

*PhD Thesis: 'Money, Financial Capability and Well-being in Indigenous Australia'*



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## Money, Financial Capability and Well-being in Indigenous Australia

Vinita Godinho  
MBA, BSc (Economics Honours)

Graduate School of Business & Law

College of Business

RMIT University

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*“We are still negotiating and affirming the value of Indigenous people to the financial services industry and constructing a rationale that engages this sector in the notion of investment with Indigenous people, not as deficit, not as dependents, not as costs to society or the financial services sector that have to be written off without reward. We need to work towards building a model that creates ownership by Indigenous people of the financial institutions, and knowledge and accountability of financial institutions to knowing their Indigenous customers.”*

Paul Briggs – AFCCRA Conference June 2007  
(National Indigenous Money Management Agenda 2007)

## **Abstract**

My thesis explores the historical, cultural and familial context of money as it flows through Indigenous households in remote, regional and urban Australia ('Indigenous money'), and considers how this influences Indigenous views on financial capability and well-being.

Indigenous people are over-represented amongst the three million adult Australians who are financially excluded, and those with lowest financial capability. They are also the only community group associated with financial exclusion irrespective of where they live.

Existing studies consistently find a gap in Indigenous inclusion vis-à-vis mainstream Australia, yet offer limited explanation of why this gap persists. Indigenous cultural norms are often identified as a barrier to enhancing financial inclusion and capability, yet few studies focus on how Indigenous people themselves understand and want to use money. National efforts to promote financial literacy are targeting the young through the formal education system, yet elders are the traditional custodians of Indigenous knowledge.

Using an Indigenous research paradigm which privileges the Indigenous perspective, I have examined the cultural shaping of money in Indigenous communities in remote, regional and urban Australia, based on Viviana Zelizer's theory of the social shaping of money. I find that 'Indigenous money' for the participants of my study, is culturally distinctive from middle-income, 'Anglo-Celtic' understandings of money, which underlie Australian financial and banking policy. This understanding influences the participants' world-view of financial capability and well-being.

In the communities studied, participants see money as imposed from outside their culture, yet have adapted it into their everyday lives in culturally distinctive ways. Elders describe the difficulty of having to learn and abide by the rules of two worlds (i.e. Indigenous and non-

Indigenous) including those that revolve around money. In remote locations money is seen as disconnected from traditional Indigenous knowledge and law. In regional and urban areas, money is inextricably linked to a wider, ongoing challenge to re-conceptualise Indigenous cultural identity and roles, vis-à-vis mainstream, non-Indigenous Australia.

Irrespective of location, 'Indigenous money' flows between related households, rather than being bounded within a nuclear family household. Participants say they prioritize sharing money over saving it, as compared to non-Indigenous people. Daily financial decisions require participants to manage money whilst maintaining relationships and fulfilling obligations. However, the desire to control one's own money in a sharing culture can increase the stress associated with money.

Elders, particularly in remote communities, want to feel more in control of money. They want to know more about money and connect it with cultural knowledge of managing valued resources, so that they can role model how younger generations should use it wisely. A limited ability to know and grow money restricts its usage to a means of survival. A culturally distinctive style of 'chuck-in' household money management has emerged, which combines individual money with shared use. Many participants manage their finances in ways that incur higher costs yet earn lower returns, particularly in remote communities with limited financial and digital infrastructure.

'Indigenous money' contributes to participants' well-being when they are able to use it for caring, and facilitate not just individual but also family and community goals. Well-being is compromised by feelings of stress and guilt associated with financial choices which clash with cultural norms and identity. Whilst acknowledging the need to provide financial education for the young, participants identify elders as the ones who should lead Indigenous

people in using money the right way to achieve their own goals, whilst retaining their cultural identity. Efforts to enhance financial capability which build on Indigenous cultural knowledge, shared values and norms are more likely to motivate participants to engage with money matters.

I conclude that historical, cultural and familial factors influence the participants' understanding of 'Indigenous money', and their world-view of financial capability and well-being. Though context matters, the understanding of 'Indigenous money' remains culturally distinctive vis-à-vis 'Anglo-Celtic money', for participants in remote, regional and urban locations. Money is disconnected from many important elements of participants' social and cultural world-view, including traditional knowledge, cultural values and norms, and their sense of cultural identity. This feeling of disconnect may be at the heart of why Indigenous people have greater difficulty in accessing banking and developing financial skills, and are more likely to be excluded, irrespective of location. Building the financial capability of elders alongside current efforts targeting the young, could strengthen their traditional role as trusted custodians of knowledge, enabling them to lead efforts to use money the right way.

My thesis contributes to knowledge by exploring the participants' world-view of money, how they manage and control it in their daily lives, how they want to use it in future, as well as its role in their well-being. This study contributes to theory by describing the sociology of a culturally distinctive 'Indigenous money', in particular how social relationships and cultural norms are inextricably linked with participants' understandings of money. It also contributes to emerging debate about Indigenous research paradigms and methodologies.

This research also has implications for policymakers, as connecting their efforts to enhance Indigenous financial well-being with knowledge about the cultural shaping of 'Indigenous

money' could allow them to use culture as an enabler, rather than a barrier, to greater financial inclusion. Culture is an enduring strength for participants of this study - policymakers could build on these findings to adopt a strengths-based approach to expand Indigenous freedoms to achieve the financial lives that they value.

**Keywords:** Indigenous money management, Indigenous financial inclusion, Indigenous research methodology, financial capability, financial well-being

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## Glossary / Abbreviations Used

'Yolŋu Matha' refers to the languages of the 'Yolŋu', the Indigenous people of northeast Arnhem Land in northern Australia (Yolŋu = people, Matha = tongue, language).

Explanations of the following Yolŋu Matha terms used in this thesis, have been referenced from the 'Yolŋu Matha Dictionary' (Zorc 1986) or via personal conversations with Yolŋu Matha linguists who were key informants for the research:

<i>Balanda:</i>	white person, European
<i>Bulpu:</i>	basket made from pandanus fibres
<i>Djambatj:</i>	good at (hunting, gathering, fishing), successful, expert, quick, smart
<i>Gurrutu:</i>	relationship, kinship, related
<i>Lay-gora:</i>	the ethic of sharing
<i>Mapu:</i>	egg
<i>Marr:</i>	strength, spiritual power, faith
<i>Mayaltha:</i>	time/season before the bush foods are ready, empty, nothing there
<i>Mundhurr:</i>	present, gift, freely given
<i>Rumbal:</i>	body
<i>Rulbaŋ-dhun:</i>	put down, save (for later)

Other words or expressions used in this thesis that require further explanation include:

Anglo-Celtic:	a term defined by the Collins English Dictionary as 'of or relating to an inhabitant of Australia who was or whose ancestors were born in the British Isles'
Black-fella:	an informal Australian English term used to describe an Indigenous Australian (Flinders University 2014)
Indigenous:	a term defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as "anyone who identifies themselves, or is identified by another household member, as being a person of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin. Outside of the ABS in broader Australian society, an individual who is recognised by their community as a person of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin may also be considered to be Indigenous" (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010)
White-fella:	an informal Australian English term used to describe a non-Indigenous Australian (Flinders University 2014)

## **Statement of Original Authorship**

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis/project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

SIGNED:

VINITA GODINHO

Dated: 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2014

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The idea for this thesis was born a decade ago, inspired by the visionary Yorta Yorta elder and esteemed leader Paul Briggs (OAM). Amongst his many responsibilities (Chair of First Nations Foundation, the Kaiela Institute and President of the Rumbalara Football/Netball Club), Paul made the time to talk to me about money, its role in everyday community life and how he wanted to motivate his people to use it wisely. His ideas sparked a passion to study this important area further, though it took many years of planning before I was ready to begin this journey.

Once I embarked on my path of discovery, I was fortunate to meet other elders across my travels in remote, regional and urban Australia, who provided much-needed guidance and introduced me to their communities. I gratefully acknowledge their wisdom, their patience in allowing me to learn from my mistakes, and their faith in trusting me with their stories. I dedicate this thesis to Paul and the elders who guided this study, whilst fully acknowledging that any errors and omissions are mine alone.

Any journey requires skillful direction and I was lucky to have not one but two dedicated supervisors in Professors Supriya Singh and Roslyn Russell, who not just kept me on track but also helped me to see and hear whatever I had missed, whenever I floundered or lost my way. My family kept me company throughout this journey, alternately providing welcome distraction and a shoulder to cry on, in times of despair. They also took over the regular servicing which kept us fed (thanks to my mother Shanti), the household engine running smoothly (thanks to my father Vinod and my husband Steven) and the passengers (my boys Vivek and Rohan) happy.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The confidence to navigate an ever-changing financial landscape and make good, responsible decisions about money, is a core life-skill for every Australian (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2014). Informed decisions about earning, spending, borrowing and saving enhance financial wellbeing, and enable individuals to secure a sound economic future for themselves, their family and community. However, 16.9% of Australian adults are financially excluded (Connolly 2014) and lack access to safe, affordable and appropriate financial products & services, which reduces their financial and economic resilience, and compromises their financial wellbeing.

The modern-day financial sector has been likened to an 'eco-system' – an organic, dynamic environment of interconnected internal and external organisms (Arinaminpathy, Kapadia & Robert 2012; Han & Yu 2012). A healthy ecosystem requires healthy components - at a minimum, a healthy financial ecosystem requires competitive suppliers, relevant and useful market infrastructure, effective regulation, and competent users. Growing financial exclusion and low user financial literacy have in the last decade, emerged as a wicked problem which threatens this global financial ecosystem.

In Australia, financial 'literacy' is defined as the combination of financial knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours necessary to make sound financial decisions, based on personal circumstances, to improve financial wellbeing (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2014; Atkinson & Messy). Global research however, recognises that in addition to financial literacy, people also need the opportunity to act (Sherraden 2013; Sherraden 2010; Johnson & Sherraden 2007), widening the debate to consider financial 'capability',

which links individual ability to appropriate access to financial institutions, products and services.

Governments and financial institutions across the world recognise the need to address financial exclusion and improve financial capability, especially amongst minority and low-income groups who are disproportionately disadvantaged. Whilst financial capability and financial inclusion are correlated, there is not necessarily a causal relationship – however, improving financial capability has been directly linked to increased well-being (Taylor, Jenkins & Sacker 2009) and greater resilience in the face of economic shocks (Klapper, Lusardi & Panos 2012).

Making good financial decisions and interacting effectively with providers of financial services makes it more likely that individuals can achieve their financial goals, and improve their household's welfare. Financially included citizens also contribute to financial sector development, which in turn is strongly related to economic growth (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development 2013). People who can manage their money well are therefore also more likely to be healthier, happier and more productive citizens. Financial inclusion and capability research has grown exponentially in the last decade, providing an evidence-base to inform policies and strategies to reduce disparities between population groups.

## **Research Questions**

My primary research question is: “How does the understanding of money influence financial capability and well-being in Indigenous Australia?” The subsidiary questions required to answer this research question are:



- What is the understanding of money (i.e. 'Indigenous money') amongst remote Indigenous participants?
- Does the understanding of 'Indigenous money' differ amongst remote, regional and urban Indigenous participants?
- What are the implications for Indigenous views on financial capability and well-being?

Greater understanding of Indigenous world-views can inform future research regarding strengths-based approaches to enhance Indigenous access to the financial sector, and the design of culturally appropriate initiatives such as financial education, products and services that better meet the needs of Indigenous people.

### **Why is this research important?**

In Australia, the Indigenous population is two and a half times more likely to be financially excluded (Connolly et al. 2012), no matter where they live (Chant Link and Associates 2004). Other culturally and linguistically diverse community groups from non-English speaking backgrounds are also over-represented amongst the financially excluded (Connolly 2014), making it important to study the link between money and culture, particularly how culture can be an enabler rather than a barrier, to greater inclusion.

However, academic literature on money and financial management amongst Indigenous Australians is limited (Gerrans, Clark-Murphy & Truscott 2009). Few studies have focused on how Indigenous people themselves understand, want to use and manage money.

Indigenous cultural norms such as kinship obligations, preference for face to face service provision, and language barriers are often identified as a barrier to improving financial inclusion and capability (National Indigenous Money Management Agenda 2007; Urbis Keys Young 2006).

Financial exclusion exacerbates other forms of disadvantage, given Indigenous people are over-represented amongst the most marginalized community groups in Australia (Productivity Commission 2011). The Government's 'Closing the gap' agenda of bringing Indigenous outcomes in critical areas up to the national average, has ambitious plans to improve health, education, employment and economic participation (Council Of Australian Governments 2014). Debate within the Indigenous community agrees that improving financial capability will help people to live full and productive lives, but emphasizes that Indigenous people must drive this (Cape York Institute 2013; First Nations Foundation 2014). There are calls for efforts to 'close the gap' to be more consultative (Holland 2014), and progress issues which the Indigenous community has prioritized.

By exploring the Indigenous participants' stories about money and their daily financial lives, my research can contribute to a greater understanding of Indigenous world-views on money, financial capability and well-being. Longitudinal studies which consistently demonstrate a considerable gap in financial outcomes for Indigenous people no matter where they live, offer only a limited explanation as to the reasons *why* this gap persists.

This is where my research could offer some additional insights by connecting efforts to 'close the gap' in Indigenous financial outcomes to a greater understanding of the culturally distinctive characteristics of 'Indigenous money'. Indigenous participants of this study say culture is their strength. Connecting participants' views on the cultural shaping of money to financial education and capability-building initiatives could offer policymakers a strengths-based, more culturally appropriate approach to resolving Indigenous financial exclusion.

## **Outline of Thesis**

This thesis builds on Viviana Zelizer's theory on the social and cultural shaping of money, to examine 'Indigenous money' as a social phenomenon, flowing through households in the remote, regional and urban Indigenous communities studied. The framework of the human development and capability approach is then used to explore how this understanding of 'Indigenous money' influences participants' views on financial capability and well-being.

In chapter two, I describe the multi-disciplinary, disparate strands of existing literature on this topic, which explores history, money, financial management and capability, well-being and Indigenous people, and the main themes that emerge within each discipline. It is only by combining this disconnected literature that I was able to shape my study. Chapter three explains my approach to planning and undertaking the research including my considerations regarding methodology and the theoretical frameworks to be adopted. I reflect on how my gender, ethnicity and professional background (being a female banker of Indian origin) shaped my research, particularly access to and engagement with, Indigenous participants. I conclude this chapter by discussing the methodological challenges faced over the course of this research.

Chapter four addresses my first subsidiary question by considering the understanding of money amongst remote Indigenous participants. I describe a sociology of 'Indigenous money' based on this remote study, and its culturally distinctive characteristics vis-à-vis the literature on 'Anglo-Celtic money' which shapes economic policy, and the design of banking services in Australia. First, I investigate the domestic boundary within which 'Indigenous money' flows. Second, I describe how participants say they prioritise sharing money to care for family over individual saving, as compared to non-Indigenous people. I also explore the

tensions caused by the desire to control one's own money whilst maintaining cultural values and relationships. Third, I trace the historical context of money for the communities studied. Lastly, I highlight the leadership role expected from the elders in promoting the 'right' way to use money wisely, despite current financial education targeting the young. I use these findings to create a framework describing 'Indigenous money' which links these culturally distinctive characteristics with participants' stories about managing and using money in everyday life.

In chapter five I explore my second subsidiary question, by comparing and contrasting the understanding of 'Indigenous money' in regional and urban Indigenous communities based on participants' stories. I use the framework describing 'Indigenous money' that I developed in chapter four, as the basis for this comparison. I also draw conclusions based on the differences that context and the external environment bring, to the cultural shaping of 'Indigenous money' in regional and urban communities.

Chapter six addresses my final subsidiary research question by piecing together participants' world-views of financial capability and well-being, within the theoretical framework of the human development and capability approach. I explore how the culturally distinctive understanding of 'Indigenous money' in remote, regional and urban contexts influences participants' 'basic' and 'internal' financial 'capabilities' (their knowledge and understandings, feelings, attitudes, skills and competencies related to money); their 'external' capabilities (available opportunities and processes); financial 'functionings' (goals and aspirations about money) and 'agency' (individual and collective action to pursue and realize their financial goals).

In Chapters four, five and six, I discuss findings and conclusions I have drawn based on these findings. I conclude in chapter seven, by summarising how the findings from this study have helped me to answer my primary research question. I outline the contributions this study makes to knowledge and theory, as well as the implications for attempts by policymakers (across the government, the industry and community sector) to enhance Indigenous financial capability and well-being. I also describe how this study could set the stage for future research on a strengths-based approach to the design of 'culturally appropriate' financial products and services, by recognizing how culture and money are inextricably linked in different community groups.

### **Limitations of the Thesis**

Qualitative research amongst Indigenous participants particularly those located in remote areas, usually involves ethnography and extended participant observation whilst located within the community. Chapter three describes how my study was only able to accommodate shorter, repeated visits. Combining these visits with 'yarning circles', story-telling, informal and semi-formal interviews meant that the data was still varied, yet not as rich as extended participant observation over a long period, would have enabled.

Throughout this research I was also conscious of the broader debate on who is 'Indigenous' and whether the Indigenous experience can be homogenised as a whole. These issues became more important as participants in this study were very conscious of not being seen to represent the views of the community as a whole. I have aimed for broad representation by including participants from remote, regional and urban Indigenous communities in this study. Whilst acknowledging the wide diversity of perspectives, languages and norms within Indigenous communities, I have also had to draw conclusions which apply to my participants,

and to the community as a whole, in order to make some practical recommendations. Whilst hoping these efforts have allowed me to develop a richer understanding, I acknowledge that the findings of this research cannot be taken as representing the experiences of Indigenous Australians as a whole.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The study of money and Indigenous people is not new – from the earliest accounts of anthropologists and historians who accompanied colonizing armies, there has been a fascination with stories about the ‘other’ - the pre-colonial lives of the ‘natives’ or the Indigenous people whose lives were forever changed by the history of colonization (Chilisa 2012). Exploring the available literature on Indigenous Australians and money, I found some multi-disciplinary academic studies encompassing anthropology, sociology, economics and psychology, as well as a large number of reports commissioned by policymakers from industry, government and the civil society. Despite having common threads, these disparate strands of literature do not connect with each other and learnings remain within the individual disciplines.

In the sections below, I first explore the main findings of studies on money within the historical context of Indigenous Australians. I trace the history of the economic lives of Indigenous people and money, encompassing early accounts of pre-colonial Indigenous life, the colonization experience of dispossession and marginalization, the history of stolen generations and stolen wages, to more recent social and policy debates on Indigenous welfare and economic participation.

Next I examine the social context of money via the writings of sociologists – from early sociologists who viewed money as a market phenomenon, to more modern sociologists who describe many types of money, both in the market and outside it. This more recent literature shows how money shapes, and is in turn shaped by changing social relationships and cultural values. Of particular interest is the examination of money management and control within the

household. I also investigate sociological studies on money and Indigenous people globally and in Australia.

I then consider literature on Indigenous people which focuses on their financial disadvantage and financial capability. Whilst studies consistently demonstrate a gap in financial inclusion and capability for Indigenous people as compared to mainstream Australia, they cannot fully explain why this gap persists, irrespective of where they live. The government's 'Closing the gap' strategy for encouraging Indigenous economic participation points to the need for a more Indigenous-centered, inclusive financial system, yet there is little discussion of how this can practically be achieved. Recent global debate on financial capability is now connecting to economist Amartya Sen's earlier foundational work extended by Martha Nussbaum, on the human development and capability approach. I place my findings on 'Indigenous money' within this framework to explore implications for financial well-being in Indigenous Australia.

Indigenous financial disadvantage is a complex, multi-dimensional problem therefore it makes sense that researching this topic requires a multi-disciplinary approach to reviewing existing literature. In order to understand the role of money in all aspects of everyday life, the learnings and themes from each of the different strands of this multi-disciplinary literature also need to be connected. It is also important to place my study on money within the broader context of the role of money in developing financial capabilities and enabling Indigenous wellbeing.

## **A historical view of money and Indigenous Australia**

Indigenous history, beginning from pre-colonial life without money, to dispossession and lack of recognition as citizens during colonization, followed by the introduction of the



welfare economy in the late 1960's, has influenced their attitude to money and financial institutions. Today, Indigenous Australians are over-represented amongst the most socio-economically disadvantaged population groups, with lower than average living standards, life expectancy, education, health and employment (Productivity Commission 2011). However, any discussion on the causes of this chronic disadvantage must take into account their history of colonisation, dispossession and marginalisation.

There are few accounts focusing on the economic life and structure of pre-colonial Indigenous Australians, recorded at the time of the arrival of white colonists in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Instead many economists assumed that Indigenous people lingered in a hypothetical 'pre-economic' stage of development, without economic ideas and structures around wealth, payment, ownership of property, organization of work or exchange (Thomson 1949). Scholars detailing Indigenous pre-colonial social and cultural practices do, however, highlight complex functional and dynamic links between the social, economic and spiritual dimensions of traditional Indigenous lives and society (see Coutts 1981; White 2012; Hinkson & Harris 2010; Fryer-Smith 2002).

The central tenet of Indigenous society as recorded by these scholars (Fryer-Smith 2002), was a belief in the oneness of the spiritual, human and natural worlds, whereby ancestral beings entrusted custodianship of certain areas of land to particular language groups, the custodianship being conditional upon following traditional law. Of particular importance in this law, was the kinship system - based on an expanded concept of family, this classificatory system provided a powerful framework for individual identity, stable social relationships and group cohesion (Fryer-Smith 2002). It also guided norms relating to mutual rights,

obligations and collective governance (via a system of checks and balances to maintain social equilibrium) through the principle of reciprocity.

A detailed academic account of the pre-colonial economic life of Indigenous Australians comes from anthropologist Thomson (1949), who explored several aspects of economic organization including craft specialization and division of labour, and Indigenous understandings of ownership, exchange, wealth and payment, within the context of kinship structures in Arnhem Land. Contrary to the belief of earlier anthropologists that the nomadic lifestyle of Indigenous people implied the absence of socio-economic structure, Thomson found a well-regulated, smoothly functioning society based on a kinship system that defined both individual behaviour and reciprocal obligations to kin.

Other studies (Trudgen 2000) also trace an elaborate 'ceremonial exchange' cycle whereby valued goods ('wealth') circulated both within Australia and overseas (namely Indonesia, via Macassan traders). The impetus for this exchange was more social than economic, and intended to build and maintain social relationships, and fulfill traditional obligations. The findings of these studies resonate with efforts to trace the anthropology of money in other colonized countries such as Africa and the Pacific (see Belk & Wallendorf 1990; Maurer 2006; Nelms & Maurer 2014) which also highlight the embeddedness of the economic, social and cultural spheres of pre-colonial lives, including the gifting and ceremonial use of 'primitive money'.

The arrival of the colonists in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century virtually destroyed this pre-colonial society, as Australia was declared '*terra nullius*' (land belonging to no-one), robbing Indigenous people of their land. Past policies of forced removal and cultural assimilation further exacerbated the loss of their cultural identity, existing power structures and ways of

life. Many Indigenous people were forcibly moved onto missions and encouraged to give up the old ways, which created a 'learned helplessness' and dependency on government-subsidized provision of food (Trudgen 2000). Children of mixed race were also forcibly removed from Indigenous families, and placed with European families, referred to as the 'stolen' generations (Commonwealth of Australia 1997).

Mission life also kept people removed from the money-economy, as Indigenous workers on these missions were offered rations (not cash) in exchange for work (Martin 1995), leaving them with little exposure to money. Other Indigenous workers were victims of abuse such as 'stolen wages', where their paid labour was withheld and financial arrangements found to be 'unlawfully controlled' by the government (Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs 2006).

This history continues to cast its dark shadow across the present (ATSI Social Justice Commissioner 2011), and influences current Indigenous attitudes and behaviour towards money. The history of not having had the opportunity to manage one's money, has contributed to a lack of confidence with money and money management, and a lack of trust in institutions (Demosthenous et al. 2006).

More recent policies particularly income management introduced under the Northern Territory Emergency Response to Indigenous communities, may have inadvertently exacerbated this lack of confidence with managing money. Under this policy, a significant proportion of many government benefits are quarantined for approved uses only, such as food, clothing, travel or education expenses. This policy has evoked mixed reactions within both Indigenous and wider community debate. Dictating how money is to be used may have further compromised Indigenous financial capability (Russell, Yoosuf & Cattlin 2011).

The first learning from this literature is that the economic lives of Indigenous people have always been inextricably linked with their social, cultural and spiritual lives. Also the historical experiences of Indigenous people, including the post-colonial policies which kept them out of the money-economy in Australia, have shaped the way they feel about, and use money in their daily lives today.

