusion of refugees. The possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty operates to discriminate in favour of itself, ensuring it protects and maintains its interest through the continuing denial and exclusion of Indigenous sovereignty. This logic is evident in the High Court’s *Yorta Yorta* decision.

(Moreton-Robinson 2004).

A full transcript of this research paper can be downloaded from *borderlands e-journal* at www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no2_2004/moreton_possessive.htm.

It is worth noting that Indigenous methodologies are often critiqued by Western academics as a form of strategic essentialism. From an Indigenous epistemological frame, this critique is fatally flawed. What is being defined as essentialism is rooted in Western knowledge systems and an unreflexive perception of the self as multiple, becoming and unfixd. The critique proposes a self whose humanness is disconnected from the earth and values itself above every other living thing. As outlined within Indigenous women's standpoint, this view of the self only makes sense within Western ontology and epistemology and is at odds with Indigenous perspectives.

nayri kati: Maggie Walter

The Indigenous quantitative methodology of nayri kati is different to Indigenous women's standpoint in its quantitative focus but shares underlining principles in relation to epistemologies, axiologies and ontologies. nayri kati emerges from my own reflexive journey to investigate how I could be a quantitative social researcher beyond the Western paradigms within which this type of research is traditionally embedded. I was spurred to this task because of the dearth of Indigenous researchers and perspectives within quantitative social research and the continuing suspicion, based on the negative experience of being statistically analysed as 'other' over many years, that quantitative research was not amenable to an Indigenous research paradigm.

The purpose of nayri kati is to facilitate the reframing of discourse, process and practice within my research. As a quantitative researcher I am aware of the power—political, economic, social and cultural—inherent in statistical results. We should not underestimate the power of the data to influence the influential. And if Indigenous researchers are not the framers of the discourse that flows from the data then it is non-Indigenous researchers who set research agendas, prioritise research questions and frame analysis and interpretation from perspectives that usually cast us as the 'problem' to be researched. nayri kati provides one way of staking an Indigenous claim across the research arena. Social research can be a form of activism and the voices of Indigenous scholarship must be ours.

Two key questions shaped the development of this quantitative research methodology:

- 1 How do you do Indigenous quantitative research?
- 2 Is Indigenous quantitative research an Indigenous methodology?

The outcome is *nayri kati*, which translates to ‘good numbers’ in *pakana* language; that is, numbers that work for Indigenous people.

As in Indigenous women’s standpoint, *nayri kati* varies in its application according to social and personal position. And while being Indigenous people in cultural, social, economic and personal aspects is fundamentally different from being non-Indigenous, neither are we all the same. We differ by age, gender, life experiences, community and country. How I approach my research within *nayri kati* is therefore framed by my identity as a *pakana* woman, my life circumstances, my era and my experiences.

nayri kati epistemology

Western epistemology permeates standard quantitative research methodologies. Who knowledge holders can be, who owns knowledge and how knowledge is discovered by research is presumed. Indigenous epistemological perspectives, in contrast, know knowledge is relational: others, country, spirit and knowers are not defined by the same criteria. Within its epistemic boundaries, *nayri kati* takes as its central tenets that:

- knowledge cannot be discovered or owned; it can only be revealed and shared
- the Indigenous person is always the observer
- Indigenous worldviews and perspectives are explicitly positioned as the lens through which the research seeks to reveal knowledge.

nayri kati axiology

Axiology is essentially the extrinsic and intrinsic values we bring to the research process. To determine our underpinning values, we must ask reflexive questions:

- Why this topic?
- Why this aspect?
- Where does my interest come from?

For *nayri kati*, the topic, question, aspects, process, analysis and interpretation must arise tangibly from a value framework that privileges Indigenous perspectives and interests. As detailed in the conceptual framework, my own axiology is linked to my understanding of how power is used to maintain and sustain the social privilege of the non-Indigenous majority in Australian society.

nayri kati ontology

Indigenous ontologies—the nature of being and how we understand existence to be—are significantly different from those that inform the Western norms of social research. *nayri kati* ontology privileges Indigenous views of reality and who we are, our place in the world

and our relatedness across kin, country, ancestors, community and the societies in which we live. nayri kati ontology specifically applies an Indigenous lens to existence and reality in making sense of the Indigenous person's place in Indigenous and broader Australian society.