## **Money as a Social Phenomenon**

The role of money in everyday life has long been most easily recognized within the economic sphere, where money is a medium of exchange, a store of value and a unit of account (Krugman 1984; Asmundson & Oner 2012). Few social theorists (Dodd 1994) or psychologists (Furnham 2014) have taken up money as an object of study in its own right. The sociology of money, however, explores money as a social phenomenon, arguing that money shapes and is shaped by, non-economic factors such as historical experiences, cultural values and social relationships (Zelizer 1989).

Money is not just a medium of exchange, but also a medium of social and cultural relationships (Baker & Jimerson 1992; Singh 2013). Differing from the earlier views of classical sociologists like Simmel (1900) who saw money as 'perfectly' homogenous, fungible and distinguished only by quantity, modern sociologists argue that money is socially and contextually defined, and reflected in cultural norms and value systems (Dodd 2012). Seeing money as a social phenomenon (Singh 2013) brings to the fore other areas of study including multiple monies, cross-cultural differences in the meanings of money, as well as the management and control of money in households.

Zelizer (1989; 1998) finds that money is not homogenous - there are multiple 'special monies' both within the market economy and outside it, each shaped by a unique set of

cultural and social factors, and thus qualitatively distinct. Market institutions are socially embedded, and there are 'dense webs of meaningful relationships' between the economic and non-economic aspects of social life (Zelizer 2010). Culture and social structures set limits to the monetization process, by introducing controls and restrictions on the flow liquidity and use of different 'special monies'. This can involve earmarking certain monies for specified uses, designating different people to use specified monies, and influencing how each particular money is to be allocated and controlled.

Also money is a multi-dimensional construct with not just economic but affective, symbolic and behavioral components, which leave financial and sociological issues deeply intertwined (Mitchell & Mickel 1999). From the affective perspective, some people can see money as good, important, valuable and attractive whilst others can see it as evil, shameful, useless and dishonest (Belk & Wallendorf 1990). Symbolically, money can be associated with achievement, recognition, status, respect, freedom, control or power (Tang 1995). The behavioural perspective on money focuses on financial actions such as money management, budgeting, saving or investing money.

These studies show that people perceive, value and treat money differently. Also, the financial functioning of individuals and families plays a central role in well-being – many studies call for social welfare policies and programs to pay greater attention to the financial lives of poor and disadvantaged households (Collins et al. 2009).

Given the latter focus on public policy, money within households ('domestic-money') has been of particular interest to sociologists in the United States and Europe. Whilst economists and policy-makers focus on the household as an economic unit, and not on intra-household allocation and consumption, studies find that the sharing and allocation of resources within

the household can reflect other aspects of the partners' everyday lives (Pahl 1989; Vogler & Pahl 1993; Burgoyne 2004; Sung & Bennett 2007). These aspects include underlying social processes (such as earning and spending income), cultural norms and values (particularly those involving gender and age), individual ideologies and socio-economic circumstances (including employment and educational status, and social class).

Pahl (1989) finds the equity of individual partners' access to money, and the ways in which households in Britain organize the allocation, management and control of money differ significantly. The allocative systems ('whole-wage', 'allowance', 'pooling' and 'independent management' systems) adopted by couples reflect other aspects of their lives including the economic position of the household, and the norms and values held by the partners. This, and more recent research (Bennett 2013), highlights that financial inequality within the household could reflect other sorts of inequality.

Pahl also finds that the lower the household income, the larger the proportion controlled and managed by the wife. Also when wives earn in their own right, they are more likely to have more say in the household's financial management. Burgoyne (2004) too finds that power within marriage is related to the control of the financial resources - the greater the individual contribution to income, the greater the power in marital decision-making. A common feature across households studied is that spending patterns are highly gendered, with women spending more on food, clothes and education than men (Pahl 2008).

Other studies exploring money in marriage and banking amongst middle-income, Anglo-Celtic Australian households find that marriage, rather than the family or the household, defines the boundary of 'domestic-money' (Singh & Lindsay 1996; Singh 1997). The married couple is the main financial unit which pools resources and shares expenses. 'Anglo-Celtic

money', and information about money, are seen as 'private' to the couple, as they do not often flow outside this unit to parents, adult children or other kin (Singh 1997). Notions of equality, power and trust are wrapped up in the 'joint ownership' of the marital home, and the joint marital bank account, which are the most visible demarcating features of 'marriage-money' in Australia.

This description of 'Anglo-Celtic money' finds that whilst married couples often also have separate accounts, the joint account is the main transaction and savings account, used to pool income and expenses by putting them in a 'common pot'. In contrast, a study of middle-income, cohabiting Australian couples found their main accounts were separate (Singh & Lindsay 1996). This literature concludes that the marital unit in Australia bounds the flow of money, which is earmarked for the use of the couple and dependent children, the archetypal nuclear family. Money management and control in households is also 'joint'.

The jointness in marriage expressed via the joint marital account, however, obscures more detailed examination of equity of access, power and control in relation to 'marriage-money'. Singh (1997) also finds that the jointness of 'marriage-money' in Australia comes together with an increased incidence of joint bank accounts, women's growing participation in paid work and joint home ownership. Given privacy regulations, banks too prefer joint loans and accounts, which also reflect joint ownership of the family home. Singh concludes that 'Anglo-Celtic money' amongst middle-income Anglo-Celtic households in Australia, is culturally distinctive from other studies of 'domestic-money' across the globe.

The focus of sociology has also been broadened from studying money in the nuclear family household in countries with primarily 'Western' cultural traditions, to also consider money in families from non-European cultures. Singh and Bhandari (2012) find a two-way flow of

money amongst extended and trans-national families in India, beyond the notion of the nuclear household of a married couple as found in the literature discussed above. Money flows between parents and adult children, siblings and other members of extended Indian families. Bashir (2014) traces similar financial flows amongst British Pakistani-origin households, which provide essential support to family, whether they live in neighbouring areas or back in their country of origin.

The Intra-Family Income Study similarly found fundamental differences between Maori notions and practices regarding the family, as compared to '*pakeha*' (non-Maori) households in New Zealand (Fleming et al. 1997). For Maori, family relates to the '*whanau*' (a broader grouping than the extended family), encompassing members of a tribe who can trace their descent from a common ancestor. Resources including money flow regularly between the *whanau* and individual households, with individuals contributing towards economic production for the sustenance of all members.

*Whanau* values, obligations and celebrations remain strong in modern-day New Zealand, hence many Maori find themselves living in 'two cultures' (Fleming et al. 1997; Taiapa 1994). They must live in 'both' worlds, maintaining a financial commitment to *whanau* activities whilst on lower than average incomes. However participation in community-based activities offers Maori households an alternative route towards self-esteem and self-definition, which may be as important to them as material success.

The challenge, says Singh (2013), is to find a 'common language' that can connect the sociological study of meaning, access, use and trust, to the economic models of supply and demand, cost and price, purchase and security. Connecting money in markets and money in personal lives means considering financial markets and their regulation, as well as the way



people manage and control money in households across different cultures (Singh 2013).

Financial inclusion will work only if it fits with the way the excluded manage their money.

### **A sociological view of money and Indigenous Australia**

Sociologists have re-conceptualised the public debate about money by broadening its study from an economic phenomenon belonging to the market, to also recognizing it as a social phenomenon belonging to the household. They have also contributed to economists and bankers' efforts to articulate important issues in banking, by expanding the focus on competition, efficiency, technology, structure and regulation to also include the users' social and cultural context (Singh 1997).

In Australia, the sociological perspective on banking has shown how changing ideologies on marriage and women's employment in Australia have influenced the incidence of the joint bank account. Also, the broader perspective of the sociology of money has helped the realization that all money is culturally shaped and not all dollars are equal. This applies equally to 'Anglo Celtic money' in middle-income households (Singh 1997) and 'Indigenous money' in remote communities as described in later chapters of this thesis, or the money of migrant communities. Money does not exist in a vacuum but is part of an elaborate web of dynamic social structural conditions within which people act and interact, with money mediating the interaction between people (Wennerlind 2001).

In Australia, some qualitative studies have examined how Indigenous cultural values of relatedness, sharing, kinship obligations, focus on collective benefits and equality have influenced the way in which money is used today. Other studies have also explored how the introduction of money with colonization in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, has influenced Indigenous

relationships and cultural norms, particularly within the context of inter-generational and gender relationships.

Sansom (1988) describes how money circulating in Darwin fringe camps is not a generalised medium of exchange with a fixed monetary value. Instead, its value is variable for its Indigenous users, based on social considerations. A loan is worth more if offered in bad times (eg. a non-pay week in the wet season) or to avoid a serious consequence (eg. bail to avoid jail) than if offered in good times or to cover a routine expense.

Sansom (1988) and Martin (1995) also find that kinship relations (labelled 'performative' kinship) in these communities are fluid, and must continually be sustained by maintaining a flow of valued items and acts, between kin. These obligations can be intangible (eg. caring for children and elderly, showing respect, love or sorrow) or tangible (eg. providing and sharing food or cash). Such sharing of money is valued in social rather than monetary terms. Its' worth is therefore subjective, variable, and influenced in part, by the current status of relationship between people.

The cultural norm of equality and not 'appearing to be better than others' increases the pressure to share money (Urbis Keys Young 2006). Some people devise strategies to avoid sharing. However, in general, the pressure to share money hinders efforts to save (Martin 1995; Schwab 1995; Senior, Perkins & Bern 2002). By choosing to share rather than save any surplus, Indigenous people may be creating a 'social investment' which allows them to draw on borrowers' resources at a future date, generating social capital instead of financial wealth.

Martin (1995) also reveals how the ready availability of cash has exacerbated the rupturing of relations between older and younger men, since neither access to cash, nor its use needs to be mediated by the elders. Women, traditionally the nurturers, are also more susceptible to

pressures to share their cash, compromising their ability to be financially independent. These findings resonate with similar studies on Maori and Pacific Islanders in New Zealand (Taiapa 1994; Fleming et al. 1997).

Other studies also link a sociological understanding of money with policy design and efforts to enhance financial capabilities and inclusion. Banking policy and the design of joint accounts in Australia, is based primarily on the understanding of 'Anglo-Celtic money' which flows through middle-income, Anglo-Celtic households in Australia (Singh 1997). To be inclusive in modern-day multicultural Australia however, our financial ecosystem must also cater to the understanding of money amongst other culturally and linguistically diverse ('CALD') community groups. Also financial inclusion agendas which miss the social uses of cash, will miss the familial and genders dynamics at work within households (Singh 2013). In particular, there is a need to design culturally appropriate financial inclusion for Indigenous communities (National Indigenous Money Management Agenda 2007; Saunders & Piper 2011).

English is often a second or third language for Indigenous people, and cross-cultural communication difficulties can leave Indigenous people in remote communities confused about certain concepts in economics, law and technology says Trudgen (Trudgen 2000). He also finds that Indigenous world-views and cultural knowledge-base are not always understood by the 'dominant culture' of non-Indigenous Australia. Other research has documented how Western financial systems, terminology and accounting concepts do not necessarily translate across to, and can even be directly opposed to, the understanding of these concepts in traditional Indigenous societies (Gibson 2000). Other research on capacity building and education finds that Indigenous people will be less motivated to learn skills from

outside their culture, if the acquisition of such skills threatens their traditional beliefs and values (Byrnes 1993).

This sociological literature shows how money once introduced to Indigenous people, has influenced, and has in turn been influenced by, Indigenous social and cultural norms. Social, cultural and economic lives are not separable – hence efforts to enhance Indigenous financial capability and inclusion must connect with Indigenous world-views of money and finances.

### **Financial Disadvantage and Indigenous Australia**

In the last decade or so, literature on Indigenous Australians and money has focused on the wicked problem of Indigenous financial exclusion, lower financial capability and well-being as compared to mainstream, non-Indigenous Australia. These studies tend to focus on measuring the gap in financial outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, and whilst they consistently demonstrate that a considerable gap persists, they cannot fully explain why these gaps exist. Moreover, they tend to view Indigenous people through the eyes of mainstream Australia – studies on how Indigenous people themselves view the world of money and finances are lacking (Russell, Yoosuf & Cattlin 2011; Gerrans, Clark-Murphy & Truscott 2009).

In the next few sections, I first explore the growing global focus on financial exclusion and financial capability in the last decade, and emerging studies on financial capability and well-being, which are linking to the human development and capabilities approach. I then consider how these findings relate to Indigenous Australia.

## **Financial Exclusion, Financial Capability & Well-being: the global debate**

Financial exclusion i.e. the lack of access to the financial system is a wicked problem facing governments and policy makers across the globe, particularly developing countries where large sections of the population are 'unbanked' i.e. do not have an account with a financial institution (Demirguc-Kunt & Klapper 2012). Most Australians are banked, yet one in six is 'under-banked' i.e. lacks access to safe, affordable and appropriate financial products and services from mainstream providers (Connolly 2014). This often leaves those excluded reliant on the informal sector to meet their daily financial needs.

The term 'financial exclusion' was first used by geographers concerned about poor and disadvantaged social groups having limited physical access to banking services as a result of bank risk assessment processes and branch closures in UK and US (Leyshon & Thrift 1995). Although the initial focus was on the lack of physical access to the financial system, the 1990's ushered in research on difficulties faced by certain people in accessing these services (Ford & Rowlingson 1996). By 1999, the term was being used in a broader sense, to also encompass people whose access to a wide range of mainstream financial services was restricted, due to a variety of barriers (Kempson & Whyley 1999).

A comprehensive study (Financial Services Authority 2000) brought together existing knowledge on the nature, causes and consequences of financial exclusion in the UK and US, and the types of people impacted by it. This study concluded that the likelihood of being on the margins of personal financial services is concentrated both geographically and among certain groups of people – who you are and where you live, is an important determinant of engagement with financial services. Common causes include low income, employment and

low financial 'literacy' i.e. the ability to make informed decisions about money (Schagen & Lines 1996).

The consequences of financial exclusion can be severe – excluded individuals lack the passport to not just access finance but also other services such as jobs, housing, education and health care. They may have to rely on the often more costly and unregulated market to meet financial needs. Where whole communities have limited access to financial products, the process becomes self-reinforcing and an important contributor to social exclusion more generally (Financial Services Authority 2000).

Improving access to financial services reduces individual financial risk and vulnerability, while also promoting economic growth and improving income distribution at a societal level (Anderloni & Carluccio 2007). Improved financial capability empowers people to confidently make informed financial decisions best suited to their own personal circumstances, and is positively correlated with well-being (Taylor, Jenkins & Sacker 2009). A population that keeps track of its money, makes ends meet and plans ahead, creates a strong foundation for economic growth, whilst consumers who choose financial products well, and stay informed about financial matters encourage healthy financial services markets (Elliott et al. 2010).

### **From Financial 'Literacy' to 'Capability' and 'Well-being'**

Early studies identifying that lower financial 'literacy' leads to financial exclusion focused policy attention on improving people's knowledge and information (Kempson, Collard & Moore 2005) about finances via education, training and information. Studies showed that financial skills are usually learned from an individual's immediate circle of family and friends, particularly from their parents' behaviour (Lusardi 2008; Lusardi, Mitchell & Curto 2009). People often need to be motivated to apply their skills in real life, whilst confidence in

using skills, and a positive attitude to money are important for effective financial behaviour (The Social Research Centre 2011). Attitudes that support financial capability include feeling in control of money, maintaining a longer-term outlook, and exercising self-discipline (Center for Financial Inclusion 2013).

Studies reviewing the effectiveness of financial education programs suggest that programs which help participants to achieve their own financial goals are more likely to succeed (Center for Financial Inclusion 2013). The person delivering financial education (a trusted 'messenger') is important, as are multiple delivery strategies that reinforce repeated messages (Dolan et al. 2012). Many people learn by doing, and are most ready to absorb and use financial education at the point when they making critical financial decisions – these are 'teachable moments'.

In the last decade, behavioural economics research (de Meza, Bernd & Reynier 2008) showed that financial decision-making is often more about individual psychology and motivation to learn, than about education and information. This expanded the focus from 'literacy' to 'capability' i.e. the combination of financial awareness, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours necessary to make sound financial decisions and achieve financial well-being (The Social Research Centre 2011).

More recently, the global debate on financial 'capability' is shifting away from a focus only on the user's capability, to also include issues of access, and the design of financial products, services and education. In addition to knowledge, competencies and ability, people also need the opportunity to act (Johnson & Sherraden 2007; Sherraden 2013). This broader definition of 'financial capability' which links individual capability to access to financial institutions and services, is what I have used throughout this study. As mentioned earlier, improving

financial capability is associated with well-being – not just viewed through the economic lens but also encompassing broader issues such as mental and physical health, social capital and inclusion etc. This focus on ‘well-being’ is closely connected to the theoretical framework of the human development and capability approach.

### **Well-being and the human development and capability approach**

The human development and capability approach is largely attributed to economist Amartya Sen’s ground-breaking research on human development and capability (Sen 1999), extended more recently by Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum 2011 ). This multi-disciplinary approach posits that the focus of development should be human and not just economic – in other words, development should enable not just economic growth, but also increase the choices, opportunities or ‘freedoms’ available for people to achieve well-being and their desired quality of life (Alkire & Deneulin 2009).

In his seminal work Sen (1999) says the purpose of development should be to overcome entrenched deprivation, destitution and oppression, thereby expanding people’s ‘freedoms’ to live the kind of life that they have reason to value. Quality of life and well-being are multi-dimensional and reflect the choices and ‘freedoms’ people have, not just the resources (including income) they command. The expansion of ‘freedoms’ is the primary *end* and the principal *means*, of development.

‘Freedoms’ involve both the ‘processes’ that allow freedom of actions and decisions, and the ‘opportunities’ that people have to pursue these, given their personal and social circumstances. Essential ‘freedoms’ include political freedoms (such as civil rights, election, freedom of speech), economic opportunities (for employment, consumption, production or exchange), social opportunities (arrangements that society makes for education, health care



etc.), transparency guarantees and protective security, which refers to social safety nets for preventing people from being disadvantaged.

Individual and collective 'agency' is central to addressing disadvantage, so people need not be seen as 'passive' recipients of the benefits of development programs. Individual agency is of course, qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to people. However, with adequate social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape not just their own individual destiny but also help each other. This interplay between individual/collective agency and well-being means that expanding the 'freedoms' that we have reason to value, helps not just to make our own lives richer and more unfettered, but also allows us to be fuller social persons, exercising our own volitions and interacting with, and influencing, the world in which we live.

Seen through the lens of this approach, poverty is not merely a consequence of low income, rather it is the deprivation of an individual's basic capabilities. Income and wealth are not desirable for their own sake but because they are the means for having more freedom to lead the kind of lives we have reason to value. The usefulness of wealth lies in the things that it allows us to do – the 'freedoms' it helps us to achieve. The lack of opportunities caused by unemployment for example, is not merely a deficiency of income that can be compensated by state welfare. It is also a source of far-reaching debilitating effects on individual freedom, initiative and skills, which contributes to social exclusion, loss of self-reliance, self-confidence and mental and physical health.

Nussbaum (2003; 2011) extends Sen's approach by focusing on the human desire to live with dignity. Her work explores the equal dignity of all human beings (irrespective of class, religion, caste, race or gender) and their striving to attain lives that are worthy of that equal

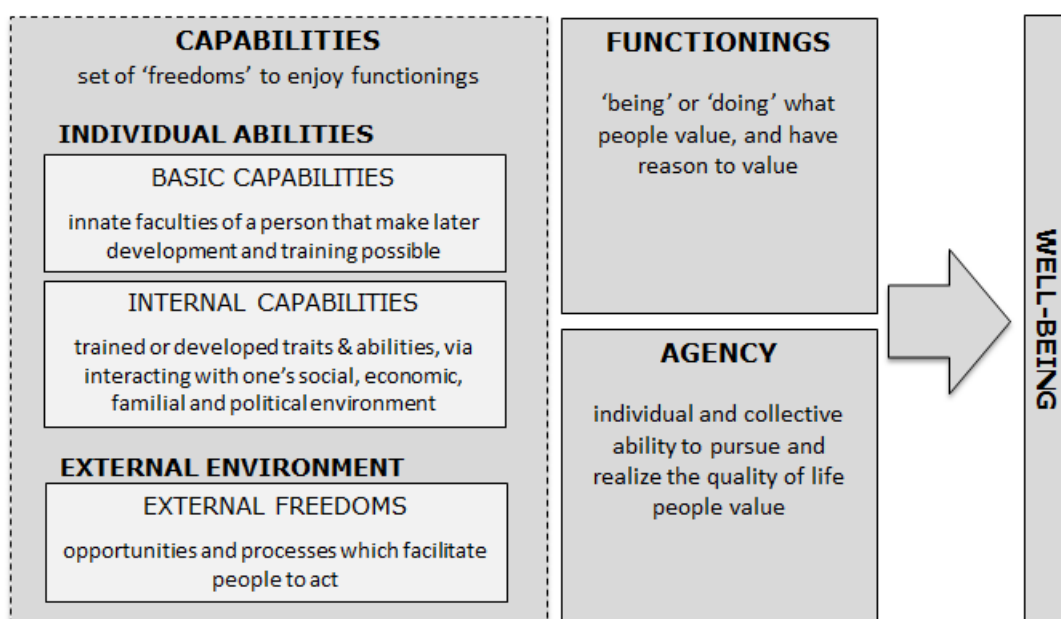
dignity. Whilst Sen refrains from listing capabilities and associated indicators, Nussbaum has outlined ten central 'capabilities' that enable people to live with dignity, which include life; health; integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play and control over one's environment. Her focus on economic and non-economic factors identified as crucial to a life well lived, is an important departure from previous emphasis on income as the basic requirement for poverty alleviation.

### *Functionings, Capabilities & Agency*

The work of both Sen and Nussbaum form the core of the human development and capability approach (Alkire & Deneulin 2009) which contains three central, related concepts – 'functionings', 'capabilities' and 'agency'. A 'functioning' is 'being' or 'doing' what people value, and have reason to value. A 'capability' is a person's 'freedom' to enjoy various functionings i.e. to be or to do things that contribute to their well-being. 'Agency' is a person's ability to pursue and realise goals they value, and have reason to value. Agency is not just individual, but also what one can do as a member of a group, collective or community. These aspects need to be working in concert i.e. people must consider goals they value, have the capabilities and desire to act, as well the opportunities and processes via which they can achieve these goals.

This approach also distinguishes between basic, internal, combined and external capabilities. 'Basic' capabilities are the innate faculties of a person that make later development and training possible. 'Internal' capabilities are trained or developed traits and abilities – these are not fixed, but are fluid and dynamic, and differ from basic capabilities or innate faculties in that they are developed in interaction with one's social, economic, familial and political environment i.e. in one's role as part of a community.

'Combined' capabilities refer to the abilities that reside inside a person ('basic' and 'internal') together with the freedoms/opportunities created by the 'external' political, social and economic environment. The term 'capabilities' is used synonymously to these 'combined capabilities' hence encompasses both individual abilities and the external environment. 'Capabilities' therefore represent the substantial 'freedoms' or the set of inter-related opportunities a person has for choice and action, within their specific political, social and economic situation. I have summarized this discussion in Diagram 1 below:



**Diagram 1: Linking functionings, capabilities, agency and well-being - adapted from the human development and capability approach**

The capability approach highlights that promoting internal and external 'freedoms' involve two distinct yet inter-related tasks. A society that wants to promote the most important human capabilities will support both the development of internal capabilities and ensure appropriate opportunities to access education and employment, resources to enhance physical & emotional health, family care and love etc. However, a society could promote internal

capabilities yet cut off avenues through which people actually have the opportunity to function in accordance with those capabilities (eg. educate people on freedom of speech or religion yet deny them free expression in practice). Alternatively the state could develop external capabilities but not offer basic health and education that would enable everyone to participate.

This approach therefore allows policymakers to focus on both the demand and supply sides of the financial exclusion debate i.e. individuals must have the understanding, knowledge and skills to achieve the financial goals they value, but they also need access to a financial system that is appropriate, based on their own values and needs. Recent research (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation 2012) similarly concludes that policymakers must make the effort to better understand the characteristics and needs of different segments of financially excluded populations.

Just providing a bank account (i.e. ensuring people are able to be 'banked') is not enough to endure longer-term participation in the financial system. The financial system must be able to more clearly demonstrate the value of participation to users, else they may prefer to remain outside the formal mainstream system. Financial inclusion must encourage people to develop their capabilities and provide appropriate access, to ensure that people have the freedom of choice to live a life they value (Singh 2013).

### *The role of education and culture in development and ensuring well-being*

Some aspects of public policy-making are foundational particularly ensuring health, education and employment which promote capabilities by enlarging people's choices to achieve their own goals. In particular education brings empowerment – it opens the mind to

further horizons, and also opens the way to acquire other valuable capabilities such as employment, social and political participation.

However, for education to be translated or 'converted' into valuable outcomes, one must focus not just on 'functionings' (i.e. actual educational achievements) but also 'capabilities' (i.e. the real freedom or opportunities each student has, to choose and achieve what they value) by considering the importance of 'conversion' factors and diverse institutional arrangements (Alkire & Deneulin 2009). 'Conversion' here refers to internal factors including how individuals learn, or understand the value of education, as well as external ones such as the quality of educators, institutional provisions, discrimination experienced etc.

This approach connects with Freire's earlier work (Freire 1970; Freire 1985) which considered teaching and learning to be political and cultural processes. The political nature of education reflects the values and perspectives that teachers and students bring to a learning situation, the way teaching and learning occurs, the forms of assessment and evaluation, institutional arrangements such as funding, curriculum etc. The cultural nature of education though, is about fostering freedom i.e. teaching and learning must be situated within a social, political and cultural context.

Pedagogy should enable people to become more fully human and transform the world. Instead of 'banking education' i.e. transmit ideas into blank and passive containers which then reproduce these ideas in an uncritical fashion, education should be 'problem-posing' i.e. involve learners as agents with a dialogical and critical approach to education. Instead of a culture of passivity, the latter approach allows people the 'freedom' to find their own voice, and effect change for themselves.

More recently studies (Collins et al. 2009) have highlighted a similar message, showing that the poor proactively manage money using formal and informal tools, in ways that connects them to their family, kin and neighbourhood. Unlike previous notions that the poor have too little money to have a financial life, this study shows the money management is important for the poor and if they had reliable access to better financial tools, they could likely improve their lives. They need but seldom receive, help with managing money on a day-to-day basis, building savings over the long-term and borrowing small amounts. Prahlad (Prahlad & Hart 2002) similarly argues that the poor should not be seen as 'passive' receivers but as value-conscious and entrepreneurial consumers who need to be served. Business practices need to change, to serve those in the bottom of the pyramid.

The human development and capability approach has also considered 'cultural freedom'. Sen himself (Sen 1999) discusses culture only obliquely i.e. in considering whether economic development which leads to elimination of traditions and cultural heritage could be considered harmful, he focuses on enabling people to make their own choices i.e. is it better to be rich and happy, than impoverished and traditional? Any 'conflict' between preservation of traditions and the advantages of modernity, calls for a participatory resolution by people themselves exercising choice.

Nussbaum (2001) focuses on women and cultural traditions which pose obstacles to their health and flourishing, whilst the Human Development Report (United Nations Development Program 2004) considers 'cultural liberty' as being able to choose one's identity, who one is, without losing the respect of others, or being excluded from other choices. This liberty is an important part of life and entitlements, the denial of which leads to significant deprivations. These studies highlight the importance of individual choice.

Others (Rao & Walton 2004) describe the importance of incorporating a culturally-informed perspective or 'lens' when considering development policies. This lens is a way of seeing individuals as driven by a culturally-informed set of motives, incentives, beliefs and identifies, that interact with economic incentives to affect outcomes. This guides my study to adopt an Indigenous lens to consider the Indigenous worldview of money and finances, and how development can enable them to achieve the financial future that they value.

Another study (Appadurai 2004) posits that development needs are always grounded in culture, since aspirations form parts of wider ethical and metaphysical ideas, which derive from larger cultural norms. The author goes on to identify three levels that ground people's aspirations in culture – the first and most immediate level consists of a 'visible inventory of wants' that people consciously identify and seek to pursue. The next level has 'intermediate norms' which people may not explicitly express, yet structure specific wants through local ideas. These in turn relate to 'higher order normative contexts' which comprise a larger 'map' of ideas and beliefs such as life and death, the value of material goods versus social relationships etc. Culture is therefore not separable from everyday life but instead structures material and relational desires through a cascade of associations that make them meaning, pressing and urgent.

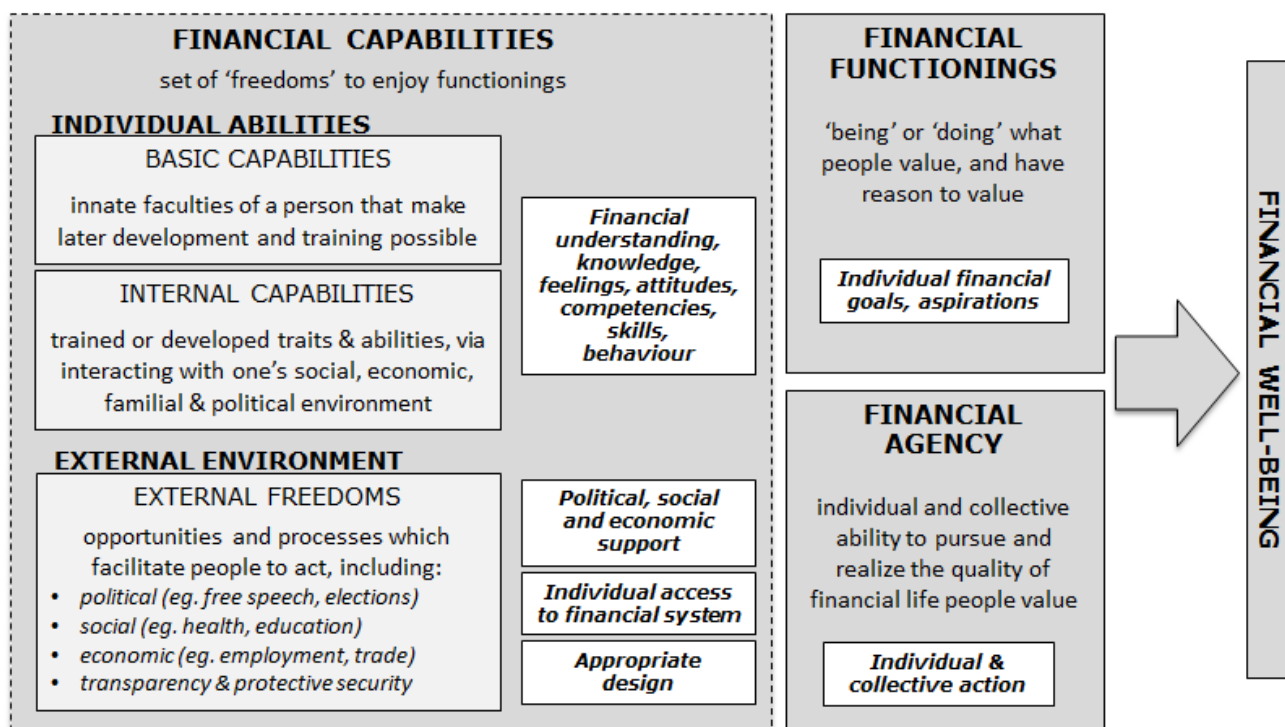
Recent research on financial education programs targeting Indigenous populations in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States (Brascoupe', Weatherdon & Tremblay 2013) has explored the link between financial literacy, culture and community. It finds three best-practice elements that successful programs have in common – they are developed in partnership with Indigenous organisations, are designed for and by community members, and have 'culturally appropriate' content.

These studies resonate with the tenets of the Indigenous research paradigm and methodology that informed my study, as well as the many of the stories I heard from my participants throughout my research. Considerations such as what education should entail, and the importance of using an appropriate cultural lens have formed an important backdrop for my study, against which I have explored my participants' views on 'Indigenous money', financial capability and well-being.

### *Tying it together – understanding financial capability and well-being*

Placing the wicked problem of financial exclusion within the human development and capability approach, shows that greater participation in economic life via enhancing financial capabilities, should maximize well-being, life chances, and enable people to lead fulfilling financial lives. A society which wants to achieve greater inclusion should focus on developing people's internal 'capabilities' as well as enable their ability to act, by providing external opportunities via political, social, economic and governance 'freedoms'. In short, financial well-being can result when individuals develop their own financial understanding, knowledge, attitudes, skills as well as gain access to external freedoms such as health, education, employment, appropriate financial policies, instruments and services (Johnson & Sherraden 2007), as per the diagram below:





**Diagram 2: Linking financial well-being, financial functionings, financial capabilities & financial agency - adapted from human development and capability approach**

*Indigenous Financial Exclusion, Capability and well-being*

Longitudinal research in Australia defines financial exclusion as existing where individuals lack access to appropriate and affordable financial services and products (Connolly 2014).

Financial exclusion also applies to organisations such as non-profits, social enterprises and micro-enterprises (Burkett & Drew 2008). Straddling issues relating to both individual capability and market functioning, such exclusion comprises well-being for individuals, families and communities, often reinforcing wider social exclusion and disadvantage.

Indigenous people are two and a half times more likely than other Australians, to be financially excluded. They are also the only community group consistently associated with financial exclusion, even in urban areas (Chant Link and Associates 2004). However,

academic literature on Indigenous financial management is limited in Australia (Gerrans, Clark-Murphy & Truscott 2009; Worthington 2013).

Population-wide longitudinal studies on financial exclusion and capability (see The Social Research Centre 2008, 2011 and Connolly 2013, 2014) consistently demonstrate a sizeable gap in Indigenous financial capability outcomes vis-à-vis mainstream Australia, yet cannot fully explain why this gap persists. Table 1 below shows the extreme disparity between levels of financial exclusion and financial literacy in the Indigenous population compared to the Australian national average.

Measure	National Average	Indigenous	Source
Financially Excluded (combined)	17.2%	43.1%	(Connolly et al. 2012)
Financial Literacy Score (FLS)	Mean FLS 83.1	Mean FLS 63.9	(The Social Research Centre 2008)
Financial Knowledge & Numeracy (combined)	Mean score 91.9	Mean score 70.7	(The Social Research Centre 2011)
Does not seek information on financial matters	50%	62%	(The Social Research Centre 2011)
Does not seek advice on financial matters	10%	22%	(The Social Research Centre 2011)

**Table 1: Comparison of financial exclusion and literacy levels between Indigenous Australians and the national average**

These studies show that when compared to national averages, Indigenous people are more likely to struggle to make ends meet, require emergency assistance from Centrelink, spend more money than they receive, and miss regular expenses (such as loan repayments or bills) which increase costs due to penalty fees. They are less likely to feel ‘in control’ of their finances or to seek information/ advice on financial matters, and more likely to exhibit a

'risk-taking' attitude towards financial matters (eg. prefer use of credit card over saving-up, purchasing to impress others etc.). Other studies (National Indigenous Money Management Agenda 2007) also show that they lack confidence in dealing with mainstream financial institutions, and are less likely to know their consumer rights or complain, as compared to non-Indigenous consumers.

The underlying causes of Indigenous financial disadvantage are multi-faceted. The ubiquitous lack of physical access to banking and financial services in rural and remote Australia, has disproportionately impacted Indigenous people (McDonnell 2003b). Although research on the specific banking needs of Indigenous people is lacking, studies (Westbury 1999; McDonnell & Westbury 2002; McDonnell 2003a) highlight specific challenges faced by Indigenous consumers in accessing affordable financial products and services.

These include lower literacy and numeracy, cultural barriers, language difficulties, lack of trust in mainstream banks and preference for face to face services, which can lead to reliance on expensive informal providers (Urbis Keys Young 2006; National Indigenous Money Management Agenda 2007). Lower employment opportunities and income status make them less likely to be targeted by providers' marketing efforts. Financial institutions also have limited information on Indigenous borrowers, and are unaccustomed to dealing with their unique circumstances and needs (McDonnell 2003a). Many Indigenous people may choose to self-exclude (McDonnell 2003a), and evaluations of financial education programs reveal difficulties in recruiting and retaining participants (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2011).

Albeit these different strands of literature have varied focal points, there is general agreement that the shared experiences, circumstances and cultural beliefs of Indigenous people, have

influenced their money management practices. There are also calls for more 'culturally appropriate' financial products, services, and education (Saunders & Piper 2011; National Indigenous Money Management Agenda 2007). Enhancing Indigenous financial knowledge is a priority for the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC), particularly by targeting the younger generations through the formal education system (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2014). Research (Russell, Yoosuf & Cattlin 2011) suggests that Indigenous financial exclusion should not be viewed in isolation of the broader cultural, historical, political and economic issues that impact Indigenous Australians, especially those living in remote communities. Understanding their financial capabilities must be preceded by understanding how Indigenous people themselves view money, and its meaning within their lives.

Existing global frameworks for understanding financial capability (Kempson, Collard & Moore 2005) position it as a multi-dimensional concept encompassing knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours. However, there is no specific global framework for understanding financial capabilities within Indigenous, or culturally and linguistically diverse ('CALD') populations. Existing research on financial capabilities has focused on the dominant majority in Western-type societies, despite studies revealing lower levels of financial capability amongst specific population segments including minority ethnic groups (Lusardi 2008; Kempson & Whyley 1999) and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Connolly et al. 2012; Connolly 2013).

Studies focusing on Indigenous well-being highlight multi-dimensional factors across economic, social and cultural domains are required to achieve Indigenous well-being (Cape York Institute 2005; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010; Jordan, Bulloch & Buchanan

2010). Past policies have left many Indigenous Australians trapped in 'passivity' - this 'negative' capability (Cape York Institute 2005) has destroyed skill, pride, purpose, the sense of achievement and fulfilment, dignity and hope i.e. the very capabilities that Sen and Nussbaum believe embody a life worth living.

Empowering Indigenous people to find their own solutions enables a balance between economic development and maintaining Indigenous cultures, identities and values (Cape York Institute 2005; Hunter & Jordan 2010; Jordan, Bulloch & Buchanan 2010). Despite overall low levels of internet access and usage, some remote Indigenous communities have thrived by proactively using technology to create local content, preserve their traditional culture and present their own identities in a positive manner (Kral 2010).

### **Tying the learnings from the Literature review together**

Each of the three strands of literature I have discussed above has important findings yet these do not connect with one another. The history of money and Indigenous Australians points to inter-connectedness of their social, cultural, spiritual and economic lives and the deliberate dismantling of Indigenous ways of life through colonisation, including traditional knowledge of economic organisation and exchange. This literature also finds that the abrupt imposition of money accompanying the Indigenous referendum in the late 1960's after almost of a century of deliberately being kept away from the money-economy, has influenced modern-day attitudes to financial management.

The sociological literature focuses on how money has influenced and has been influenced by, Indigenous cultural norms. The literature on Indigenous financial disadvantage finds a consistent gap in financial outcomes for Indigenous people as compared to non-Indigenous

Australians, yet cannot fully explain why this persists irrespective of where Indigenous people are located.

Recent studies find that financial capability must bridge the disciplines of economics, psychology and sociology in order to account for how individuals act and behave, and how social structures influence household financial management and decision-making (Sherraden 2013). Although each of these disciplines view human behaviour through different lenses, together they offer a promising way forward, for improving financial functioning and well-being.

In chapter three, I describe how I had to combine disparate strands of literature from multiple disciplines, in order to explore my research question. I connected historical accounts of Indigenous experiences with money, sociological studies on ways of managing money and quantitative measures of their financial disadvantage, to piece together an approach which allowed me to investigate participants' world-view of money, financial capability and well-being.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

In this chapter, I describe the approach I took to designing the research in order to answer my research questions. Before embarking on research, researchers must consider various aspects of the philosophy of reality ('ontology') and knowledge ('epistemology') such as how we know what we know, and the relationship between the 'knower' and what is 'known' (Crotty 1998; Guba & Lincoln 1994). They must also consider whether quantitative or qualitative methods of researching would suit their research best – these choices can often be driven by the research question (Morse & Richards 2002).

In the sections below I describe how I found myself drawn to recent work by Indigenous researchers who have explored alternate paradigms to Western-based research, which are informed by Indigenous knowledge systems. Labelled 'Indigenous' research paradigms and methodologies, they recognise that knowledge is relational, and based on the multiple relations people have with the living and non-living universe (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999; Rigney 2006; Chilisa 2012).

This paradigm also guided my choice of research methods towards those which best suit Indigenous ways of knowing and being. I found that qualitative research, described as a 'situated activity that locates the observer in the world' (Denzin & Lincoln 2005) offered the best approach to study my research questions. I describe below the ways in which I designed my qualitative study to complement the Indigenous research paradigm.

### **Indigenous Research Paradigm**

The generic term 'Indigenous' encompasses 370 million people across 70 countries who practice unique traditions, and retain social, cultural and economic characteristics that are distinct from those of the 'dominant' societies in which they live (United Nations Permanent

Forum on Indigenous Issues 2014). Although each Indigenous community across the globe is distinctively unique, there are many commonalities, particularly amongst higher-income countries which share a similar colonial past, and have marginalised Indigenous populations (Brascoupe', Weatherdon & Tremblay 2013).

Indigenous people are the 'most researched people in the world' (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999) yet most of these studies have been based on Western perspectives. Post-colonial 'Indigenous' research paradigms (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999; Rigney 2006; Chilisa 2012) have emerged, which challenge Western paradigms and privilege Indigenous viewpoints. The main tenets of this literature are that intended research should reflect the priorities and interests of the Indigenous communities, rather than those of the researcher; cultural sensitivity should apply to all aspects of consultation, negotiation, consent and involvement of communities in the design, facilitation and publication of research; social transformation and change must be guided by Indigenous people themselves; and Indigenous knowledge and intellectual property should increase as a result of the research.

In particular, the relational Indigenous research paradigm (Chilisa 2012) acknowledges that there are multiple socially-constructed realities, shaped by relationships that humans have with their living and non-living environment. It focuses on developing Indigenous knowledge that carries hope, promotes transformation and social change. Indigenous Australians are a particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged group, with lower than average outcomes for education, employment, income and health, yet few studies explore their world-views.

I therefore based my methodological approach, ontological and epistemological stance, on the relational Indigenous research paradigm, in order to privilege their perspectives. My research was also informed by national guidelines on ethical research with Indigenous people



(National Health and Medical Research Council 2003; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2012).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines the term Indigenous as referring to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, encompassing persons of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, those who identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin and those who are accepted as such by the community with which the person associates (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010). Accordingly, I have used 'Indigenous' to refer to the shared commonalities and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Australians, whilst acknowledging the rich diversity within Indigenous groups in Australia, including different languages, cultural norms and perspectives. This meant I did not distinguish between Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander groups, and did not ask my participants to declare whether they identified as one or the other, or indeed as both.

I am also aware that some research amongst Indigenous communities has been criticized for portraying Indigenous people as a 'problem' to be solved, rendering them passive 'objects' that require assistance from external expert researchers (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999). Whilst recognising the disadvantage faced by Indigenous Australians in remote communities, I aim to move past pathological descriptions of their history, towards a strengths-based approach to enhancing their financial inclusion and capability, based on a better understanding of 'Indigenous money'.

Any research exploring Indigenous issues must recognise and privilege Indigenous knowledge systems – in the sections below, I have outlined two approaches to privileging Indigenous knowledge ('both-ways' learning and 'deep listening') that guided my approach to using the Indigenous research paradigm and methodology in practise.

### *Privileging Indigenous knowledge*

Indigenous people have unique knowledge systems that can contribute to all fields of research, yet this knowledge is not always acknowledged or valued appropriately (Expert Working Group on Indigenous Engagement with Science 2014). Their socio-cultural and linguistic knowledge, ecological understandings and well-being are interdependent, and embedded within relationships to country, natural resources and each other (Maffi 2001; Burgess et al. 2009).

The growing focus on environmental sustainability since the late 20th century has meant that Western science has become increasingly aware of the intrinsic resilience of Indigenous communities, and their ways of living and knowing. However, the role that Indigenous people play is largely limited to being informants, and having their diverse knowledge recognised is still a struggle (Rigney 2001). Moreover, there are broader ethical issues being raised around non-Indigenous researchers undertaking research on an Indigenous-specific issue.

Indigenous knowledge systems are complex, holistic and interdisciplinary, and not merely potential subsets of Western knowledge systems – this can lead to a tension between the two systems. Yet efforts to combine the two systems as complementary rather than competing partners, can lead to highly successful and innovative outcomes. My own experience as a non-Indigenous researcher studying an Indigenous issue has taught me that provided both parties are genuinely respectful of their complementary strengths, it is possible to forge a common ground where both parties benefit.

As Australia moves toward a knowledge-based economy, appropriately acknowledging the contribution that Indigenous knowledge systems make, will build their capacity to contribute

even more via enhanced local and regional economic participation, and improved national productivity.

### *'Both-ways' learning Approach*

One approach to combining Western and Indigenous knowledge systems is 'both-ways' or 'two-ways' learning, developed and implemented by Indigenous teacher trainees, most significantly Mandawuy Yunupingu and Nalwarri Ngurruwutthun, in the 1980's (Wunungmurra 1989; Yunupingu 1989; Harris 1990). Adopted into school curriculum, this approach enabled Indigenous and non-Indigenous ('Western') knowledge systems to work collaboratively, to develop mutually compatible learning which benefited both cultures (AhChee 1991). By respecting and recognising Indigenous culture and customs, this 'both-ways' curriculum was found to reduce conflict and improve learning outcomes. Although there is limited academic literature on this approach, it has influenced some on the ground practise, and has been incorporated into Remote Teaching Service school curricula (Department of Education Western Australia 2012).

Proponents of 'both-ways' learning emphasise the importance of finding a 'common language' in cross-cultural communication, as talking does not necessarily equal to understanding (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2011). This applies equally to education as it does to studies of financial decision-making in Indigenous communities. Researchers exploring Indigenous financial and commercial capability must use financial 'language' that makes sense 'both-ways' i.e. to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous listeners. There are often differences in the Indigenous understanding of Western commercial concepts, including the separation of business vs. personal money; 'hidden' costs

involved in running a commercial enterprise; and the impact of business income on Centrelink entitlements (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2011).

My research has adopted the principles of the 'both-ways' learning approach, as I find it perfectly complements the Indigenous research paradigm, and allows me to take a strengths-based approach to understanding Indigenous financial behaviour. My study has also been influenced by principles of a 'both-ways' or 'two-ways' learning approach, which was developed and implemented by Indigenous teacher trainees, most significantly Mandawuy Yunupingu and Nalwarri Ngurruwutthun, in the 1980's (Wunungmurra 1989; Yunupingu 1989). The following sections describe further how I have incorporated 'both-ways' learning into my study as the ideal way to articulate a strengths-based approach to understanding Indigenous financial behaviour.

### *'Deep-Listening'*

A recent study conducted on education and cultural renewal in Indigenous communities (Brearley 2010) developed the concept of Indigenous 'Deep Listening' which appears in many Indigenous cultures, and describes a process of listening deeply and respectfully, in ways that build understanding and a sense of community. A collaboration between the corporate sector, academia and the Indigenous community, this project encouraged the exploration of fresh ways of generating new ideas, and opportunities to learn from the rich and ancient heritage of Australian Indigenous culture, knowledge and understandings.

By allowing Indigenous post-graduate students to present their research findings via a series of creative events and multi-media outcomes, the Indigenous Deep Listening Project provides a framework for research to be communicated to the Indigenous community in creative ways – a way of learning, working and being together. It means listening and observing the many

ways in which people communicate – via stories, silences, gestures, art or even observing. From a research perspective, Deep Listening provides multiple ways of knowing to gather, analyse and represent data – data emerges from participants' stories, dreams, country, music, art and being.

Deep Listening has several parallels in Western thinking and organisational culture, example the term 'intuition' which describes the ability to listen to the heart, as opposed to the head, to know what's right and how to behave in any circumstance. This awareness creates 'mindfulness' which can keep us safe, form stronger relationships and improve performance – all of which are values that the Indigenous communities hold dear.

Using the Indigenous research paradigm and associated methodologies in practice is often a steep learning curve for any researcher – as I describe further in the sections below, I found that it is vital to 'listen deeply' to not just my participants' stories, but also to their silences, and their artwork, in order to understand how they feel about money, and how they want to use it, to meet their objectives.

## **Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory has its origins in the philosophical perspective that reality is negotiated between people, always changing and constantly evolving (Heath & Cowley 2004). The approach was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss 1967) and extended by subsequent research (Strauss & Corbin 1997). Research questions based on this approach consider how reality is socially constructed, and dynamically changes and evolves along with social relationships and constructs. A researcher using this approach examines how the topic they are investigating has been shaped over time, is currently being shaped, and also considers how it might change over time.

This approach provides tools for analyzing processes, which allow the researcher to build theory bottom-up i.e. from the data to theory, rather than the reverse i.e. testing a theory by using the data (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). This data-driven approach is used to seek core concepts in a focused, small-scale environment. However, the researcher must also be conscious of the fact that they are instruments in the development of such theory i.e. they are active participants. The types of research questions best suited to this approach are those which explore a particular situation, process or context, and ideally researchers using this approach will seek to learn about these from the participants.

Researchers constantly work with their data to tease out concepts and linkages which allow them to generate theoretical insights. Emerging concepts once again interplay with the data, whilst the researcher considers integration and synthesis. Often researchers will consider how what they are finding is different to other situations, processes or contexts. Researchers therefore remain close to their studied worlds, and develop an integrated set of theoretical concepts from their empirical materials that not only synthesize and interpret them, but also show the process relationships.