nayri kati in action

By definition, nayri kati uses statistical methods for data gathering and analysis. The conceptual framework will vary. The nayri kati-framed research reported in the following section is informed by how I see Indigenous people positioned within non-Indigenous Australian society and the power dimensions of the terrain of Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations. The central elements, as shown in figure 22.1, are that not only are Indigenous people marginalised in the contexts of social resources, opportunities and socioeconomic status, but have also through colonialisation and its contemporary aftermath been separated from country, family and conceptions of different futures. This marginalisation is formed within and magnified by Indigenous absence from non-Indigenous Australians' everyday life, the nation's positions of influence and even its concepts of itself. Where Indigenous Australians do feature is within a domain of disregard whereby pejorative stereotypes pattern how non-Indigenous people speak about Indigenous people and issues, and this is reflected almost daily in the intrusive and judgemental gaze under which Indigenous peoples have to live their lives.

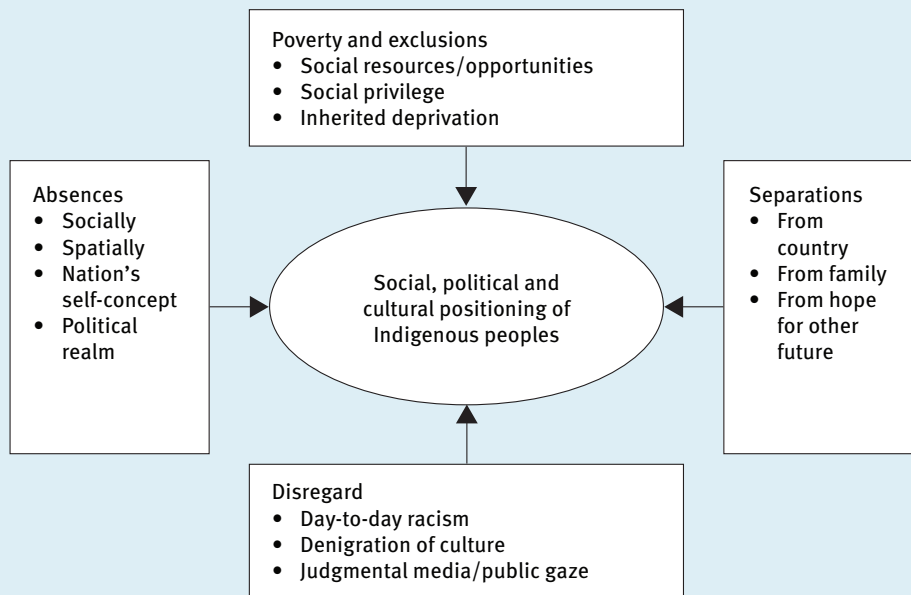


Figure 22.1: Conceptualising indigenous positioning within Australian society

A nayri kati lens on non-Indigenous attitudes

In essence, nayri kati reframes quantitative research so that the interests served; the beneficiaries; the design, frame and scope, interpretation and ownership reflect Indigenous values and perspectives. As with other quantitative research (see chapter 2), the starting point for research undertaken using a nayri kati methodology is the research question. When the research question is developed from an Indigenous framework, the process and practice of the research itself are transformed.

The ‘Keeping our Distance’ research project centres on a set of survey items from the 2007 AuSSA survey. The research topic is the positioning of non-Indigenous Australians within race relations across two dimensions: non-Indigenous attitudes towards Indigenous people and issues, and the level of social proximity between non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people. This sequencing of these terms is deliberate, and in line with nayri kati epistemology as the Indigenous people are the observers in the research. Two research questions informed the study but only the first is addressed here.

Research question 1: What is the shape of contemporary social attitudes among non-Indigenous Australians towards Indigenous issues and are these associated with particular social, economic or demographic factors?

The six survey statements assessing non-Indigenous attitudes are shown in table 22.2. They have three underpinning concepts: Indigenous equality (a, f); Indigenous culture (c, e); Indigenous restorative justice (b, d). As can be seen, a moderate majority of non-Indigenous Australians disagree that Aboriginal people are now treated equally, and about half disagree that injustices are all in the past and that Aboriginal people should have to change their culture or retain a traditional lifestyle. There is less support for the restorative action items: fewer than half agree on extra government assistance and only one-third disagree that granting land rights is unfair. These findings suggest a dissonance between egalitarian attitudes expressed and a willingness to put those attitudes into action. While a (albeit small) majority of non-Indigenous Australians agree that Indigenous people remain unfairly positioned within Australian society, direct redress of this disadvantage is not equally accepted.