More recently, a 'constructivist grounded theory' has been applied towards issues of social justice, focusing on equitable distribution of resources, fairness and eradication of oppression (Charmaz 2014). Indigenous researchers proposing decolonizing methodologies have also used grounded theory to champion transformational, 'Indigenist' research (Tuhiwai-Smith 2005) as an alternative to Western methodologies.

I found grounded theory offered a very useful and flexible approach, ideally suited to my needs in other words, to study money within a completely different cultural context – that of Indigenous Australia. I needed to learn how to 'see' the Indigenous world-view through the

eyes of my participants, learning from their stories and experiences in different contextual settings i.e. remote, regional and urban communities. I also needed to learn that silence is a part of language, meaning and action as described further below.

## **Conceptual Framework for my PhD research**

My research topic was directly influenced by Indigenous leaders who proactively collaborated with Australian banks to promote financial inclusion for their people. Placing my research within the framework of the Indigenous research paradigm and grounded theory helped me to focus my research questions, yet I found that over the course of the study, the research questions changed. I began my studies with the idea of developing a user-centred design of culturally appropriate banking for Indigenous people. Over the course of engaging with my participants though, I realised that an essential precursor to design is a greater understanding of the user's world-view of money itself.

I therefore sharpened my focus to exploring the understanding of 'Indigenous money' and implications for financial capability as the core of my research, leaving issues of culturally appropriate design to future research. In order to do this, I combined the theoretical frameworks of the sociology of money, and the human development and capability approach. These frameworks are complementary as they place the 'researched' or 'user' at the centre of the study, and acknowledge the influence of the users' context and economic and socio-cultural environment, in decision-making.

The sociology of money focuses on how money is influenced by, and in turn influences, individual users' socio-cultural environments and relationships. Given the literature points to the importance of socio-cultural factors for Indigenous people, the sociology of money offers an ideal framework to explore my first subsidiary question i.e. an understanding of

'Indigenous money'. It also allows me to compare and contrast the experience of money in regional and urban Indigenous communities, as compared to the remote study, thereby addressing my second subsidiary question.

The Human Development and Capability approach considers that the primary purpose of development is to provide people the freedom to live the lives they value, and have reason to value. The focus is on people's 'functionings' (i.e. the 'being's and 'doing's that they value), 'capabilities' (i.e. the 'freedom' to enjoy valuable functionings) and 'agency' (i.e. their ability to pursue and realize goals that they value). This 'people-centred' framework encompasses user-related issues such as internal capabilities, values and goals, as well as external environment-related issues such as opportunities available to people, access and processes that enable people to enjoy freedoms they value, both individually and collectively. This is the ideal framework to explore the interplay between Indigenous understandings of money, their socio-economic circumstances and their financial capability which is my third subsidiary question.

Together these frameworks form the core of my study and allow me to investigate my primary research question: 'how does the understanding of money influence financial capability amongst the Indigenous participants included in my study?' I have also recommended policy considerations for future research on the design of 'culturally appropriate' financial capability initiatives (encompassing financial education, products and services) for Indigenous Australians. The following table (Table 2) represents a conceptual map of how I have combined these complementary frameworks to answer my research questions:



Primary Research Question: "How does the understanding of money influence financial capability and well-being in Indigenous Australia?"		
Subsidiary Research Questions	Theoretical Frameworks Used	
	Sociology of Money	Human Development and Capability Approach
(1) What is the understanding of money (i.e. 'Indigenous money') amongst remote participants?	How money shapes culture?	Importance of 'cultural lens' in determining the quality of life that people value, and have reason to value
(2) Does context matter i.e. does the understanding of 'Indigenous money' differ amongst remote, regional and urban Indigenous participants?	How culture shapes money?  How is money managed and controlled within households?	
(3) What are implications for Indigenous financial capability and well-being?		Functioning: what people value 'doing' and 'being'? Capability: what 'freedom' people have, to lead the financial life they have reason to value? Agency: how people can act (individually /collectively) to pursue and realise goals they value?

**Table 2: Conceptual map: Studying money, financial capability and well-being in Indigenous Australia**

### Data Collection: Consultation, Seeking Access & Participation

In this section, I describe a vital precursor to co-designing Indigenous research, which is appropriate consultation, understanding priorities and seeking permission. As mentioned previously, my professional networks brought me in touch with respected Indigenous community leaders, who saw this research as an important evidence-base in their efforts to promote greater financial inclusion for their people.

These leaders offered to guide my research, introducing me to local elders, Indigenous organisations and traditional owners who had expressed a particular interest in improving financial capability for their communities. Formal approval from RMIT University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and relevant Indigenous land councils was obtained before visiting any communities. I decided to first pilot and refine my research design in the remote communities. The research in remote communities then became the reference point for expanding my consultation to include regional and urban areas.

The guidance and support from community elders included advice on important ethical considerations such as respectful ways to inform participants about the research, ways to withdraw from participating, record consent for those with lower literacy skills, avoid direct questioning and allow silences. Visual aids such as posters were displayed in public spaces wherever available, to inform participants about the research and invite their participation. Participant permission was sought to record verbal consent and audio-tape conversations – in two cases participants were not comfortable with being taped, so written notes were taken instead. I introduced the research to groups of people in public spaces, so that individuals could decide whether to join in, leave at will or have individual conversations.

Being introduced to community members by respected Indigenous elders is important, so I was very fortunate to be welcomed by local leaders in all locations. Researchers undertaking fieldwork (particularly in traditional remote communities) must be sensitive to issues of internal polity such as who represents the community, whether elders represent the community as a whole, and gender nuances associated with access to locations, people, activities and even topics of discussion. I was able to negotiate these sometimes thorny issues by allowing myself to be guided by the elders, and following their lead.

One elder who introduced me to his community during the remote study, was a respected traditional owner and leader. Since I was a female, he first introduced me to 'strong' women I could speak to, and later invited other men to join the discussions. At another remote community, a female elder and traditional owner first introduced me to a group of women weaving baskets. In regional and urban areas, I was introduced by a staff member of the hosting Indigenous organisation, to their colleagues and other community members. In all the communities I visited, I observed that participants including the elders, were mindful of not representing the views of the community as a whole.

Building trust and genuine relationships with community members takes time, and multiple visits enabled people in all the consultation sites, to get to know me. As an 'outsider' ('*balanda*' or non-Indigenous) particularly in the remote communities which retain strong links to traditional culture, I carefully considered how best to introduce myself, and connect with people. Despite external differences (i.e. race, language, culture, education, profession etc.) I focused instead on what I shared in common with participants i.e. my traditional upbringing (in India) where relationships, family obligations and reciprocity are paramount, language and cultural heritage revered. Instead of a business card, I used a photo of my extended family including my children and parents, to introduce myself to people. This proved to be an ideal starting point, as people invariably responded by introducing their own families, particularly their children, before they sat down to chat.

Although I felt less of an outsider during the regional and urban community visits, I adhered to the protocols I had established during the remote visits, and found these equally useful. I used my professional networks to identify suitable Indigenous organisations in regional and urban areas, and then sought to be introduced via respected local elders. Wherever possible, I

based myself at the local organisation, and let their leadership facilitate introductions to prospective participants from their staff and clients. This made it easier for me on repeat visits, as I was already familiar to both the staff and clients of the local organisation.

This worked smoothly for the regional study, and I was able to facilitate repeat visits through the same local organisation, often meeting the same participants over the course of the research. In the urban consultations though, I found it harder to pinpoint a local Indigenous organisation which could introduce me to their staff and clients. The ethics committee at the first urban-based organisation I approached, rejected my application to base my research at their premises, as they felt my area of research (money and finances) did not have much overlap with their area of service provision (health). The CEO of a second organisation I identified was comfortable facilitating introductions but retired half-way through my research. The new CEO decided against allowing me to continue my research with their staff and clients, based on an ideological objection to non-Indigenous researchers studying Indigenous issues.

This created some tension and delayed my study until I succeeded in identifying an alternate organisation which was willing to facilitate both my research and introductions to their staff and clients. In general though, I was welcomed by most participants, who appreciated both the topic of my research and the way in which I conducted the research via informal conversations. “That didn’t feel like research – I was just having a yarn” said Nama, a middle-aged financial services advisor from a regional town.

Reflecting on the challenges of obtaining access, I realised that whilst having a pre-existing network amongst Indigenous leaders at a national level was a huge advantage, strong support at the national level did not necessarily smooth over the difficulties of ‘getting in’ at the local

community level. Living thousands of kilometres away from my participants, I found it difficult (and expensive) to maintain close contact. Despite the introductions from respected leaders to a number of prospective communities, it took many months of negotiation and multiple visits to Darwin, before I could confirm the participation of two communities.

## Sample Selection

I considered it important to include participants from different geographical locations, as issues of financial capability and access to financial services are different across remote, regional and urban Indigenous communities. Also, a common criticism of Indigenous research is that it is focused primarily on remote communities, while the majority (78%) of the Indigenous population is now concentrated in regional and urban areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). This thesis aims to contribute further to the knowledge on Indigenous people and money, by including these under-researched communities.

The following table summarises the one hundred and thirty three (133) participants of this study, whilst the sections below contain a more detailed description of each sample site in the remote, regional and urban Indigenous communities studied.

Community	Yarning Circles	1:1 interviews		Observation	TOTAL
		Participants	Key Informants		
Remote	16 (5 groups)	20	11	6 (private workshop)	53
Regional	8 (3 groups)	19	5	10 (focus group)	42
Urban	14 (3 groups)	16	5	3 (Board meeting)	38
TOTAL	38	55	21	19	133

Note: An additional 13 people in Remote communities were interviewed as part of the Smart

Services Cooperative Research Centre project on mobile banking. Including the Smart Services CRC Project, this would take the total number of participants to 146.
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### **Table 3: Overall Participant Summary for PhD study**

#### *Remote Indigenous Australia*

Elders from two remote communities in the Northern Territory (referenced herein as 'InlandTown' and 'CoastalTown') invited me to conduct my research on their communities, as described in more detail in Chapter Four. This research involved fifty three participants via five yarning circles with sixteen attendees (two with women, one with men, two with mixed groups) and thirty-one open-ended interviews (twenty with participants, and eleven with key informants). The key informants included subject matter experts or specialists such as academics, linguists, consultants and those involved in service delivery to remote communities. I was invited to observe a private workshop (six attendees), and participate in three conferences on remote Indigenous financial capability. I also interviewed people from six other remote communities, while they were visiting urban areas.

I captured personal information for participant interviews, but it was not appropriate to do this for yarning circles or workshops where I was invited to observe or participate directly. Table 9 (refer Appendix) summarises the details for the participant interviews conducted.

I had to be mindful of local protocols relating to gender, whilst undertaking field work. Men and women do not generally mix in public on the remote communities, and as a female researcher, I was careful to not approach any males until properly introduced. The elders' invitation did however, encourage some menfolk to join the public conversations and individual interviews, and I ended up interviewing fifteen women and five men in the remote areas.

Travel and accommodation are expensive in remote communities, so I required additional financial support to complete my fieldwork. Unforeseen events such as a death while visiting InlandTown, and local unrest in CoastalTown, meant visits had to be cut short, resulting in further costs and delays. Local community priorities took precedence over research objectives - plans to observe how residents shop and use the sole ATM in InlandTown had to be abandoned, as a pest-control team unexpectedly flew in a day earlier than planned, to fumigate the store.

I used my first consultations in InlandTown and CoastalTown (in 2011) as a pilot study to develop a framework for describing 'Indigenous money', which I refined further in subsequent remote consultations in 2012 and 2013. In October 2012, I was also invited to participate in a Smart Services CRC project exploring mobile banking for remote Indigenous communities, partnering with 'BushProvider', an Indigenous financial services organisation. Ethics approval was sought from RMIT University's Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct this project, and necessary permission was obtained from government officials in order to conduct this research in InlandTown, building on my ongoing PhD research.

An additional thirteen interviews were conducted as part of this project, and learnings from this additional consultation have been appropriately referenced in this research. This additional project has helped to refine the recommendations for future research (discussed in chapter seven) based on user-centred design, for culturally appropriate financial products and services for Indigenous Australian.

### *Regional Indigenous Australia*

My regional consultations involved forty-two participants, and were conducted with the assistance of Indigenous organisations based in regional centres, and my existing networks

(both professional and personal) across three states i.e. New South Wales (labelled 'QuarryTown' and 'MiningTown'), Victoria (labelled 'FruitTown' and 'GoldTown') and the Northern Territory (labelled 'RiverTown' and 'HubTown'), as described further in Chapter Five. The consultations included three yarning circles with fourteen participants (one mixed group, one with male small business owners, one with women), one focus group with ten women, and twenty-four interviews (nineteen with participants, five with key informants).

I was also invited to participate in two conferences on financial management in Indigenous communities. I obtained ethics clearance and special participant permission to observe the women's focus group in GoldTown, conducted as part of a broader national study on women and money. Six participants from the mixed yarning circle also participated in interviews, therefore I have counted only two participants in that particular yarning circle, bringing the total number of participants to forty-two.

In regional areas the distinction between genders was far less relevant than in remote communities, yet I did find that the local elders I was introduced to tended to be male, whilst more of the participants were female. I interviewed fourteen women and five men, as per details in Table 9 (refer Appendix).

Key informants included the branch manager of a FruitTown bank, the manager of a community finance hub in QuarryTown, and three NSW-based financial management case workers. I also interviewed one person from another regional location, who was visiting the city I was interviewing in. Although the regional consultations therefore involved seven locations, I found the responses to be similar, so I have represented the regional participants as a whole. This also affords greater privacy and anonymity for my participants, as I visited some locations more frequently than others.



### *Urban Indigenous Australia*

Urban consultations were facilitated largely via my existing networks (both professional and personal) and an Indigenous organization based in NorthCity. This study included thirty-eight participants from three major cities, in Northern Territory ('NorthCity'), New South Wales ('NewCity') and Victoria ('VicCity'), as described further in Chapter Five. This research involved four yarning circles with fourteen attendees (all mixed groups), twenty-one open-ended interviews (sixteen with participants, and five with key informants) and one private workshop (three attendees) discussing my research findings. The key informants included executives (two CEOs and two senior managers) from organisations servicing Indigenous clients, and one consultant specializing in financial education programs. I was also invited to participate in two public forums on Indigenous financial management, and conducted two staff briefings, for organisations focused on Indigenous financial services delivery.

In urban areas, there was no perceptible gender aspect to consultations - in fact I found the proportion of male to female interviewees was reversed, as I interviewed six women and ten men. I was also able to find more participants who owned small businesses than in the regional areas. Details of the sixteen participants I interviewed are in Table 9 (refer Appendix).

### **Qualitative methods: Fieldwork & Knowledge-making**

Qualitative techniques such as observing and interacting with participants as they go about their daily lives (i.e. 'participant observation' and informal conversations) were an obvious choice for this research, as was the need for fieldwork, given some participants were in remote locations, which were difficult to access. My regional and urban consultations were facilitated by local Indigenous organisations (including cultural and educational centres,

service providers and an Indigenous TAFE) and introductions through professional networks. Indigenous people travel frequently between remote communities and urban areas, to connect with extended family or for health and work-related matters, so I was also able to interview remote community participants when they were in cities I happened to be visiting. I also had the opportunity to observe participants at private finance-related workshops, and at various public conferences on Indigenous financial management, that I was invited to attend.

I visited each community multiple times, so that participants were able to get to know me better, and provide inputs into my learnings over the course of the PhD. Over the period July 2011 to February 2014, I visited SouthCity eight times; QuarryTown five times; NorthCity four times; InlandTown and FruitTown thrice; CoastalTown and GoldTown twice; RiverTown, MiningTown and HubTown once each. I also visited InlandTown in April 2013, as part of the Smart Services CRC project on mobile banking in remote Indigenous communities.

## **Indigenous Research Methods**

The careful consideration of research methods is a basic tenet of the Indigenous research paradigm, which recognises that *how* we go about acquiring knowledge in Indigenous communities is just as critical for the elimination of disparities as the actual knowledge that is gained about a particular problem (Cochran et al. 2008). This means that researchers must collaboratively identify research methods that are inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing, so that the research can lead to sustainable, efficacious services that redress Indigenous disadvantage without violating their rights or preferences.

In the sections below, I describe how I originally designed my research method around yarning circles, story-telling and participant observation, but quickly learned to expand my

methods to also incorporate 'deep-listening' via learning to listen to participants' silences, and discerning stories from their artwork.

### *Yarning Circles, Story-telling & Participant Observation*

My research was typically introduced via a 'yarning circle', an informal method of consulting community members on a particular topic. Usually held in a public space over a shared meal, participants are introduced to the researcher by a known and trusted local elder and the consultation begins only when participants are comfortable with the researcher (Demosthenous et al. 2006). My study included informal conversations and stories, focusing on individual experiences with money, rather than the household economy. I asked participants for their stories about how they use money in their homes. I explored how people talk about money, with whom they share money, and where appropriate, their experience with banking and how this might be improved. As part of the subsequent Smart Services CRC policy-focused study, I also explored how mobile phones were used.

Yarning circles allowed the topic to be introduced and stories shared, in a relaxed, informal setting with community members as a group, usually in a public space of their choice (eg. in the shade of a tree while weaving baskets, in the shire office or church hall). In some cases, these were followed up with a more intensive open-ended, one on one interview with interested participants. I focused only on individual stories about money, not on the household economy or 'business'-money.

Organising an appropriate meal to share as a group provided the perfect ice-breaker, especially for participants who were often shy and wary of strangers. The meals also allowed me an opportunity to reciprocate the participants' warm hospitality and graciousness. A carefully planned 'thank-you' bag, hand-painted by my children and decorated with family

photos, was also offered to each interviewee. I noticed that invariably, the treats in these bags would be immediately shared with whoever happened to be in the vicinity. In a very touching gesture, one interviewee re-filled the bag with her own gifts, handing it to me before I left the community the following day.

Throughout the research, participants were mindful of not representing others' views or generalising on behalf of the community as a whole. Yarning circles and interviews were audio-taped wherever participants permitted it, and I took extensive field notes and maintained an electronic journal. The latter proved to be very valuable, as an aide-de-memoir for conversations that were not able to be audio-taped, and as a record of my own reflections.

Other additional data included powerpoint presentations from a conference, online resources from relevant websites, brochures and pamphlets. All data was stored securely and backed up regularly. Audio-recordings were deleted from the voice-recorder after being transferred to secure storage, while transcripts used pseudonyms to de-identity people and locations, thereby ensuring privacy and confidentiality.

### *Learning from Silences – practicing Deep Listening*

Excited about my very first consultation, I described my experiences and what my data was saying, to my primary supervisor. However, I was blind-sided when she queried about what the participants did not say. This led me to reflect on the consultation, and listen to the recorded conversations again. This time, I noticed something I had previously missed – there were distinct silences in the consultations.

Ignoring natural silences in-between conversing, I could identify that typically the meaningful silences occurred when the topic of conversation led to a sensitive issue which could lead to shame, such as the use of money to gamble or buy drugs, or when a participant

recounted a story of domestic violence and financial abuse from her partner. I also realised that despite my caution, at times my way of questioning could be seen as too direct – invariably, participants would respond by becoming silent, avoiding a response or changing the topic.

The silences came first from the elders, and then the weight of the silence would be passed down to the other participants. If, as in one case, a younger participant piped up with a controversial comment, the continuing silence from the elders would make them stop. Also, in one of my earliest interviews, I made the cardinal error of rushing in to fill a silence with a follow-up question, only to find myself being gently admonished by the respondent, who was still 'thinking through' how to respond to the first question. To their credit, participants generously forgave me these indiscretions, allowing me to learn and grow from my experiences.

These learning became an essential component of my approach to future consultations. I became very aware of silences, and topics or issues that possibly evoked 'shame' for participants. When it became obvious that there was a silence, I would no longer jump in to fill the silence, or continue my questioning. In this way, I did everything I could to avoid shame for my participants.

Through the silences, I also gleaned the importance of the role that the elders play in the community. Their support (or lack of support through their continued silence) is an essential cue for the others to either continuing discussing a topic or stop doing so. It also led me to understand the role of the elders in role-modelling the 'right' behaviour in the community, and conscious of the way in which elders prefer to teach i.e. not by reprimanding or overtly stopping the conversation, but by gently steering it away from a vexatious topic, by their

silence. The way Indigenous people talk about money and use it, is undoubtedly influenced by their elders.

### **Visual 'story-telling' - artwork**

In one of the early community consultations for the remote pilot study, I was introduced to a group of local 'strong' women, who were artists. Reflecting on the yarning circle that had been conducted with these women, I realised that not all the women were contributing to the conversations – one reason could be that English was a second or third language for many of these women. Given their obvious artistic skills, I wondered whether it would make it easier for more participants to contribute, if I asked them to draw a picture about money instead. Given previous studies on art as a culturally appropriate way to engage Indigenous knowledge-making (Morphy 1991), I was fortunate to soon have the opportunity to test this method of conducting research. As part of introducing the research to a group of participants, I asked them to draw how they felt about money. The group painted this stunning picture, reproduced with permission below.



**Picture 1: The Money Picture (reproduced with permission)**

When asked to explain what their artwork represented, one by one each participant started telling me about how they saw the artwork, and what it meant to them, in the context of their experience with money. Their explanations were eye-opening, as each one built on the previous participants' discussion, enriching the story that slowly began to unfold from the artwork.

The group waited for their elder, a sprightly 60-something white-haired Miah, to have the first go, and she explained that the background of the painting is ochre, representing a strong identification with the traditional Indigenous palette. 'It is our colour – it tells us that this painting is meant for us'.

Scattered throughout the middle of the painting are faint black swirling patterns – these represent a 'willy-willy' (hurricane), depicting the chaos that money problems can produce for Indigenous people. Young Willa, a shy 20-year old accompanied by her mother Yangara, explained this in almost poetic terms - the money 'willy-willy' can suck up everything in its way, and then spits the person out far away from where they originally started.

The other participants nodded their agreement - this is a common pattern for their people i.e. if they get caught up in money problems, things can escalate very quickly. In particular younger people often end up in debt-spirals, or credit problems, which can seriously mar their future financial lives.

Middle-aged Mogo, who had so far been a quiet observer, joined in with the ladies – he explained that the faint white handprints around the edges of the painting denote that there is help available for Indigenous people who find themselves in financial difficulties. People are not always aware that there are financial counsellors who can help them with specialist money advice – they usually just rely on their family and friends, who may not be very

money-savvy themselves. This was a very pertinent observation, as research demonstrates that Indigenous people are the least likely to be aware of where to find help, should they find themselves in financial difficulties (National Indigenous Money Management Agenda 2007).

Dorak, a young father, pointed out that not everything is sad about the story in the painting. The bright yellow sun in the middle of the painting, along with the water course which has been drawn, shows nourishing, life-giving things such as honey-ants, dingo tracks and boomerangs. These show that if people are able to navigate the 'money-track' wisely, they will be able to sustainably manage their money-life and achieve their goals.

Explaining that he works part-time as a money management worker, Dorak said he always tells people who seek his advice, that with some help, they too can manage their money more wisely, and 'get that money to work for them'. Research corroborates this – people with higher financial capability are able to achieve higher well-being, not just for themselves but also for their family and the wider community (Taylor, Jenkins & Sacker 2009).

Other participants joined in to explain that the painting also shows footsteps and secret meeting places for both men and women, which reflects the different ways in which gender plays out in managing money in everyday life. They felt that men and women have different ways of managing their money – men want to hide money away for themselves but women always share everything they've got with their family, often to the point that they have nothing left for themselves. However, if men and women work together to manage their money, this will make it easier for the family as a whole to thrive.

Middle-aged Tathra also highlighted that in addition to the meeting places for men and women, she had put in some meeting places in black (representing Indigenous people) and white (non-Indigenous people) where both communities can come together, and work



collaboratively on helping Indigenous people to manage money wisely. She likened this collaboration to playing a piano 'You have to learn to play both the black and the white keys, in order to make beautiful music'

This call for collaborative action on improving Indigenous financial capability is echoed in policy documents ((National Indigenous Money Management Agenda 2007); (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2013)) which recommend this as the only sustainable way to address the multi-dimensional problem that is Indigenous financial exclusion.

Miah also explained that the entire painting is linked by a cord of string, which connects the tools and resources available to the community depicted by 'coolamons' (vessel or dish, shaped roughly like a canoe dugout). This shows that good communications, trust and respect will bind her community together. Young Ulla then proudly pointed out a personal touch to this group painting that we hadn't discussed yet - she had drawn an outline of lips scattered throughout the background, because she shows her love for her family, through the way she uses money.

Listening to the way in which my participants explained the stories that lie within this artwork helped me to increase my understanding of my data in two very important ways – firstly, allowing participants to express themselves via art in a group effort, made them much more relaxed. Participants could communicate with the researchers in a way that showcased their skills and artistry instead of having to talk about how they managed money, a topic that often incurred shame.

Secondly, being in a group helped the shyer participants, particularly the younger ones who usually defer to the elders, to contribute without being singled out. When I asked them to explain their artwork, they volunteered several ideas that they may not have spoken about, as

part of a yarning circle or interview. Their art 'spoke' in their stead - this allowed me to explore their true feelings more deeply, without making them uncomfortable.

It wasn't always possible to involve an entire group in developing artwork, however, I tried to build on the theme of allowing art to speak for the participants, by asking interviewees how they would paint money, or sing about it. This too proved to be a very useful way to allow them to visualize how they feel about money - I have discussed this in more detail in Chapter Six, in the section exploring feelings about 'Indigenous money'.

Elder Tinka, explaining her idea about making a film about money, says she would ensure the music is Indigenous, so her people know the message is for them. This notion of alerting Indigenous people to messages that are important to them, by using an Indigenous palette of colours and sounds was another important learning for me. I have this discussed further in chapter seven, in the section considering how future research can build on the findings of my study.

## **Analysing my data**

Throughout my PhD journey, I kept an electronic journal in addition to taking detailed field-notes from each of my consultation visits. I developed a discipline of writing down my thoughts prior to each consultation in my electronic journal, and then adding in the field-notes taken from the day's consultation. I would then put down my learnings from the day. Although this was at times difficult, I found that on re-visiting my notes many months later, some of my best insights came from these very notes. I also made it a point to send my field-notes to my supervisors after each visit, so that they could review these and point out areas for improvement.

I used a software program (NVivo 9.2) to collate, organise, sort, and search the various forms of knowledge I created over the course of my study, including stories, artwork, newspaper clippings, non-academic literature including industry and government-sponsored reports, conference proceedings. I decided to first make sense of the data from the remote study by identifying 'themes' arising, then creating 'nodes' for the recurring ones. Wherever possible, I used words/constructs from the participants themselves, to label these nodes and categories.

In my early attempts to categorise data into nodes, I found myself overwhelmed by the sheer number of nodes I had created. Being a visual person, I tried to sort the nodes into a logical order using the most intuitive method I know, which is drawing a mind-map. I started with a key concept, breaking it down into its most logical drivers then expanding each driver into its own factors until I had traced each concept into its most granular level of detail (see Picture 2 below). Often I found myself rolling up factors into a higher level of abstraction i.e. smaller concepts often ended up as sub-sections of the main themes.



**Picture 2: Mind-map for a framework to describe 'Indigenous money'**

This way of creating the most logical 'mind-map' of what I was hearing from my data worked really well for me, and allowed me to step back from the detail and finally see the patterns in my participants' stories. I would also challenge myself to create a one-page visual representation of each major discovery, refining these diagrams via conversations with my supervisors or other mentors, till I was able to clarify and distil the multiple themes I initially found, to the more central ones.

In addition to alerting me to silences, my supervisor also challenged me to focus not just on capturing what most participants were agreeing with, but also on what the odd person who didn't agree, said. Initially, I found it quite difficult to find dissonant voices from the remote pilot study, as in public consultations, I would invariably find most people agreeing with others' statements. On reviewing the recorded conversations though, I did pick up the odd occasion when someone piped up with a differing opinion, before they were invariably silenced by the others. Also in one on one interviews, I did come across people who would express a controversial opinion in private, which they may not have divulged in a public setting.

These 'negative' cases helped me to challenge what I was hearing from the more cohesive stories, and develop some more ideas about why their opinion was different, and what the factors, circumstances or personality differences were, that might have contributed to these individuals being different. In later consultations conducted in regional and urban areas, I found people were slightly less inhibited in expressing differing opinions. Some participants (particularly younger people and males) did disagree with the rest even in public conversations, though it was obvious they still respected the opinions of their elders.

## **Feedback and co-creating knowledge**

An important part of adopting Indigenous research methodologies is allowing participants the opportunity to share in the creation of knowledge. Throughout the remote pilot study, I challenged myself to obtain feedback at every opportunity. Repeat visits to the participating communities offered the chance to discuss, share and refine learnings, as did the many public forums and conferences I was invited to attend. I also presented early findings via executive briefings and board updates for local organisations which were hosting me, left written material so that they could discuss the research with other staff and clients, and invited feedback both written and verbal.

Gradually, I found order emerging from the initial chaos of trying to make sense of all the stories I had heard, and the feedback provided. By the time I was ready to wrap up the remote pilot study, I realised that there were four main characteristics that were becoming most relevant to my study about how Indigenous people understand money. I created a framework describing 'Indigenous money' based on these characteristics, which I then used in the subsequent consultations in regional and urban communities. In this manner, the initial framework created during the remote pilot served as the filter through which I could view the subsequent data from regional and urban consultations.

Presenting research questions and findings to the participating communities is also an important consideration for researchers. I tried to use a range of ways to present my research to engage different audiences – from the usual powerpoint presentations at public forums and formal board meetings, to pictures and charts I used in the remote communities, and even a rap song I wrote. I found that the visual and audio presentations offered a powerful way to communicate often complicated research concepts and findings in a simple manner. This

made me appreciate the power of music and art which play a vital role in Indigenous culture, and offer the ideal way to pass down knowledge in an oral, not written tradition.

## **Methodological challenges and learnings**

Not everything went right over the course of this project I describe below some methodological challenges I faced.

### **On not being Indigenous**

Non-Indigenous researcher exploring an Indigenous topic can find themselves faced with the difficult question of whether it is ethically right for them to do be doing this research. Most participants directly involved in this research were unfailingly gracious and welcoming, yet as mentioned earlier, one urban-based organisation decided to discontinue repeated visits based on this very issue.

Moreover, I was aware that non-Indigenous researchers from the 'South' (i.e. not from the Northern Top-end of Australia) were sometimes perceived as city-slickers who 'fly up to remote Indigenous communities thinking they know it all', exploiting their participants' innate hospitality. Another frequently heard comment was that although these researchers earned themselves PhDs, the community members did not benefit from, nor saw the final results of, such research. Such remarks led me to redouble my efforts to ensure that I (and my research) were indeed welcome in the local communities, before repeating visits. I also discussed research learnings and findings at every opportunity possible, so that knowledge could be developed and shared with, the participants and stakeholders.

## **Avoiding Power Imbalance**

A further complication for me was the need to avoid any power-imbalance such as being perceived as an 'expert', vis-à-vis the participants. Throughout my study, my current context was that of a novice student and researcher, attempting to learn more about Indigenous culture from her participants, yet I did struggle at times, to ensure I was not falling back into an 'expert banker' mode and offering advice to my participants. On reflection, the fact that community introductions were facilitated via the network of contacts established while I was a professional banker, possibly exacerbated this dilemma.

## **Local Access**

Having a pre-existing network amongst Indigenous leaders at a national level, who offered to guide the research and introduce me to local elders, was a huge advantage. However, strong support at the national level did not necessarily smooth over the difficulties of 'getting in' at the local community level. Moreover, living thousands of kilometres away from my participants, I found it difficult (and expensive) to maintain close contact. Despite the introductions from respected leaders to a number of prospective communities, it took many months of negotiation and multiple visits to Darwin, before I could confirm the participation of two communities.

Whilst this chapter and the previous one (chapter two) described the way in which I have approached my research and the design which best enabled me to conduct my study, in the following chapters I describe the findings of my research.

## **Chapter Four: A sociology of 'Indigenous Money' in remote**

### **Australia**

Throughout this chapter and the next one (chapter five) I have used the term 'Indigenous money' to describe money as a social phenomenon, flowing through Indigenous households in remote, regional and urban Australia. Using the theoretical framework of the sociology of money allowed me to 'see' money through the eyes of my Indigenous participants, and describe the culturally distinctive characteristics of 'Indigenous money' (Godinho & Singh 2014; Godinho & Singh 2013).

I first undertook a pilot study in two remote communities (referenced as 'InlandTown' and 'CoastalTown') in Northern Territory, which helped me to create a framework for 'seeing' money through the Indigenous lens. I refined the framework over subsequent remote consultations - this framework is the focus of this chapter, and also forms the basis of comparison with the study conducted in the regional and urban areas, which is discussed further in chapter five.

### **Setting the Context: Remote Indigenous communities**

The majority of the population of InlandTown and CoastalTown is Indigenous, and more than a third are under 20 years of age. Each town is 'strong' in traditional Indigenous art and culture, has its own distinctive language and a history of pre-colonial trade with Macassan traders from Indonesia. Both these communities face common challenges of limited education and employment opportunities, which cause high unemployment and welfare dependency. There are chronic housing shortages leading to overcrowding and high maintenance costs. Expensive freight rates drive up prices of everyday necessities. Table 4 below summarises some key statistics relating to these communities.



Remote community (State)	Introductions via	% working-age population which is Indigenous	Unemployed % Indigenous (vs. non-Indigenous)	Post-school qualifications % Indigenous (vs. non-Indigenous)
InlandTown (Northern Territory )	Professional & personal networks	92.83%	19.6% (vs. 0%)	4.56% (vs. 76.92%)
CoastalTown (Northern Territory)		84.84%	12.6% (vs. 0%)	14.72% (vs. 68.30%)

**Table 4: Describing Sample Sites - Remote Indigenous communities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011)**

The communities also have limited access to digital and financial infrastructure. InlandTown has one bank branch while CoastalTown has none. Both have Electronic Funds Transfer at Point of Sale (EFTPOS) and Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) located in a community store. Digital network coverage in both the communities is patchy, as is the maintenance for the public-access computers located near the shire office.

Travel in remote communities is also difficult and expensive - CoastalTown is relatively easy to access from Darwin, but InlandTown requires an expensive flight on a small charter plane. Over the course of my research, I visited InlandTown thrice, and CoastalTown twice between July 2011 and September 2013. Despite minor differences between the two communities, I found that the understanding of 'Indigenous money' was consistent across these sites.

### How people talk about 'Indigenous money' in remote communities

Using Zelizer's theory of the social and cultural shaping of money, my study explores the social aspects of money i.e. in the remote communities studied, the data shows that

'Indigenous money' shapes and is shaped by, non-economic factors such as historical experiences, cultural values and social relationships, particularly those of family and kin. Studying the semiotics of money, Wennerlind (2001) says that money communicates meaning and facilitates interaction between people. I found that the way in which my participants related their story about money, its role in their daily lives, how they manage it and want to use it, often revealed a lot more about how they feel about money, than direct questioning could uncover. In this section, I have described the distinctive ways in which the participants of my study (see Table 9 in the Appendix for more details) talk about money in their daily lives.

'Indigenous money' is often categorised based on its ownership or intended recipient eg. 'husband'-money, 'wife'-money or 'kids'-money, which describe the money that is paid to the relevant member of the household, including wages or salary from employment. Although these terms were more commonly used in the remote consultations, I found similar ways of categorising whom the money belongs to, in the regional and urban areas, though they tended to refer to it as 'his'-money or 'her'-money. This way of categorising money reveals a degree of independence that is afforded to the recipient, in terms of how they spend their money.

Cobar, a young man interviewed in Darwin, explains how couples use 'husband' and 'wife' money to pay for the household shopping on alternate weeks:

“They always looking after the family - with the wife money and the husband money. He just gives money to the wife when he gets it - they all buy the shopping together, and then she does the exact same thing when she gets it - gives him all her money and goes out and buys meat and fish...”

Other commonly used descriptors 'work'-money and 'business'-money describe money which is earned through individual employment and through running a business respectively. I found this type of naming was quite consistent across the geographically different consultations.

The use to which the money is put is also a natural way of categorising it - in CoastalTown, elder Iluka explained "Culture money is from our own account - aboriginal benefit account, for cultural ceremony". She further explained that 'community'-money is to be used for funding community activities, whilst 'culture'-money is to be used for promoting and maintaining culture. Similarly, 'start-up' money refers to the capital (money) needed by a business in its start-up phase.

Money is also categorised by the meaning associated with it – for example, some people refer to 'danger'-money. Key informant Maka, who has been consulting on money-related matters for many decades, says the 'danger' refers to the fact that money has rules associated with its usage, and an unwary user can face unpleasant consequences if these rules are not adhered to. "Danger-money – it's when you've already overspent - spending money that you shouldn't have spent."

Eerin, a key informant who has similarly spent many decades consulting in remote communities, explains further:

"Danger money is anything to do with debt or a fine - its money you owe. Could be hire-purchase fees, so its money you cannot use. You know that if you don't pay it, you can get into serious trouble, so that's what the danger means."

If 'danger'-money refers to overspent money, which people can get into trouble for, its mirror-opposite is 'leftover'-money, which describe an excess or amount still available after all expenses have been covered. As Eerin says "Danger money is like if you are going into debt - and leftover money is what you've got leftover once everything has been paid for."

In the home, 'extra'-money after the household expenses had been met, could pay for its owners' wants as Cobar explains:

"She [his wife] saves up enough for her shopping and all that, and then she goes gambling. And then when my pay comes, (after shopping)- when I want, I can get \$2-300 off her, and she keeps the rest. And we do that every payday, yeah."

Irrespective of the name which is associated with a categorisation of money, I found the naming is very literal and describes the meaning of that money very clearly. Taree, a key informant who is a specialist in Indigenous languages, explains that this probably reflects the natural style of Indigenous languages. The sociology of money similarly shows that how people talk about money can reveal how they feel about it, and its role in their social lives. Once I got used to the distinctively 'Indigenous- style' of talking about money, I was able to delve deeper into the participants' stories about money and investigate various aspects of money in their daily lives.

First I explored the domestic boundaries of 'family', within which 'Indigenous money' flows in remote communities. Next I considered the cultural context of my participants' view that they prioritise sharing with family and the community over individual saving, as compared to non-Indigenous people. I then examined the historical context of money for the remote communities studied, and the role of elders in promoting knowledge about using money wisely. My findings from this pilot study allowed me to identify four distinctive

characteristics of 'Indigenous money' vis-à-vis those of 'Anglo-Celtic money' which shapes mainstream economic policy and the design of banking services in Australia (Singh 1997; Singh 2013). Each of these characteristics is described in the sections below.

### **Domestic money flows within a household cluster, rather than the nuclear household**

For the remote communities studied, the first distinctive characteristic of 'Indigenous money' is that money flows regularly and freely (along with food, shelter, caring and other resources) both within and between, connected households seen as 'family'. 'Family' for my participants, can span clusters of two to four related households of extended kin with fluid membership, as people frequently move between households and communities. Despite flowing freely however, money is rarely talked about – participants say they discuss it only when there is a shortage of it.

Fourteen of the twenty participants I interviewed, live in multi-family households and one in a group household (see Table 9 in Appendix), with an average of 8 people, as compared to 2.6 in non-Indigenous households (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). Jarrah, an Inland Town elder, counts off eleven people living with him at present including siblings and their children, saying "that eleven family of mine, they need to have a share of me - of what I get".

Household clusters, which other studies (Anderson 1982; Altman 1987; Senior, Perkins & Bern 2002) suggest may be the most appropriate 'economic unit' for analysis in the Indigenous context, can span upto four family households for participants. Daku, a middle-aged InlandTown father, says he regularly shares money, food, clothing and other resources with his sister's household, as she and her husband struggle to find stable employment.

Hanya, a middle-aged single mother in CoastalTown, counts off four households that she

regularly shares money with – her mother and the households of two siblings. Both Daku and Hanya also have their nieces and nephews frequently living with them, particularly over the school holidays.

Housing shortages and chronic overcrowding often further expand the boundary of these larger and fluid household clusters, making it difficult to predict who is 'usually resident' in any household, and also whether it is a 'multi-family' or 'group' household. This difficulty has also been acknowledged by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). Money flows 'downwards' from grandparents and parents to children, and 'across' generations (between siblings) for these household clusters. However, I did not find any talk of 'upward' flows from children to their parents or grandparents.

This characteristic of 'Indigenous Money' in that it flows within and between large and fluid household clusters of extended family is different from money in middle-income Anglo-Celtic Australia, where the couple in a nuclear family household, is the domestic financial unit. 'Anglo-Celtic money' and information about household money, is private to the marital or de facto couple (Singh 1997). Studies in the United Kingdom ((Pahl 1989); (Burgoyne 2004) and Pakeha (non-Maori) households in New Zealand (Fleming et al. 1997; Taiapa 1994) find that couples protect information about their financial affairs.

The way in which domestic 'Indigenous money' flows across household boundaries and the extended family is similar to how money is shared within extended Pacific Islander families, and the Maori '*whanau*' in New Zealand (Taiapa 1994). Resource-flows between the whanau and Maori households involve gifts, loans, hospitality, sharing of goods and services, money and contributions to events and activities. In India too, the domestic boundary is wider than

the nuclear family, and money can be shared (in some contexts) within 'joint' Hindu families (Singh & Bhandari 2012).

Though 'Indigenous money' flows within large household clusters, money is not usually talked about in remote communities. As Darri, an Inlandtown grandmother says "Money is - not really a topic that's discussed in the family unless there is a shortage of it. It is only brought up when it is necessary." Among middle-income Anglo-Celtic households too, money is not usually discussed (Singh 1997), but this is because money is seen as private. Information about money is not generally discussed outside the marital unit, and not always fully shared even within couples.

Elder Jannali, weaving baskets in CoastalTown, however, says "for us - (money is) - not private, we have open hearts...". 'Indigenous money' is not too private to discuss, but just not top-of-mind for households. "Money is needed to survive today - money has a value, but it is limited. Family is everything." says Darri, an InlandTown grandmother. This view of money as a means to procure the essentials for survival, which is prioritised below family, community and culture, is echoed by others, both young and old.

Notions of family, and the large, flexible domestic boundary of related households through which resources (including money) regularly flow, have undoubtedly influenced the way in which 'Indigenous money' is understood in the remote communities studied.

### **Sharing money with family and community prioritized over individual saving**

When participants talk about money, they invariably talk about caring for and sharing with family, both within and across households. They feel they value money differently, prioritising sharing money over saving it, as compared to non-Indigenous ('*balanda*') people.

Money is a means of survival for participants, family is their 'store' of long-term 'value' and

caring their preferred 'unit of account'. This view of money is different to the oft-quoted definition of money (Krugman 1984) in terms of its functions as the 'perfect' medium of exchange, store of value and unit of account.

Money is regularly shared between related households (along with other resources such as food, clothing and shelter) to meet daily needs, in the remote communities studied. Elders link such sharing to traditional obligations based along 'gurrutu', or kinship lines.

InlandTown elder Jarrah says:

"In my Yolŋu culture, I have a family structure and I know what I need to do for each person in that family structure. Whatever I have, food or clothes or money, I have to distribute it to these people based on that family structure. That is what is important to me – not that money itself, or the food or the clothes".

If there is no money available to be shared in a particular week, some participants rely on hunting to keep the family fed. The game from such hunting is also shared between related households. Sharing also extends to occasional expenses such as a large bill or unexpected medical costs. Funerals and traditional ceremonies are very expensive, and the host's extended family and kin are expected to share the costs of travel, accommodation, food and ceremonial payments (eg. flour, tobacco, cloth, axes etc.).

Saving is not mentioned in participants' stories about how they use their money, until I ask about it. When asked, participants say that sharing money is more important to them than saving it, as compared to non-Indigenous people. "We don't save like the *balanda*" says young Umina in a CoastalTown interview. Others agree, seeing non-Indigenous people as more likely to 'hold on' to their money or prioritise saving for themselves, over demonstrating caring for family by sharing it. Participants who do talk about having saved



money, did it for one-off purchases such as cars or household goods. Regular saving, investment and wealth creation were not mentioned.

Participants both young and old, also talk about sharing money as 'saving' and 'investing' in their family and in their culture. "My mother, she put her money in me and my brother" says young CoastalTown participant Umina. Other participants agree that in the longer term, sharing with their family is more important than putting money away in a savings account, as family will be there to care for them, should things go wrong in future. "Money won't cry for you", said Arunta, a middle-aged man interviewed in Darwin as part of the Smart Services CRC project.

"If you get sick and can't work, you get less money ...but family will care for you, when you got no money" echoes Camira. A middle-aged remote community resident who moved into Darwin a decade ago, she shares her rented home with her parent, siblings and their families. During the interview, she refers to them as her 'savings'. In an earlier study, Martin (1995) reached this same conclusion i.e. sharing and creating a future reciprocal obligation can be considered opportunities for Indigenous people to create future wealth and 'investment'.

Such sharing is perceived as 'giving' not 'lending' as elder Jarrah explains it - "It's a '*mundhurr*' - a gift of appreciation. I could ask you for \$100, you've got to give me straightaway - as long as you live, we have an arrangement between us." A study of income and expenditure in Ngukurr (Senior, Perkins & Bern 2002) found that up to 16 per cent of discretionary household expenditure was in the form of shared gifts. Participants agree that this extent of sharing and gifting would be true in their own communities too, with young InlandTowner Tallara suggesting it may even be the reverse. "I reckon its 20 per cent you actually keep!" she quips.

Sharing, seen as a natural part of life by both young and older respondents, satisfies more than just the survival needs of extended family – it also makes the participants feel good.

Cobar, a young married man now living in Darwin, declares “It’s good to have money - when it’s there, for looking after your family.” This contrasts with the literature on Anglo-Celtic money which suggests a more one-way inter-generational flow of money, from the older generation to the younger ones (Singh 1997) rather than this freer flow.

Taree, a key informant who is a non-Indigenous academic specialising in language, has lived and worked amongst the Yolŋu people of northeast Arnhemland (Northern Australia), for many decades. He also ties sharing back to traditional law, saying “Yolŋu have a strong belief in ‘*lay-gora*’, the ethic of sharing – people want to give money away because they feel good when they do, not because someone is asking them to share it.”

Although the sharing of money seems co-operative and interdependent, it is not always a positive experience. “Usually this is working well” says Miro, a traditional owner at a board meeting in Darwin. “But then sometimes it’s that humbug that creates a lot of stress for me.” ‘Humbugging’ refers to demands from extended family that money (cash, bank keycards, Personal Identification Numbers (PINs) or even BasicCards) be shared with them (Peterson 1993). Failure to share causes tension and even social ostracism, pitting individual desire to control one’s own money against an obligation to share. Other studies (Singh 2013) have highlighted similar moral imperatives to share money with extended kin and clan networks in Africa.

Though the literature makes frequent reference to ‘humbugging’ amongst Indigenous communities in Australia, in both towns studied elders usually avoid speaking about it, as it is

associated with shame. Some younger participants do bring it up in individual interviews.

Hanya, a middle-aged CoastalTown single mother with five children, says:

“It [humbug] doesn’t work for me –I just don’t like to give things away to people, even family. I just tell them, I’ve got a house to pay off, and bills. If I give money away to people, when I need money, who will I go and ask for money? I’m too embarrassed to go and ask my own family for money, but sometimes they kind of press you.”

This reluctance to share has resulted in some tension for Hanya. She says, “Me and my daughter, they say to us – we act like a white person. They think I think like white people.”

Despite this, she says she regularly supports her brother’s family and often has two of his children living with her, as he and his wife struggle to find stable employment. Similarly Daku, living in a large multi-family household in InlandTown, says he regularly supports the household of his sister and her family, but will often refuse to share with others. He says, “I tell them ‘Go away. Find a job and get your own money’”.

Only one of my participants (elder Allora) runs a small business providing cultural awareness training. For her, the boundary within which money flows gets blurred between family and her business. She is often pressed to share her ‘business-money’ with her family, which makes it difficult for her to separate her ‘personal-money’ from this ‘business-money’. Describing how a non-Indigenous colleague helps her to manage her finances, she says “I know I got to do this business white-fella way – keep the business money away”. Yet she admits she find this very difficult to do, and often ends up not having any of her earnings left for herself.

Demand sharing also contributes to a reluctance to save, as any 'extra' (discretionary) money increases the likelihood of being humbugged. Bakana, a young woman recently relocated to Darwin, muses "When I was home, there was family - asking, and arguing - wanting my money when I am working for it. That's why I had to get out of there". As Fleming (1997) and Taiapa (1994) found in Maori households living in New Zealand who actively support whanau events and activities, living in 'two cultures' extracts additional costs, as people must live by the rules of 'both' worlds.

Participants also describe how money received can be immediately withdrawn, to prevent possible misuse by other family members who know their personal banking details. Elders (particularly women) are more likely to be the target of humbugging, often by their children and grandchildren. Young Pangari says of her mother "We humbug her – that's why she froze all the money for my little one." Pangari's comments were followed by a long silence by the others in an InlandTown yarning circle.

Some participants freeze their 'pay', not just due to humbugging, but to avoid the temptation of spending it immediately, sometimes on unnecessary purchases. Pindan a prominent InlandTown official, admits that when he has it, money burns a hole in his pocket. "Money is (so) tempting. I know I should save, but I spend it all now anyway." This view of money as a 'transient' commodity to be used up now, as opposed to a longer-term 'store of value' is echoed by key informant Adoni. Exploring saving habits amongst remote Indigenous communities, Adoni concluded that 'saving' was being construed more as a short-term, delayed consumption than a longer-term activity.