The more detailed analyses find, in line with other studies, that among non-Indigenous Australians, male, older, rural and less educated people hold less egalitarian attitudes towards Aboriginal people. Within these results, as shown in figure 22.2, education, used as a proxy for socioeconomic position, has the most visible effect across each of the three concepts investigated.

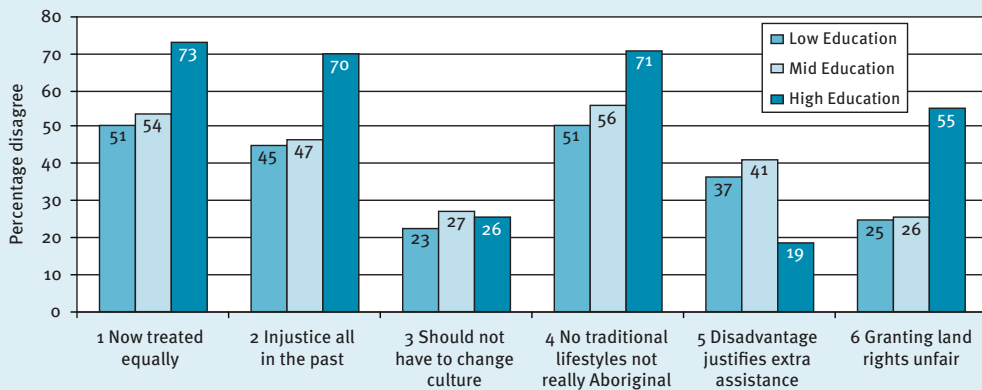
Table 22.2: Frequencies of AuSSA questions H1a–f: Attitude statements

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (N = 2582–2599)	Agree*	Neither	Disagree*
	%	%	%
a. Aboriginal people are now treated equally to other Australians**	23	19	68
f. Injustices towards Aboriginal people are now all in the past	26	22	52
c. Aboriginal people should not have to change their culture to fit into Australian society	53	23	25
e. Aboriginal people who no longer follow traditional lifestyles are not really Aboriginal	23	20	57
b. Aboriginal people's levels of disadvantage justifies extra government assistance	45	20	35
d. Granting land rights to Aboriginal people is unfair to other Australians	43	25	33

Source: AuSSA 2007

* 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' results were combined for this table, as were 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' results.

** Statements were posed in order from a–f and have been ordered here to reflect underlying concepts.

**Figure 22.2:** Education level and Aboriginal items attitudes

* Percentages refer to proportion of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with each statement item.

** Proportion of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with each statement as numbered.

Therefore, the answer to the research question on the shape of contemporary social attitudes is that a small majority of non-Indigenous Australians hold egalitarian attitudes about Aboriginal issues, but, incongruously, these attitudes do not extend to restorative action.

There is an attitude–action gap. Non-Indigenous attitudes also vary by socioeconomic and demographic factors, but again the pattern on the restorative action items differs. While being younger, being female, having a higher level of education and residing in a capital city are all statistically associated with higher levels of egalitarian-aligned attitudes, only those with higher education are significantly more likely to support restorative action. A straightforward interpretation of these results makes basic theoretical sense. In relation to age group, the last fifty years have seen dramatic attitude changes around Aboriginal issues and the oldest group of non-Indigenous Australians are more likely to retain attitudes from earlier eras. Similarly, it might be theorised that people with a higher level of education will have had a higher exposure to a range of opinions, perspectives and debates and so be more liberal in their attitudes.

But interpretation becomes more complicated when theorising why non-Indigenous Australians' attitudes to restorative action do not align with their attitudes on the position of Indigenous people within Australian society. Using the *nayri kati* theoretical frame, the different positions can be theoretically sustained by linking these results to non-Indigenous privilege. Holding egalitarian attitudes does not threaten the privileged positioning of non-Indigenous people within Australian society, and allows the holder to claim to be egalitarian. Acting on those attitudes, that is, actually addressing Indigenous rights to better life chances, however, might threaten that privilege. From a zero-sum perception, addressing Indigenous rights and structural disadvantage will lead to a similar-sized reduction in non-Indigenous privilege. From this conceptual vantage point, it becomes possible to understand why non-Indigenous people with higher education, status and income are less likely to be affected by any perceived loss of privilege via land rights and remediating strategies, and therefore more likely to be supportive of such strategies.

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