Cultural obligations to share money combined with the temptation to spend it immediately, within the backdrop of generally low incomes, make saving difficult in remote communities.

These factors also influence a shorter-term view of money as a means of survival, as opposed to it being seen as a longer-term store of value. Those who do manage to save, do so by 'hiding' money away in a separate account (often with restricted withdrawals), to resist the lure of immediate spending. Kinship obligations and a sharing culture have led to sharing money being prioritised over saving, in the remote communities studied.

### **Money has been imposed from the outside**

The third distinctive characteristic of 'Indigenous money' is that in remote communities, participants see it as having been imposed on them, from outside their traditional culture. Introduced to remote Indigenous community life with the collapse of the missions in the 1960's, early education about money (if at all offered) failed to connect with traditional Indigenous cultural ethos and world-views, leaving many people confused about the full 'money-story'. Participants label money as 'foreign', 'introduced', '*balanda* -culture', which is disconnected from their traditional knowledge systems and law.

Whilst many Anglo-Celtic Australian households also struggle with managing money, research highlights that Indigenous people are the least confident with managing money, and least likely to feel 'in control' of money (The Social Research Centre 2011). I argue that the underlying 'disconnect' between traditional cultural knowledge and '*balanda*' money, is at the heart of this struggle.

The participants of my study see money as necessary for their survival, because it is the 'white-fella way' to get what Indigenous people need and want, yet elders say many people are confused about it, and are not 'connecting' money to their traditional knowledge about using 'valued' resource wisely. Ganan, an InlandTown elder says, "Money - to me it's just..

like a paper... But I need to value it, to live in the western world, so my life can be meaningful in Yolŋu. We need that pride. We need to build that.”

Traditional languages in both towns have words for valuable objects, and obligations under traditional law governing the use of valued resources, but not for money per se. Elders describe how valued objects such as ochre, ceremonial axes or possum fur would be carried in woven ‘*bulpu*’ or string-bags, with specially designated colours, beads or feathers signifying the value of the objects in the bag. However, money (in terms of a currency) did not have a role in traditional pre-colonial life and knowledge systems, including traditional law governing resource usage, exchange and trade.

Elder Ganan describes how traditional law assigned obligations to each individual, to collectively use and preserve (‘respect’) valued resources wisely. “In Yolŋu, we call it ‘*djambatj*’ - means like caring.. for the system, for the law. How to value the meat or wallaby or the yams - and how to cook it properly ..to make it last.”

When asked whether these obligations apply to modern-day money, Ganan says his people may not be making this connection. Money is a relatively recent introduction to these remote communities. Studies (Martin 1995; Trudgen 2000) have documented how Indigenous people were forced onto missions, and workers compensated via rations, not cash, up until the late 1960s. The dismantling of the missions coincided with the abrupt introduction of ‘welfare-money’, however, as participants recount and other research has found (Russell, Yoosuf & Cattlin 2011) people on remote communities may not have been given the education or opportunity to fully understand the full ‘money-story’ on their own terms.

“Yolŋu people has not been educated... on what is the meaning of the money.. the money-side of the story.. how money should be respected and how should the money be used" says

InlandTown elder Ganan. This lack of inter-generational experience with managing money limits the opportunity for young Indigenous people to acquire financial skills from their family, which global studies acknowledge is the most common way that people acquire financial skills (Lusardi 2008). Limited employment opportunities and the resulting welfare dependency have further reduced opportunities to gain this understanding, according to elder Jarrah. Being given money without being given the opportunity to earn it, negates the idea of money as a medium of exchange for 'respectful' work or trade.

In pre-colonial times, both InlandTown and CoastalTown had a history of traditional trade and exchange with other tribes in Australia, and also internationally with Macassans from Indonesia. Although the Indonesian word for money ('rupiyah') is now part of everyday language, people in these communities do not connect their traditional exchange with modern-day money. Elder Lowan at the InlandTown mens' yarning circle emphasises "We were trading yes, with Macassans – our fathers - but (for) food, axe – not for money".

Jarrah views traditional exchange as more of a social opportunity to build goodwill and closer relationships amongst tribes "It was .. people exchanging stuff.. it wasn't a value for dollar, .. it was just a trade-off thing. But with that, we used to build a lot of good relationships between tribes.. and become good friends".

Anthropologists and historians similarly describe pre-colonial Indigenous trade and exchange (Thomson 1949) within the social context of strengthening goodwill, relationships and exchanging culture and knowledge. This would over-ride the economic aspect of obtaining supplies of good quality or scarce 'necessary' items (eg. axeheads, soft-wood shields or red ochre) from neighbouring groups.

Key informant Akama further clarifies the disconnect between traditional understandings of 'value', exchange and introduced money:

“.. [commerce] is not a foreign concept, what is foreign is the paper ...or plastic stuff that turned up, which people have no understanding of. They cannot see any connections between the money of today and the things they saw [as valuable] in the old days”.

For many people, money is a 'white-fella'-introduced 'problem' which has caused stress and grief. Weaving baskets in CoastalTown, elder Jannali says:

“People had dreaming - never used to worry about money, they just went about hunting, do their thing - sing, learning about culture, teach their children. Never worry about money, until white man brought it in’.

When I question why money once introduced, has caused stress and grief, participants relate stories about having to make money-related choices which clash with their inherent cultural values and beliefs.

Young Bakana loves her family yet she had to move away from her home on a remote community to the city, to escape the pressure to share her money. She says “Money - it’s a heart-broke.. like when you lose money, it’s really heart-broke – you feel stressed, angry if you lose it.” By distancing herself from her family, she is able to control the use of her own money, yet this choice has caused her some unhappiness as she misses them.

Grandmother Darri also moved to the city to be with her family – recalling her life on the remote communities, she tells a similar story. “My mother.. taught us about sharing, and how money is not important. You can get really stressful over money – you can get sick. When it



is short, it creates stress - that's what we learned". Before money came into her mother's life, the family was able to share resources without feeling stressed about them being used up – food, clothing and shelter were available, even if as rations from the missions.

Today though, money is needed to obtain resources, even gifts given to family visiting during traditional ceremonies, as young Tallara explains “you need money to buy the gifts for ceremony.. to family as .. appreciation - like thank you for coming and spending your time for dancing with us”. A shortage of money embarrasses people if they are not able to fulfil their traditional ceremonial role as hosts.

These stories reveal that the disconnect from traditional knowledge, combined with money-choices that clash with Indigenous cultural norms, exacerbate my participants' view that money is a problem imposed on them by 'white-fella' (non-Indigenous people). Research finds that viewing money as a problem reduces the ability of individuals to use it as a resource to achieve their own goals (The Social Research Centre 2011). These findings may help to explain *why* Indigenous people are over-represented amongst those who struggle with managing money.

### **Role of elders in using money wisely**

Confusion about the 'money-story' causes shame and creates stress, particularly for participants who are community elders. Elders have a unique position in Indigenous communities, their traditional role being that of the keepers of knowledge, who lead by example and pass on the right knowledge to the right people at the right time (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation 2014). However, participating elders feel that money compromises this traditional role, as their own confusion about money makes it difficult for them to show the young the right way to manage and preserve money.

Elders repeatedly say they want to learn more about the full 'money-story', so that they can fulfil this traditional role. Pindan, an emerging leader in InlandTown, says that though money was imposed by the '*balanda*', his people have to now learn how to use it wisely, to achieve their goals. He says:

“In the old days money could mean nothing to us - it was a *balanda* thing. But now it is for everybody – *balanda* and Yolŋu, because that *rupiyah*, if you save it properly.. that could take you anywhere you like”.

Elder Ganan agrees, and says it's the elders who must take the leadership to help his people do this. “We .. have to [have] more talk on it, sit down and talk, educate one another. The leaders, the elders have to do that.” Current financial education programs focus primarily on the young through the formal education system (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2014). Essential as these program are, the knowledge gap for Indigenous elders remains.

Under traditional systems for managing and preserving valued resources, individuals knew the role they were expected to play in ensuring collective benefit, and the authority of the elders would keep individual greed and selfishness in check. Ganan says:

“If I go to get turtles from the sea, the ladies know that we've gone out. They get lentils, coals, wood.. dig the hole. When we come, they start burning, getting the leaves, sticks. So while we are doing our part, they are doing their part”.

'Humbug' may be symptomatic of individuals not understanding their obligation to assist others in managing their own money, and of elders being unable to exercise their authority to enforce this given their own confusion about the full money-story, according to elder Ganan.

Also, using money without fully understanding rules attached to its use, can have adverse consequences for the unwary user.

Ganan feels that if elders were able to explain the role of each individual in the 'money-story' in terms of traditional law, then individuals may better recognise their obligation to support others in managing their own money. Also elders would be able to role-model the right way to manage and respect money. He says, "Yolŋu people like myself, I got the 'djambatj' and understanding. Maybe if I interpret, connect - that system to this new western world system - that will help them to properly look after their money."

Ganan feels fortunate to be able to put his ideas into practise, as his advisory role with a local bank requires him to liaise with their InlandTown customers, explaining the banks' policies, terms and conditions, and documentation requirements. Ganan also offers a valuable insight into how saving can be better connected to traditional knowledge systems. He acknowledges how difficult it is to save in an environment where low incomes, few employment opportunities and cultural obligations combine. Moreover, people feel guilty about saving for their individual needs, and women in particular, tend to express their nurturing through giving money away. However, he feels that if he could explain saving in terms of 'caring for oneself' then maybe he can encourage more people to save – he would tell women that by caring for themselves, they are able to better care for others in future.

Pindan feels he has a strategy for how individuals can save without feeling pressured to give the money away to others instead – he is planning to start saving to buy a vehicle. When his relatives ask him to share money, he plans to say "From now on, families, friends – from today, I'm not gonna give you any money - I gotta save it. I gonna buy a motorcar and when I have it – I'll take you hunting, visiting". By ensuring that his future purchase can offer a

collective benefit to his family and friends, he feels confident that he will win the support of his family, to continue to save his money till he achieves his goal. In this way, Pindan is using the traditional Indigenous norm of ensuring collective benefits to enable his individual goal, offering an invaluable insight into how to connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems.

Taree, a key informant who has worked in remote Arnhemland for many decades, explains how financial debt, which is common in mainstream Western understandings, can leave an Indigenous borrower feeling exceptionally stressed, in terms of traditional Indigenous belief in the '*marr*' ('spiritual power' or 'honour') which is associated with returning an obligation. Taree explains that an Indigenous person receives something, he feels obliged to return what is a fair value, in terms of the '*marr*' associated with what was received. Until the point that this is achieved, says Taree 'the one who receives is beholden – his '*marr*' or spirit is 'tied', until he can return the favour and free his honour'. Whilst being in debt is a common source of worry for most people, it can create tremendous stress for Indigenous people, so Taree uses '*marr*' to explain financial options to his Yolŋu friends.

Another key informant Akama agrees, and further elaborates on how he uses traditional understandings to explain other 'Western' debt-related terms such as 'interest' and 'repayment' to people on remote communities. Akama says:

“In traditional understandings, once you have given back what you regard is a fair exchange, that ends the debt. The concept that you had to keep repaying a debt, or that you had to pay more than the amount you originally took, which is the interest, confuses some people”.

Akama then described how he explains these concepts to his Yolŋu friends, in terms of one person borrowing a hen from another – the borrower had to return the hen, but also any eggs (*mapu*) that the hen has laid.

‘You’ve got the *rumbal*, the body of the bird, which is the actual loan amount of the debt. And then you’ve got the *mapu* which is the interest payment. So the bank is giving you the *rumbal*, the body, and expecting some eggs back from that as well’.

By connecting the knowledge systems, he finds people are able to quickly clear up any confusion about financial options such as hire-purchase and loans.

Key informant Bardo, who has conducted research on water management in Yolŋu society, also describes how elders succeeded in connecting governance requirements such as accountability, to traditional knowledge systems. The elders ascribed water, and the responsibility to ‘look after it’, to particular kinship groups, thereby invoking traditional obligations and accountability for maintaining valued resources on behalf of the collective.

Bardo says:

“The connectedness of water as a resource to particular interests, is something that needed to be acknowledged from the very beginning - as a way to prevent it from being an abstract sort of resource, that doesn’t actually belong to anybody, so people have no real accountability for it”.

These real-life examples show how building the financial capability of Indigenous elders and empowering them to connect the understanding of the ‘money-story’ to traditional knowledge systems, can build on existing Indigenous cultural strengths such as creating more awareness of individual obligations to use money the ‘right way’, and support others’ use of it. Given

their obvious desire to lead their own people in managing money with respect, the elders can supplement learnings from existing financial education programs which target young Indigenous people, in far more culturally appropriate ways.

In addition to building individual financial capability, elders also express a strong desire to lead entrepreneurial efforts on behalf of their communities. Although only one of my participants (elder Allora) runs her own business, I was able to interact with some Indigenous small business owners at a public conference on enhancing commercial capability for remote Indigenous communities that I was invited to participate in – the overwhelming majority were elders.

Building commercial capability in remote Indigenous communities, and encouraging greater economic participation via entrepreneurship is a strong policy focus (Hunt 2011). A private study commissioned by a government department, on Indigenous financial and commercial capability (Two Way Communications 2012) found that there are differences in the way certain business and commercial concepts are understood in remote Indigenous communities. Of the nine participants with business ideas they wanted to develop further, seven were elders.

Enabling elders in remote communities to establish a 'common language' for financial and commercial knowledge could therefore allow these concepts to be talked about in a way that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous listeners can understand (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2011).

## **A culturally distinctive 'Indigenous money' in remote communities**

The discussion above shows how family, culture and historical experiences have shaped a culturally distinctive 'Indigenous money' for participants in remote communities, when compared to the literature on 'Anglo-Celtic money' in Australia discussed in chapter two. 'Indigenous money' flows within and between clusters of related households, rather than being bound within a nuclear household as 'Anglo-Celtic money' is. Participants say they prioritise 'Indigenous money' for sharing over saving, as compared to Anglo-Celtic folk. 'Indigenous money' is disconnected from traditional knowledge systems, law, norms of exchange and trade, having been imposed from the outside. Traditional obligations to 'respect' valued resources by using them wisely may not connect with money. Although recognized as important for survival, many people are confused about money, and do not feel confident about managing it. This compromises the traditional role of the elders, in showing the young how to use money wisely. Some see it as a 'white-fella'-introduced 'problem' which has caused them stress and grief, and avoid having to manage it.

Although this was not my direct focus, I also found that this culturally distinctive understanding of 'Indigenous money' flows through my participants' stories about managing and controlling money in their daily financial lives. The literature on the sociology of money has focused on 'domestic-money', so in the next section, I investigate the management, use and control of 'Indigenous money' within households in the remote communities studied. Participants' attitudes and feelings about money, as well as their goals and aspirations about money are essential elements of financial capability, so I have explored how 'Indigenous money' influences these, in chapter six.

## Household Management and Control of 'Indigenous money'

'Indigenous money' is routinely shared across household clusters, and its most important use for my participants is when it facilitates caring for their extended family and kin. Many participants 'feel good' about themselves, when they are in a position to give money away to others. 'Indigenous money' is therefore more a medium of maintaining and nurturing relationships for participants, than the medium of exchange described in economics. The act of giving 'Indigenous money' away also creates a reciprocal obligation for the receiver, offering the giver some protection against future financial uncertainty. This makes family, not money, the store of longer-term 'value' for participants, and caring their preferred unit of account. Again, these findings contrast with the functional definition of money in economics.

'Indigenous money' is able to offer a positive experience for participants when it facilitates and reinforces their social and cultural norms of relatedness, sharing and reciprocity, but causes stress and grief when money-choices clash with these norms. Participants' stories shows that they manage and control 'Indigenous money' whilst maintaining relationships and cultural obligations, which results in culturally distinctive ways of household budgeting, discretionary spending and banking. I describe these further in the sections below.

Many participants are unable to find appropriate employment, and must rely primarily on welfare benefits. They refer to benefits as their 'pay', connecting them to the recipient i.e. husband's money (usually unemployment benefit), wife's money (usually family benefit) or kids' money (usually child payments). Households which have multiple sources of 'pay' are likely to be in a better position to smoothen household expenses. Those reliant on a single source often struggle to meet expenses in the '*mayaltha*' or 'down' week, where there is no pay expected.



Although three generations of his family are cramped together in a three-bedroom home, elder Ganan feels fortunate to be able to spread household expenses, and meet needs. He says “one daughter has the food money... to organise kids’ food from the shop. Other get stuff to wash plates, or Chux or toilet paper.. and my son throws in a bit more money”. For those reliant on a single fortnightly income, young Cobar says “on a pay-day, it’s all taxis and tailor-made and the next day its bumpers and buses – they rich on that one day, the next day they go back to being poor”.

### *‘Chuck-in’ style of budgeting and managing ‘Indigenous money’*

The management and control of ‘Anglo-Celtic money’ in middle-income, Anglo-Celtic households in Australia (Singh 1997) is described as ‘joint’, reflecting the ideology of marriage as an equal partnership, women’s increasing employment and increased joint home ownership. The boundary of ‘Anglo-Celtic money’ is the married couple and their dependent children, with couples ‘jointly’ controlling their money, typically pooling incomes and expenses into a joint bank account. Also the notion of ‘control’ over money is not based on physical access to money, but relates to control exercised through the budgeting process before the money is used, and through the monitoring process afterwards.

In contrast, amongst the remote Indigenous communities studied, there are likely to be multiple families or related groups within a household at any point in time. The total money available and its allocation to meet common household expenses such as utilities, rent and food, is a matter of informal negotiation amongst those living in the household, not just the couple. Although respondents were not directly asked, none of the participants talked about trying to ascertain the exact amount of money available to their household in any given week.

Possibly, it's not the amount available that's of concern, rather whether it's sufficient to cover expenses till the next 'pay-day'.

Asked to describe how she covers household expenses, Darri says "it is common to 'chuck-in' money for shopping, when the family gets together". Ganan elaborates "We call it chuck-in money, (because) family throw money or chuck in money, share money...to buy food ..expenses for the house, children's clothing, to get them to school."

'Chuck-in' describes an informal, voluntary contribution made by eligible residents of the household, designed to meet current expenses. There are no formal rules about who needs to contribute how much, how much will be shared or kept separate. Whoever is resident in the household 'chucks in' or 'throws' whatever they can contribute at the time, towards common expenses. The person receiving their benefit that week may chuck in more, but this doesn't appear to be strictly enforced by the rest. This lack of deliberation makes the 'chuck-in' style of money management different from other systems described in the literature on money in low-income households (see Pahl 1989; Vogler & Pahl 1993) and Singh's study (1997) of 'Anglo-Celtic money' in middle-income Australia.

If the amount 'chucked-in' is insufficient to meet the bills, the women in the household will first try to negotiate with residents to chuck in more money, then direct efforts towards collecting the shortfall from other related households. If the amount collected via 'chuck-in' is sufficient, then members may have 'extra' money which they can use towards their personal discretionary spending. Women often complain that men are more likely to try to dodge paying their fair share.

### *Controlling 'Indigenous money'*

Women tend to be the ones managing 'Indigenous money' on a daily basis, whilst men are the ones who make the 'big' decisions about money. This contrasts with studies (Singh 1997) which find that 'Anglo-Celtic money' in middle-income Australia is managed and controlled 'jointly' by married couples, where decision making is also seen as 'joint'. Yet these findings resonate with other research amongst lower-income households (Pahl 1989; Vogler & Pahl 1993; Stocks, Diaz-Martinez & Hallerod 2007) which finds that women tend to shoulder the responsibility of managing the finances and making ends meet.

Given many participants are reliant on government benefits, the notion of control of household money being linked with the earning of money, is less relevant yet individual ownership of money is reflected in the way money is associated with the intended recipient of the benefit. Also the notion that control of money within 'Anglo-Celtic' households can be exercised via information about money, and household budgeting and monitoring processes, is less relevant for participants of this study.

Participants, when asked about control of money within the household, tend to talk instead about controlling their desire to spend money immediately. I tried rephrasing and explaining the question further, yet it did not elicit any response from participants. This aligns with other research (Taiapa 1994) which found that unlike Anglo-Celtic ('*pakeha*' or non-Maori) households, a greater responsibility to manage and control money in the household did not equate to greater power, amongst Maori households. This, combined with the lower priority given to money vis-à-vis caring for family, could explain why less effort is made under the informal 'chuck-in' system of managing 'Indigenous money', to ascertain information about money, or deliberately monitor and control money in Indigenous households.

### *Spending 'Indigenous money'*

Although 'Indigenous money' invariably ends up allocated towards shared use, the owner of the money is allowed some independence in determining how much they will share with the household and how much they will retain for their personal discretionary spending. Given low incomes, the first household priority is meeting family needs (food, power, clothing, schooling etc.) but both men and women say they try to keep some 'extra' money for personal wants such as travel, alcohol, smokes, card-games or visits to the casino.

Gender influences how people use this discretionary 'extra'-money. Some women complain that 'husband'-money is used by men as they please, but 'wife'-money is used to provide food, clothing and necessities for the family, especially for the children. This resonates with studies of 'Anglo-Celtic money' in Australia (Singh 1997) and other studies across the globe (Eroglu 2009; Singh 2013) where women see their husbands as freer with money or 'spendthrift' in their ways. This is found to be true irrespective of the type of household money management system practiced.

In households I studied, 'kids'-money is often lumped with 'wife'-money and used to fund household expenses. Participants describe giving children significant amounts as 'spending' money to purchase goodies at the community store, or trips undertaken at boarding school. This is unusual compared to an Anglo-Celtic context, where parents would not willingly hand over substantial amounts to children to spend as they please (Martin 1995).

Young adults earning their own 'work'-money also enjoy a fair degree of independence regarding how they spend their money. None of the young adults in my study, have been asked to contribute towards household expenses – hence I observe that 'Indigenous money' does not flow 'upwards'. Parents however, continue to support their adult children and

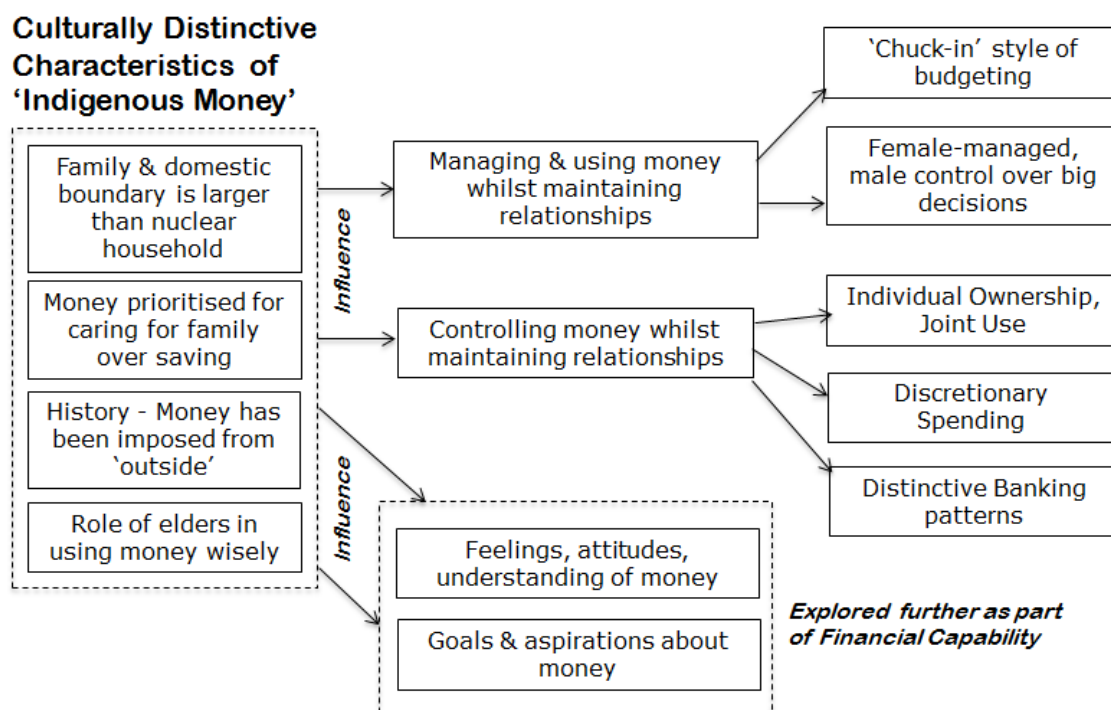
grandchildren. Indigenous money therefore flows 'downwards' from older generations in remote areas, and also 'across' generations, as it is regularly shared amongst siblings.

### *Banking and 'Indigenous money'*

Culturally distinctive ways of controlling 'Indigenous money' are also apparent in the way people conduct their banking. Although not a direct area of focus, local bank staff participated in my research – also the Smart Services CRC project on mobile banking involved thirteen interviews with InlandTown participants about banking, and transaction-level information from bank staff. Similar to other research (Singh et al. 2007) I found personal banking information (eg. passwords, Personal Identification Numbers) is regularly shared amongst family and kin, heightening privacy and security concerns about money in the bank account.

The resulting banking patterns include repeated balance enquiries, and withdrawing the entire balance once received. Efforts are made to control money received by pre-allocating regular expenses, and maintaining multiple bank accounts to 'hide' money. Many people are confused about banking terms and conditions hence incur higher fees, or are unaware of ways to 'know and grow' money (i.e. saving and investments).

I link the culturally distinctive characteristics of 'Indigenous money' with participants' stories about managing and controlling money in their households, in the diagram below:



**Diagram 3: A framework for describing the culturally distinctive 'Indigenous money'**

This framework for describing the understanding, management and control of 'Indigenous money' in remote communities studied formed the lens through which I explored money in the subsequent phases of my study. In chapter five, I explore the understanding of 'Indigenous money' in regional and urban communities, and compare and contrast this understanding to the framework developed in remote communities. Again, whilst this was not the direct focus of my study, I also discuss participants' stories about managing and controlling money in their households and consider aspects of financial behavior i.e. managing, using and controlling money whilst maintaining relationships.

In chapter six I place my findings about 'Indigenous money' within the theoretical framework of the human development and capability approach, in order to explore Indigenous views on financial capability and well-being. This chapter also explores participants' feelings, attitudes, competencies, goals and aspirations about money, as well as

how they want to act (individually and collectively) to determine their own financial futures. In Chapter seven, I summarise the conclusions that I have discussed in detail in chapters four, five and six, based on the findings detailed in these chapters. I also discuss how my studies contributes to knowledge, theory and policy – in particular, I describe some practical ways in which policymakers can incorporate my findings into their ongoing efforts to promote Indigenous financial inclusion in Australia.

## **Chapter Five: 'Indigenous money' in regional and urban**

### **Australia**

The framework for understanding 'Indigenous money' described in chapter four helped me answer my first subsidiary question about the understanding of 'Indigenous money' amongst participants in remote communities. This chapter focuses on answering the my second subsidiary question regarding how the understanding of 'Indigenous money' differs across remote, regional and urban Indigenous communities, by comparing and contrasting participants' stories about money. I have chosen to represent the experience in regional and urban communities together as I found it to be similar, but have highlighted differences wherever applicable, particularly between experiences in the Top-end (i.e. Northern Territory) and the 'Southern' states (i.e. New South Wales and Victoria) of Australia.

### **Setting the Context: Regional and Urban Indigenous communities**

Three related and recurring themes emerge throughout participants' stories in regional and urban communities. The first relates to how participants feel they fit into society as a whole, particularly their lack of employment opportunities. The second is about participants' perceptions of racism and discrimination, whilst the third is about a struggle to establish their cultural identity vis-à-vis mainstream (non-Indigenous) Australia. These inter-related themes form an important backdrop to my subsequent exploration about money in my participants' daily lives.

My regional study involved forty-two participants from six towns in New South Wales (labelled 'QuarryTown' and 'MiningTown'), Victoria ('FruitTown' and 'GoldTown') and Northern Territory ('RiverTown' and 'HubTown'). I conducted these studies with the assistance of Indigenous organisations based in these regional centres identified from my



existing networks, where the management agreed to facilitate introductions to their staff and clients. Although each of the six towns has been given a separate label to afford privacy and confidentiality, I have reflected on the regional experience as a whole, as I found the responses from participants to be very similar.

The proportion of the Indigenous population in the regional towns studied, is considerably smaller than in remote communities, as described in Table 5. The proportion of the working-age population which is Indigenous is almost four times higher in the Northern Territory, when compared to the 'Southern' states. Despite differences between regional centres, Indigenous unemployment rates are higher than the national average rate of 5.7% p.a.

Regional locations also have fewer bank branches and ATMs than urban cities.

Regional Centre (State)	Introductions via	% working-age population which is Indigenous	Unemployed % Indigenous (vs. non-Indigenous)	Post-school qualifications % Indigenous (vs. non-Indigenous)
QuarryTown (New South Wales)	Local Cultural & Educational Centre	2.29%	11.9 (vs. 4.9)	29.16 (vs. 41.55)
MiningTown (New South Wales)	Local Centacare	5.77%	21.6 (vs. 7.6)	19.66 (vs. 32.05)
FruitTown (Victoria)	Professional & personal networks	2.07%	18.2 (vs. 4.8)	23.25 (vs. 35.44)
GoldTown (Victoria)	Local TAFE	0.98%	17.1 (vs. 4.9)	26.96 (vs. 42.75)
RiverTown (Northern Territory)	Professional & personal networks	22.58%	26.2 (vs. 2.3)	15.52 (vs. 52.67)
HubTown (Northern Territory)	Professional & personal networks	32.56%	19.4 (vs. 2.0)	10.17 (vs. 55.44)

**Table 5: Describing Sample Sites - Regional Indigenous communities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011)**

My urban study included thirty-eight participants from three major cities, in Northern Territory ('NorthCity'), New South Wales ('NewCity') and Victoria ('VicCity') as described in Table 6 below. In referencing my urban consultations, instead of using a single moniker to cover them all as I did for the regional consultations, I have used the monikers 'NorthCity' and 'SouthCity' to distinguish between participants from the Top-End (i.e. Northern Territory) and 'down-south' (the 'southern' states of New South Wales and Victoria). This became important as I found some differences in the participant responses between these areas.

Urban centre (State)	Introductions via	% working-age population which is Indigenous	Unemployed % Indigenous (vs. non-Indigenous)	Post-school qualifications % Indigenous (vs. non-Indigenous)
NorthCity (Northern Territory)	Professional & personal networks	7.78%	11.7% (vs. 3.1%)	25.23% (vs. 50.81%)
NewCity (New South Wales)	Local cultural & educational centre & personal networks	1.02%	13.2% (vs. 5.6%)	29.84% (vs. 45.13%)
VicCity (Victoria)	Government & personal networks	0.37%	11.1% (vs. 5.4%)	33.95% (vs. 47.90%)

**Table 6: Describing Sample Sites - Urban Indigenous communities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011)**

Whilst remote communities have always struggled with very low employment, participants in regional areas describe previously thriving communities which have in the last decade or so,

increasingly shown signs of distress. Employment particularly opportunities for lower-skilled, casual and seasonal work such as fruit picking or manual labour have dried up as manufacturing has withdrawn, factories have wound up and farms have been abandoned. For Indigenous people in particular, the withdrawal of the Community Development Employment Program ('CDEP') has hit hard. This is probably why participants, particularly in regional areas, mention the lack of employment opportunities so often.

A closer analysis of my data makes this clear – eight of nineteen participants interviewed in regional areas are unemployed, compared with one of sixteen urban interviewees. Also four regional interviewees have part-time employment, compared with two in urban consultations. Of those participants who are employed, particularly in the regional areas, many are engaged in community development programs (funded mainly by government) which offer only project-based, shorter-term and irregular work opportunities.

Coorain (a young man who grew up in regional NSW) says the loss of opportunities to work leaves people dependent on welfare 'people are only able to get government money'.

Although some interviewees in regional areas talk about wanting to set up their own businesses instead of seeking employment elsewhere, it was difficult for me to locate business owners to interview, till a chance referral led me to an opportunity to conduct a yarning circle with three men who were running their own businesses. In urban locations though, I was able to locate Indigenous business owners via a published business directory, and interviewed seven business owners.

Many regional participants represent the second or third generation living in the same area, yet have lost connection with their ancestral lands as their parents or grandparents were part of the 'stolen' generations. Forcibly removed from their families and herded onto missions or

hostels, girls were often raised as domestic help for 'white' families, and boys as farmhands or stockmen on white farms. In contrast, more urban participants represent the first generation to move into the city, away from their extended family. In both regional and urban locations though, many participants say they have lost their connection to ancestral lands, or simply don't know where their ancestors came from, which evokes a sense of loss of connection to culture that was not mentioned in the remote communities. Elders in particular, talk about feeling like they are 'visitors on someone else's lands', increasing their feeling of isolation and being disengaged not just from mainstream society, but also from their own culture.

Participants also talk about facing discrimination and racism in their everyday interaction with mainstream institutions such as education, housing, employment, childcare - this erodes self-esteem and cultural pride, leaving people feeling these institutions are not 'culturally safe' for their people. Elder Barina who has lived in the same regional centre for many decades, feels proud that she was always able to work for her money, yet unemployment has deprived many young Indigenous people of this pride, saying "some of the men - they are ashamed – they lost their jobs, they lost their confidence – now they feel worthless". Young Coorain feels lack of self-esteem also compromises the respect young people afford their own family and community. "You've gotta be able to work and have pride, self-respect - which then gives respect for family and community" he says.

Some regional participants say that growing up, they did not admit their Indigeneity for fear of racial discrimination at school and work. FruitTown elder Ekala feels that mainstream society thinks "we've got nothing to give" which reinforces a negative cultural stereotype for the young. "Society doesn't allow us to think big – to think that we can have our own home

and jobs and education for our kids” she says. Respected FruitTown leader Warra echoes this sentiment, reflecting that “the broader public view aboriginal culture and identity and place – as not having much value”.

In urban areas, I found some participants also talked about discrimination and ‘lateral violence’ from *within* their own community, particularly towards those who have succeeded in setting up their own business. The participants from Southern States (i.e. New South Wales and Victoria) also say that they are not recognised as being Indigenous by those from the ‘North’ (i.e. Australia’s Top-End), where the connection to ancestral lands and traditional culture is stronger. As Konol, successful urban businessman in his sixties explains, he was recently referred to as a ‘middle-class black fella from the eastern states’ by another Indigenous person from the Top-End. There were “whispering campaigns about your service - people bad-mouthing or putting down your quality of services that you offer”.

He felt this type of ‘class divide’ amongst Indigenous people is particularly destructive, given “the struggle for access, and the rights agenda that black folk have been fighting for – now when some of our people get the access, there is others trying to pull them back”. Business-owner Barwon says that sometimes individual success can be seen as ‘bad’ within the community, but if the benefits are shared with the community, that may reduce lateral violence.

No matter how participants people feel about it, what is clear is that this double-whammy of discrimination (from outside and inside the community) and loss of connection with culture is brought more sharply into focus when talking about money in urban areas.

## **'Indigenous money' in regional and urban locations**

Encouraging participants to share their stories about money, its role in their daily lives, how they manage it and want to use it, revealed more than direct questioning could uncover, so I continued to rely on informal story-telling as the best way of introducing and conducting my research. Through participants' stories, I was able to explore how 'Indigenous money' shapes and is shaped by, historical experiences, cultural values and social relationships even in regional and urban areas.

Similar to the experience with participants in the remote consultations, the way people in regional areas talk about money shows that they too seem to be compartmentalising or earmarking money based on the recipient of the money, or the purpose for which the money was going to be used. However, the distinction being made here is not between 'husband'-money and 'wife'-money as in remote areas, but between 'his'-money and 'her'-money and at times, 'our'-money.

Talking about her own experiences with money once partnered, young FruitTown mother Kaiya explains "In the beginning, it was his money and my money and he would give me money out of his pay - but he was still sharing with his brother and sister out on the side". Once the couple had their own children though, she had to convince her partner to focus on their own needs first so they started thinking of it as 'our' money.

A group of GoldTown women discussing money in their households talked about secretly stashing up 'run-away-money' in an undeclared bank account, so that they could escape an abusive domestic relationship with their children, without being financially dependent on their partner. This resonates with other research (Eroglu 2009), which finds women in Turkish households hide savings in 'secret kitties' to maintain some level of financial

independence. Meanwhile, a staff member at a QuarryTown Indigenous community finance hub described how he explains community-credit as 'boomerang-money' to his clients - it's only once they repay their loan, that the next client can access it. He feels this analogy has helped to keep default rates down, as people realize that other members of their family or wider community will be deprived of a loan, should they not pay it back in full.

Money is also at times earmarked for the intended recipient, or purpose for which it will be spent. FruitTown elder Barina describes how the introduction of 'baby'-money (i.e. a previous government incentive linked to births) saw young parents spend the entire amount on toys for their baby 'when they first got this baby-money off Kevin Rudd, they bought \$2,000 of toys and then they couldn't pay \$5 to the taxi to come home!'

The way in which participants talk about money offers a very useful route to explore their underlying social and cultural views. However, in order to answer my second subsidiary question, I needed to compare and contrast the understanding of 'Indigenous money' in regional and urban communities studied, vis-à-vis the framework I developed (described in chapter four) on remote community consultations. In the sections below I investigate each of the four culturally distinctive characteristics of 'Indigenous money' based on stories from regional and urban consultations.

### **Family and the domestic boundary within which money flows**

Similar to the experience in remote communities, the notion of 'family' for my regional and urban participants, refers to not just the nuclear family unit, but also extended family. Young FruitTown mother Kaiya explains 'someone who may not be related - we still call them family.' GoldTown elder Manya has a quotable quip about family – she says "family is not

just who's related to you, but who's got your back – those who care for me and watch over me, that's my family!”.

Although in regional and urban areas participants do not talk about overcrowding as in remote areas, data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012) shows that the average size of Indigenous households (3.3 people) is larger than non-Indigenous households (2.6 people). My data shows that participants from regional locations are more likely to live in shared or group housing, whilst in urban locations more participants are from single-parent households with dependent children. Also young adults are more likely to move out of their parents' home when they become independent, as compared to remote locations where I found young adults continue to live with their parents.

The high mobility and consequent fluidity of the domestic boundary experienced by the remote participants is also not talked about, though many participants in regional areas mention living close to their extended family, and relying on them to offer inter-generational support i.e. help with caring for dependent children, or ageing relatives. More NorthCity participants report having a constant stream of visitors (family and friends) visiting from the bush, for a number of reasons including medical and health issues, visiting family, education, cultural reasons and entertainment. This constant stream of visitors is not a daily occurrence in the Southern states.

Participants in regional and urban areas do share money with extended family, however this is not a regular feature as it is in remote communities. This is more prevalent in regional areas, where fifteen of nineteen interviewees live in single-family households, yet share money and other resources 'as needed' amongst extended family. In urban areas, thirteen of



sixteen participants interviewed live in single-family households, yet say they share money with family 'in case of emergencies'.

Another area of difference from the remote communities is that in regional and urban areas, some younger participants talk about sharing money with older generations (their parents) when they need it. Young FruitTown man Uwan is working full-time and has moved out of home – he stays in a shared house, but often shares money with his mother, who has not managed to find full-time employment since she was retrenched a few years ago. He says “I give out loans – to my sisters and my Mum. When it’s my sisters, I want it back but for Mum, I don’t ask for it back”. Young urban men Coorain and Mandu tell similar stories. This ‘upward’ flow of money contrasts with the primarily ‘downward’ flow of ‘Indigenous money’ I noticed in the remote communities, where younger adults have not been asked to share money with their parents. Could this be because younger adults in regional/urban areas are earning more than their parents, as compared to remoter areas? Similar to the experience of participants in remote communities, most participants from regional areas also say that money was not talked about in their family, when they were growing up. Their parents usually kept money matters to themselves (whether they were working or not) and whilst they may have discussed money amongst themselves, they did not talk to their children (i.e. the participants) about money.

Young FruitTown mother Jarri is tertiary educated and working full-time as a money management worker, yet she never handled money growing up. “We knew he [her father] had bills to pay, but we had never seen any of that, we never got to handle it” she says. In Anglo-Celtic families too, often people did not know how their parents handled money, but this was because money is considered too ‘private’ to discuss (Singh 1997).

Participants' stories in regional and urban areas continue to corroborate my earlier finding from remote consultations, that 'Indigenous money' is not talked about because it is not top of mind, and is only mentioned when there isn't enough to go around. FruitTown elder Warra recalls the only time money was mentioned in his household when he was growing up, was when there was a shortage of it. "The only time cash was really important when I was growing up, was when you had no food" he says.

In contrast to the remote experience though, participants do talk about having to earn their own money from a young age, if they wanted little treats. Young FruitTown mother Kaiya describes how she did odd jobs to earn pocket money for things she wanted to buy. "My mum was a single mum - my sister and I knew that money was very tight. From a young age we used to do babysitting - we'd get paid for things that we wanted to buy".

Also in contrast to the remote experience, many participants say they make a specific effort to discuss money with their own children, even if its only to tell them there is a shortage of it, and encourage them to save. Jarri says she does this so that her children are better prepared to handle money issues than she was. "I talk about money all the time and they had bank accounts from when they were born" she says. When asked why she did this, she says it is to prepare them for the future.

"We talk about the future - they need to go to school, get a job so that they've got money to buy things. We do discuss that - which is different to how I was brought up" says Jarri. Kaiya also makes this effort, and feels it is helping her children to learn about money and the need to save up before they can buy things they want.

Many participants in regional and urban locations, particularly women, also say they have made a special effort to undertake further education, so that they are properly able to

understand money and business, which they feel are not natural skills for their people. Ghera and Mallana describe how they went on to complete school and undertake tertiary education after their children have grown and gone to school. They are very proud of their efforts to undertake this education, and their ability to manage money better than their parents.

### **Prioritising sharing with family and community over individual saving**

Similar to the experience with remote communities, participants from regional and urban areas also talk about how they prioritise sharing with family and community over individual saving, as compared to white people. Regional participants both young and old, describe how they share food, accommodation, caring responsibilities and money, with their extended families. They say this as an essential part of their cultural strength, as compared to non-Indigenous people. Elder Warra describes this sharing as part of their evolutionary DNA, and steeped in traditional law. “If I had more money in my pocket than my other family members - in terms of traditional values and resource allocations, resources belong to the people, not to the person” he says.

“Caring” says young mother Kaiya, is “sharing and being shown love and support through money”. Not sharing money is equated as being greedy, says Kaiya, making people feel “you don’t care about them”. Mandu, a young man who grew up in Sydney but has extended family in regional NSW explains how his grandmother talked about the need to share money, in terms of her favourite game of poker “My grandma said that money is play around that goes around and not back to stack”. Asked to explain what that meant he says “money is something that flows in and flows out and it should. Don’t expect anything else – don’t stack it up for yourself - make sure that it goes around”.

It's not just food and money that's shared. Describing the time he rented a share-house with fellow Indigenous students, Coorain says "People borrowed my shirts and stuff if they want to dress up a bit and go out. That's just how it is – I see it as natural". Elders also talk about sharing information including referrals to service providers (eg. emergency-relief agencies Anglicare or the Salvation Army), financial counsellors, offering to mentor young people etc.

In contrast to the experience of remote communities though, participants don't describe sharing money as a daily or regular occurrence, viewing it more as a fall-back or emergency option, in case family members find themselves in difficulty. Examples mentioned included supplementing food-vouchers in case they are not sufficient to feed the family, looking after siblings' children to give them a break from parenting, or helping elders to travel for medical and social reasons, or the occasional entertainment. Participants from urban areas in contrast to the regional experience, do not mention food being shared with family – instead they talk about spending money on extended family members who might occasionally visit them for a holiday, or helping their parents or siblings out with one-off expenses.

As in remote communities, sharing is considered a natural part of 'being Indigenous', and makes both young and older participants 'feel good' about themselves. Young Coorain earns a good salary and explains how he wants to pay for his cousins to also have the same things he does "because I earn more money than other people.. when the bill comes around, I want to pay for everyone". He remarks his non-Indigenous friends would instead, have wanted everyone to contribute equally in paying the bill. Middle-aged NorthCity father of nine Warrun says money can be a 'term of endearment' or a way of expressing caring, for his people. "People enjoy sharing, enjoy being in a position to give to others" he says. In contrast to the remote experience though, participants in regional and urban areas view sharing money

as 'lending' rather than the 'giving', as they expect the money to be paid back once the receiver is able to do so.

Regional and urban participants also mention pressure from extended family to share food, accommodation, caring responsibilities and money ('demand-sharing'), though they do not refer to it as 'humbug', using words such as 'bullying' and 'standover' tactics instead. I found elders were not silent on this topic, as I experienced in remote communities. Elder Barina describes how on 'pay-day' (i.e. the day a benefit is due), people wait outside a recipient's home in FruitTown, in order to borrow from them. "They're all sitting out the front waiting - and the next day they're sitting at the house around the corner. There is no solution to this problem" she says.

Demands to share money are also felt in a business context, where entrepreneurs are pressured to share earnings, stocks or assets with extended family or the wider community. In contrast to the remote consultations where only one entrepreneur (elder Allora) was able to be interviewed, I conducted a yarning circle with three regional businessmen, and also included seven business-owners in urban areas. They all mention demands to share money, with urban businessman Konol saying "anyone in trouble quite happily rings me up and ask for funds". However, he decides whether or not to oblige, depending on whether the borrower appears to be becoming dependant on him.

Other participants also talk about having developed strategies for dealing with demands to share money. When asked, participants say they are likely to 'give' money only to their immediate family (eg. their or their partners' parent or sibling) and also have their own informal rules by which they decide whether to share and how much to share, with family

and friends. They tend to restrict the amount lent out, refusing to lend again if people do not return a previous loan, or delay paying it back.

Nama, who works for a large regional provider of financial management services, encourages her clients to explicitly budget for the amount they expect to share with their family and friends. She says “I tell people - if you know you give your family money, then we should be putting that in your money plan - your budget”. Kaiya agrees that by deliberately budgeting for such sharing, individuals are able to exercise some control over their money, whilst maintaining social relationships and cultural obligations which they don't want to risk by refusing to share.

In urban areas, more participants say they do not share money on principle, although they will share other resources eg. food, transport or shelter, if the need arises. Tinka in NorthCity, describes how her mother found a way to keep some money for herself without refusing to share, by opening a secret bank account. “She gave me the bank book, so that when others asked her, she could honestly say she had no money without lying!” she says.

In an interesting aside, some urban participants point out that though they do not share money, they do ‘give back’ to their community by sharing their professional skills by offering to train young Indigenous people, offer apprenticeships and employment if they run a business etc. Marginally more people in SouthCity adopt these restricting strategies, as compared to NorthCity respondents.

Many participants see themselves and their community at large, as bad at managing money and not ‘good savers’, as compared to non-Indigenous people. Urban participants working with a non-Indigenous business partner say that the latter is better at managing the finances, and ‘tighter with money’ than they are. Businessman Konol describes how he occasionally

struggles with his non-Indigenous business partner due to “tensions between my giving back into my community, and my contribution to the business”.

Also in contrast to the remote community consultations, I found more participants in regional and urban areas talk about savings, as part of recounting their own story with money. Mostly though, it's about how they encourage their children to save money to buy things they want for themselves. People say a cultural expectation to share, and the temptation to spend money immediately, make it more difficult for them to save. Participants who do manage to save have made efforts to prevent themselves from accessing money readily, to resist the temptation to spend. However, there is an underlying sense of feeling guilty for having saved or invested to meet their own goals, reflecting a lack of social legitimacy attached to individual saving and investment.

Tarra, an emerging leader in NorthCity, eloquently describes how she sees that saving, wealth creation and investment for the future are equally important for her people, yet what they want to achieve is different, when compared to non-Indigenous views. “People want to invest in their land, their culture and their people - this is our wealth, not material things. We don't need to own material things in order to be satisfied” she says.

Jarri in FruitTown similarly feels Indigenous people might want to achieve different things with their money, as compared to non-Indigenous people. “If you want to be closer to your family or culture, then that's where your money will probably be invested” she says. This is a different world-view of savings, wealth-creation and investment than is prevalent in mainstream, and I have discussed it further in chapter six, as part of the discussion on Indigenous financial capability.

## **Money imposed from the outside**

As described in chapter four, participants from remote communities which retain strong links to cultural traditions and knowledge, see the abrupt imposition of money as disconnected to their culture and traditional knowledge systems. Participants from both regional and urban communities similarly talk about money being imposed on their previous generations from the outside, however, the disconnect is not so much from their knowledge systems, as from their sense of cultural identity.

FruitTown elder Warra describes how his ancestors (who were river people) had a thriving economic life thousands of years before colonisation, and a long history of trading valued resources, to enable the quality of life they desired. However, the economic aspects of life were inextricably linked with social and cultural aspects, and the focus of traditional trading was more on building honour and relationships, not about ensuring an exact value was exchanged. “There was a sense of honour” he says. “It wasn’t about the size of what was traded. You trusted people’s base of trade, that people would be respectful in their trade”. Also traditional trading focused on the collective control of traded resources says Warra. “It had to do with spirituality – any resource belonged to everyone so you could trade with it, but you couldn’t own it”.

The experience of colonisation, if viewed as an exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds, showed no such respect or honour, according to Warra. Indigenous land was declared ‘*terra nullius*’ (land belonging to no-one) and claimed on behalf of the colonisers. Traditional ways of life were replaced by “a new regime, a new culture of doing business, a new ‘religion’ including money which worships individual ownership” says Warra. He doubts whether the imposition of money from the outside has helped Indigenous



people at all. “Has it been good for the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples and the culture we had? I don’t know – we have to find that out. We have no proof of it at the moment – it’s a Western way” he says.

Elder Coorah too talks about how the new culture that was imposed with colonisation, wiped out Indigenous traditional knowledge. “The aboriginal university of river and bush and environment – our spirituality was attached to that. It enabled us to exist for 40,000 years but it has no place in this new culture that’s come in” she says. Elder Barina similarly recounts that “the white man brought cash with him. He brought rum in one hand, and the Bible in the other”.

Being part of the ‘stolen’ generations or forced onto missions kept many Indigenous people out of the money economy in regional areas. Their labour was repaid either in rations or as Coorain explains:

“Their wages were put into an account and rationed out by.. the employer. They had to trust them to keep their money for them and give it out to them. They never really knew how much they were getting or how much was being kept away”.

Elder Warra feels the introduction of welfare, combined with fewer education and employment opportunities leaves Indigenous people “trying to re-establish our footing - in terms of what our visions are, what our future is, what our lifestyle is, where our belief systems are, and what underpins these”. He feels Indigenous culture and tradition even today, is seen by non-Indigenous people as having “no value, worthless”.

Given this history, Warra feels, Indigenous people are not thinking about money in isolation, but about how it fits into the context of their life as a whole. Their struggle to define their

cultural identity and role vis-à-vis mainstream Australia flows into a struggle with money as a resource in this identity. “For me it’s about the purpose of money in relation to my values – the historical, cultural evolution of money in aboriginal lives” he says.

The disconnect for participants is not just from historical experiences with money. Money plays an important role in their ongoing struggle to reconcile and negotiate with non-Indigenous Australia, and establish their own cultural identity as Indigenous people. When asked how they keep close to their culture in a modern environment, participants talk about the importance of ‘shared places’ within the local community where they feel ‘culturally safe’. These shared places include Indigenous cultural centres, education and vocational training institutes for Indigenous people and service hubs providing housing, health or legal advice. They also value having a support network and opportunities for cultural interactions such as celebrating National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week in the local community.

As a modern-day resource, people in regional consultations are not confused by money as was evident for some remote community members. Instead, participants talk about a general lack of engagement with the financial system as a whole, and awareness about banking products and services, fees, terms & conditions etc. “I don’t think we understand the foundational stuff to know about money and banking – how this all works and how can I access it culturally as a community? We don’t know it so we cannot be a part of it” says Jarri.

Although she is well educated and in steady employment, Jarri feels reluctant to approach her own bank for advice, despite being uncertain about financial options and “unaware of how to access information, and what other options are out there”. Similarly Arora is tertiary educated and sees herself as a confident person, yet says she does not want to engage with banks

because they are just another institution in mainstream Australia where she does not feel 'culturally safe'. Trudgen (2000) similarly describes 'non-Yolŋu -friendly' environments in mainstream-controlled institutions such as hospitals, schools, courts or workplaces which leave Yolŋu in Arnhemland feeling isolated and in 'cultural shock'.

The importance of social relationships extends to banking - business owner Konol feels that Indigenous people want a relationship with their banker, saying "Aboriginal people want a sense of dealing with a person, not a computer". However, neither Konol nor business owners Dural, Jirra and Arora feel they have any relationship with their bank. These men see their bank as "a repository for the money that comes in". They have not had good experiences with banks, and do not believe they welcome Indigenous clients.

Jarri thinks another reason her people don't tune in to the financial world around them is due to lower incomes, which make wealth-creation and investments seem too far out of people's reach:

"If you don't have a lot of money, those other options to become limited and become unavailable. So you are not able to buy a house, or invest money in the stock-market. Then you go, I don't even know that system – it's not for me".

New research shows that this way of thinking is not uncommon. A 'scarcity' of any resource, in this case of money, can not only make people less happy, it can also change the way they think, reduce their mental capacity and make them lose focus of the 'big picture' finds a new study (Mullainathan & Shafir 2013). Continual worry about finances translates into lower productivity at work and more difficulty in maintaining personal relationships. The result is a vicious circle from which it is hard to escape. Poor people can therefore 'tune out' longer-term financial opportunities that may become available, feeling these don't apply to them.

Kaiya also talks about how being 'given' welfare 'makes people feel like a failure. "If they are not working, then they are not earning money – it is being given to them, so they respect it less" she says. When asked what respect equates to, Kaiya uses virtually the same words as in remote consultations i.e. 'using money wisely'. "When you earn the money, it's very different when you are going to spend it – you are more careful" she says. Elder Barina similarly feels that people might make more effort to use money more wisely, if they have had to work hard for it. "If you can get given a new bike, you might go out and wreck it in a couple of months. But if they had to pay for that themselves, they wouldn't do it" she says.

Money is also a topic that can invoke 'shame', as some Indigenous people feel they are being judged about their ability to manage it like the white-folk do. "People don't want to talk about money – it's a 'shame-thing', because they think you are judging them, and other people may judge them – whether they are doing good or bad" explains Kaiya.

Elder Warra feels the general reluctance to engage with the financial system is a symptom of the rapid transitions that Indigenous people have been forced to make. "I think it's more the transition - from the clash of cultures and us redefining our place, and what our future might look like, given that we have to make adjustments" he says. The world Warra's grandchildren now live in, is very different from his life growing up along the riverbanks of the regional town he now lives in, with little or no interaction with the money economy. This new world clashes with the 'old' ways and Warra thinks cash is one of the many factors that exacerbates this clash. "It's cash and what you get with it – ownership. If you want to own possessions, that's a clash, because possessions were always shared possessions in my culture".

As compared to remote areas, more participants in regional and urban communities are from mixed-cultural backgrounds (i.e. either a parent or partner is non-Indigenous). In my

participant cohort, I found that male relatives were more likely to be non-Indigenous, with the Indigeneity coming from the woman's side. Participants say that their views on money are different from, although also influenced by, their non-Indigenous relative, which heightens the disconnect between money and cultural identity.

Participants with a non-Indigenous partner see themselves as being worse at managing money. They also admit some tension between the cultures (i.e. with their non-Indigenous relative) relating to how they want to manage money, which leads to fights about money. They talk about wanting to share money with their extended family and friends, and use money to live 'in the moment' whilst their non-Indigenous partner wants them to limit this sharing, and save money for the future instead.

If both partners are Indigenous however, unlike the remote experience, more women talk about taking on the more proactive role in managing household finances i.e. not just the daily management of the money, but also the big decisions. Kaiya explains how her ex-husband (who was non-Indigenous) used to proactively share in the management of their money. "We used to share the managing of the money. The big things like the house and cars he would do, but the day to day things and bills I would manage".

When the marriage ended, she struggled to manage money on her own. "I was on my own then with two children – money then became really tight" she recalls. Now partnered with an Indigenous man, Kaiya feels she is better at managing money than him, so she now manages the household money and makes most decisions. Jarri, whose partner is also Indigenous, similarly mentions she has to take on the lion's share of managing the household money and making the big decisions as he shows less interest in taking on this responsibility.

Although participants judge themselves to be worse managers of money than their non-Indigenous relative, it is clear that participants don't want to become like white people either. They want to manage their money better whilst retaining their cultural identity. I have explored this further in chapter seven, as part of the exploration of Indigenous financial capability.

### **Elders as role-models for using money wisely**

Just as in remote areas, elders play a vital nurturing role in regional and urban areas - they are seen as leaders and mentors for younger members of the community, and an important source of cultural learning and caring through shared places such as institutions and workplaces. Young Coorain explains how he turned to elders in the city, when he moved away from his family home in regional New South Wales. "The elders have always been the most respected people and they give advice and direction to the community" he says.

An interesting difference from the remote experience of elders however, is that particularly in regional locations, elders are seen as having more knowledge about money than the younger generations. Young Mandu says people turn to the elders for guidance on money matters. "Elders had this knowledge of how to survive - it's their role to look after the money within the family and they were careful with their money. They pay all the bills, they don't like to owe anything" he says.

Coorain agrees, saying his group of young Indigenous friends 'ask the elders before they go to do a big deal or spend big money or make big decisions". Jarri recalls it was her grandmother who helped her open her first bank account. "She gave me some birthday money to open up my bank account - it was the Victorian State Bank. I had my own little passbook and I was so thrilled!" she says.

Elders themselves feel they have more knowledge about managing money because they have always had to work for their money and did not have access to welfare whilst growing up.

The drying up of employment opportunities in regional locations means many young people have grown up as the second generation without access to work, relying primarily on welfare assistance. Elders feel this dependence has compromised younger generations' ability to use money wisely. "Some of our girls get nearly \$2,000 per fortnight, because they've got big families - that's a whole lot more than I ever got, but what are they doing with the money?" asks elder Coorah at a yarnning circle in FruitTown.

Elder Ghera feels some of the younger generation is 'not respecting' themselves, their culture, their elders' and money is caught up in all of this i.e. they are not respecting money either by using it wisely. Elder Barina feels the young are not distinguishing between needs and wants. "Young people feel that they can't live if they haven't got their magazines, their smoke, their drink. That's all wants, that's not needs –your needs are your milk, your bread, your vegetables, your meat" she says. Coorah completes Barina's sentence, chiming in that "when they'll have no bread or butter next week, then they come around to the grandparents!".

Elders say younger people are not dreaming of their future or building a better world for their children – they seem to have outsourced this to their elders. Many participants, both young and old, say that elders are likely to get pressured by the young, to give them money once they have spent all their own pay. Elder Warra, echoing Ganan's views from the remote consultations, links such bullying or standover behaviour to Indigenous people not having a shared frame of reference (i.e. rules and values) regarding money. "There's no traditional

structure around it – no community rules, community values, or family values that are related to it. We have to find those out” he says.

Young Coorain too, wonders whether cultural values of sharing whilst taking individual responsibility for collective benefits are being applied to money. He says:

“In aboriginal culture, it’s always been about sharing everything in the collective, but it’s also about each individual taking on responsibility as well. Each one had a role to play and if they didn’t play that role, then they were not included in the collective activities”.

Mandu similarly suggests that connecting money to traditional knowledge of managing, allocating and preserving resources, and highlighting both the rights and obligations attached to the use of resources, could help people to manage their money wisely.

Given elders play an important role in teaching and role-modelling the right way to live life in general, and manage money, Coorain feels “they want to be empowered to be able to share the information with the community members”. It is therefore important to include elders in programs to build financial capability, instead of just focusing on the young. Also given many participants mention how elders have had to taken the primary responsibility of caring for their grandchildren, it is important to give them the skills required to teach the younger generation about how to use money wisely.

## **Linking the characteristics of ‘Indigenous money’ in regional and urban areas**

Similar to the experience with money in remote communities, my participants stories about money in everyday regional and urban life reveal a culturally distinctive understanding of



'Indigenous money' vis-à-vis 'Anglo-Celtic money' in Australia. Family includes extended family, and the domestic boundary within which money flows is larger than the nuclear household (particularly in regional areas) yet the size of households is smaller, and the fluidity of people moving in and out of homes less pronounced, than in remote areas.

Participants similarly feel they prioritise sharing money to care for family over individual saving, as compared to non-Indigenous people – however, more mixed-marriages means the influence of non-Indigenous cultures on managing money has increased in regional and urban areas. Participants adopt deliberate strategies to control their own money whilst maintaining relationships. Money has been imposed from the outside however, the disconnect for participants in regional and urban areas is not so much between traditional knowledge and money as a modern-day resource, but wrapped up in a much wider disconnect of the Indigenous cultural identity vis-à-vis mainstream Australia.

Perceptions of racism and discrimination leave some Indigenous participants reluctant to engage with mainstream institutions as a whole, including the financial system. There is a general lack of awareness of financial products and services, options available for wealth creation and investments, and a lack of confidence about managing money. A feeling of guilt associated with individual saving (if prioritized over sharing money) remains. Money is a problem which has created stress for many people, which reduces the attention people pay towards using this resource to enable their own goals.

Despite not having much discussion about money whilst growing up, participants talk about making a deliberate effort to talk to their family about money, as well as educating themselves about money. Elders are called upon to advise the community about money matters, and express a strong interest in building their own financial capability, so that they

can help the younger generation to use it wisely. In regional areas, grandparents take a larger role in socializing the younger generation about money matters.

This culturally distinctive understanding of 'Indigenous money' in regional and urban areas flows through my participants' stories about their daily financial lives. The management, use and control of money within households is an area of particular interest for researchers studying the sociology of money, so I investigate this further in the next section. Participants' attitudes towards and feelings about money, their goals and aspirations about money and the action (individual and collective) that they want to take in order to determine their own financial futures, are essential elements of financial capability, which I have explored in chapter six.

### **Managing and controlling 'Indigenous money' in regional & urban households**

Fewer employment opportunities in regional areas means many families are on welfare benefits – just as in remote communities, they refer to these as their 'pay'. Households share food and money across a network of families, though less regularly than in remote community life. Kaiya often has other family dropping in to spend a few days with her. "They get Centrelink too" she says, so they share their pay towards meeting the household expenses whilst they are living there, making it a 'circle of sharing.' Jarri similarly talks about sharing amongst Indigenous households as allowing people to "maintain your relationship - the obligation stuff to your brother or sister".

The characteristics of 'Indigenous money' outlined in the above sections highlight that despite some differences due to context, there is an inextricable link between money and cultural identity. Here too, money is viewed more a medium of relationships than a medium

of exchange. The value of money is in using it as a means of sharing and caring for their family. Family, not money, is the store of longer-term value, whilst caring is their preferred unit of account.

This contrasts with the way money is described in economics, by its functional characteristics as a medium of exchange, a store of value and a unit of account. I describe in the sections below, how participants in regional and urban areas try to manage and control 'Indigenous money' whilst maintaining relationships and cultural obligations, which results in culturally distinctive ways of household budgeting, discretionary spending and banking.

### **Budgeting and managing 'Indigenous money' Chuck-in style**

Similar to the experience in remote communities, some participants from regional areas also refer to the way of managing regular household expenses as 'chucking-in'. Young Coorain grew up in Taree (NSW) but describes sharing accommodation with a group of fellow Indigenous students when he moved to study in Sydney, where they shared food, money and even clothes. Asked how they managed regular expenses, Coorain's response is strikingly similar to the remote experience. "We just chucked in" he says. "We just used to put the bills on the fridge and pay them".

Asked to describe this 'chucking-in' in more detail he describes it as very casual saying "everyone just contributes what they can at the time". Coorain did not make the effort to keep track of who was paying how much each time. There was a sense that each person would 'cough up' as much as they were able to, and no one chased up those who paid less, as they assumed that they would make good when they did have the money. Elders Coorah and Barina describe a similar way of managing money in shared FruitTown households, although

they don't refer to it as 'chucking-in'. "Everybody in the house has got to put in. We call it board - everyone puts in to paying the board".

Coorain goes on to describe how different his experience in managing household expenses was, when he completed his education and moved into another shared accommodation, this time with mostly non-Indigenous fellow trainees. Here he found more of a focus on individual ownership. "They had their own loaf of bread in the fridge - they would write their names on it – that's my milk, that's my bread" he recalls. In this share-house, all bills were equally split between the residents, so he could no longer informally 'chuck-in' whatever he considered he could contribute.

Jarri feels that sharing and informal 'chuck-in' arrangements are examples of how Indigenous people have developed their own way of coping with a system that has kept them out of the money economy for a long time. "They've been kept disadvantaged and out of the economy for so long, that they've created a system that works for the community" she says. Also, similar to the experience in the remote communities, it's the women who will try to organise everyone to pay up for common household expenses.

"Usually if there is a woman in the house, she will be the one who will go to each one and get the money. If there is a teenage boy in the house who is getting his own Centrelink, then he will just give her the money or share it out" says Kaiya. Elder Coorah similarly agrees that women enforce this informal money management style. If anyone tries to dodge paying their fair share, she says "the women will pull them up straightaway. Hey, you're out of line - its share and share alike!".

### **Controlling 'Indigenous money' – gender, spending and banking**

There is a definite gender to how money is managed in Indigenous households in regional and urban areas too. As seen in the remote communities, it is more common for women to manage the day to day household expenses. However, in contrast to the remote communities, more women who have Indigenous partners are also taking on the role of making the big decisions about money. Women who have non-Indigenous partners are more likely to let them take on a larger role in managing the money at home.

Both Jarri and Kaiya are young mothers with Indigenous partners. “I manage the money. He does some bits but I have a very structured financial part of our planning going on” says Jarri. She also makes the big decisions as her partner “is not probably as confident about big financial decisions and money”. Jarri’s experience is echoed by Kaiya, who manages the day to day running of the money as well as the big decisions as her partner has a very ‘easy-going’ attitude to money. “I do all the managing. I do most of the big decisions as well. For him money is a means to an end, there is no value to money – he earns good money but his attitude is easy come, easy go” she explains.

Discretionary spending is also gendered, just as I found in remote communities. Women are more likely to say that they end up spending all of their money towards household expenses, whilst they complain that men are likely to keep some money for themselves. Leewana works for a state-based financial management program in a regional area. “Men seem to hand over the money to the women, and then it’s up to the woman to manage it. The man usually gets what he wants out of it, but the woman has to manage the household” she says.

Nama, who also advises regional clients on money management, echoes the response from the remote communities about personal discretionary spending. She says:

“Men just use up their money – but women feel guilty. If she wants to go out, then she’s taking money away from the family. She feels that’s what she should be spending it on - but the man doesn’t suffer from that guilt”.

Age also plays a role in how money is being managed, particularly in regional areas – participants talk about elders having to take on an increasing role in caring for grandchildren (including teaching them about money) as their own children are not doing this. Elder Coorah relates a heart-breaking story about a family she knows. “The grandmother had to take over the kids. They were stealing out of the lunchboxes at school - they’ve got no breakfast, no dinner, no money for excursions” she recounts. Elder Barina similarly talks about another elder who has to support the grandchildren because the ‘kids-money’ is being spent on drinking, smoking and gambling.

Although banking was not a direct focus of my research, I was able to observe culturally distinctive banking patterns in the remote communities, where I found participants’ efforts to control money whilst maintaining relationships resulted in their incurring higher banking fees. I presented these observations at public forums I was invited to, and informally discussed these with participants who were involved with delivering financial management programs in regional areas. I also interviewed two key informants (a bank manager at a regional location, and an executive from a national credit union with responsibility for Indigenous clients). Based on these, I found that the culturally distinctive personal banking patterns I observed in remote communities, also apply for Indigenous people in regional and urban areas.

## **Comparing/Contrasting 'Indigenous money' in remote, regional and urban areas**

My study in regional and urban areas as discussed above, has compared and contrasted each element of the framework for understanding 'Indigenous money' developed from my study in remote communities (refer Diagram 3 in chapter four) with participants' stories from regional and urban locations. I find that Indigenous participants, no matter where they are located, feel money is being disconnected from their essential, primal, cultural self. They share money with extended family and kin, prioritise sharing money with family over individual saving, and feel that money was imposed on them from outside their culture. Elders are an important source of knowledge about money, and want to role-model how to use money wisely.

As compared to remote communities, more participants in regional and urban areas come from mixed-cultural families (where a parent or a partner is non-Indigenous) - this means their views on money have been shaped by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous influences. Despite recognizing this, participants say that they have a different view on money, as compared to their non-Indigenous relative. Women play a greater role in managing and controlling money in the household, as compared to remote communities. More participants in regional and particularly urban areas talk more about discussing money within the family and seeking out further education to learn more about managing money.

This discussion supports the conclusion that despite differences due to context and experiences, social norms related to family, culture and historical experiences have shaped the understanding of 'Indigenous money' in regional and urban locations. This means that 'Indigenous money' remains culturally distinctive vis-à-vis 'Anglo-Celtic' understandings of money, in remote, regional and urban Indigenous communities. These findings support earlier

research (Chant Link and Associates 2004) which found that unlike in other countries, Indigenous Australians are the only community group which is over-represented amongst the financially excluded and those with lower financial capabilities, irrespective of where they live. In other countries, community groups are more likely to be excluded when they are located in remote/regional areas with less access to financial infrastructure.

I summarise the above discussion on the characteristics that describe 'Indigenous money', compared and contrasted between remote, regional and urban locations, in Table 7 below:

<b>Characteristics of 'Indigenous money'</b>	<b>Remote participants</b>	<b>Regional participants</b>	<b>Urban participants</b>
<p>Family and domestic boundary within which money flows</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is 'Family'?</li> <li>• Regularity of sharing</li> <li>• Talk about money in families</li> </ul>	<p>Family includes extended family and kin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Likely to live together (overcrowding)</li> <li>• Regular sharing between clusters of related households</li> <li>• No talk about money</li> </ul>	<p>Family includes extended family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Likely to live nearby</li> <li>• Sharing in case of need, not everyday feature</li> <li>• Growing up had less talk about money, effort to discuss with next generation</li> </ul>	<p>Family includes extended family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Likely to live further away but still 'connected'</li> <li>• Sharing in case of emergency</li> <li>• Growing up had less talk about money, effort to seek education and encourage next generation</li> </ul>
<p>Sharing money is prioritised over saving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obligations based on kinship</li> <li>• Sharing makes people feel good</li> <li>• Humbug (demand-sharing)</li> <li>• Saving is difficult</li> </ul>	<p>Obligation to share unconditionally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing is 'giving' money</li> <li>• Ability to fulfil obligations brings pride, satisfaction</li> <li>• The very few who do not share unconditionally feel guilty</li> <li>• Only 2 participants reported inter-</li> </ul>	<p>Share money but likely to have conditions/strategies to limit sharing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing is 'lending' money except to close family</li> <li>• Sharing makes people feel good, so does achieving own goals</li> <li>• More likely to</li> </ul>	<p>Share but more likely to have conditions /strategies to limit sharing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing is 'lending' money except to parent</li> <li>• Sharing makes people feel good, so does achieving own goals</li> <li>• Most likely to have inter-marriage, report</li> </ul>



	<p>marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saving is difficult, and if achieved, for one-off purchases</li> </ul>	<p>have inter-marriage, report different attitude to money as compared to non-Indigenous relative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More likely to report efforts made to save, get children to save</li> </ul>	<p>different attitude to money as compared to non-Indigenous relative or business partner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most likely to report efforts made to save and invest, get children to save</li> </ul>
<p>Money has been imposed from the 'outside'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History with money</li> <li>• Disconnect from knowledge</li> <li>• Choices being made</li> <li>• Money is a problem</li> </ul>	<p>Money introduced in late 1960's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion about money, disconnect from traditional knowledge</li> <li>• Feeling of not being in control of 'white-fella'-imposed money</li> <li>• Feast and Famine cycle with money</li> <li>• Money is a problem – associated with high stress</li> </ul>	<p>Previous generation paid mostly in rations or low wage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack awareness of financial products, services, fees etc.</li> <li>• Stolen generations - money is part of struggle to establish cultural identity and maintain control</li> <li>• Short-term, survival view</li> </ul>	<p>Previous generation paid mostly in rations or low wage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack awareness of financial products, services, fees etc.</li> <li>• Struggle to establish own cultural identity &amp; talk of lateral violence</li> <li>• Report conscious efforts to learn about money, walk in 'both' worlds</li> </ul>
<p>Role of the elders in using money wisely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional role as holders of knowledge &amp; pass on at right time to right people</li> <li>• Want to know more, want to role-model for young</li> </ul>	<p>Elders are respected leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inter-generational confusion about money, money management skills</li> <li>• School-based efforts to train young</li> <li>• Older generation more likely to have had work, ability to manage money</li> </ul>	<p>Elders respected leaders / mentors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elders feel next generation not managing money well, some are primary carers for grandchildren</li> <li>• Parents report encouraging children to save</li> </ul>	<p>Elders respected leaders/ mentors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents report encouraging children to save</li> <li>• More first-generation business owners</li> </ul>

**Table 7: Comparing and contrasting the framework for describing 'Indigenous money' in remote, regional and urban communities.**

In the discussion undertaken in chapters four and five, I have described the culturally distinctive characteristics of 'Indigenous money' in remote, regional and urban Indigenous communities. Although this was not an area of direct focus for my study, I have also discussed how this culturally distinctive understanding of money influences the way in which the participants manage, use and control money in their households. This discussion has helped me to answer my first and second subsidiary questions.

In the next chapter I address my last subsidiary questions by exploring how the culturally distinctive understanding of 'Indigenous money' influences participants' world-views on financial capability and well-being. In order to do this, I explore participants' stories to discern their feelings, attitudes, competencies and skills in relation to money, their goals and aspirations about money, as well how they want to act, regarding their financial futures.

## **Chapter Six: Indigenous views on financial capability and well-being**

The understanding of 'Indigenous money' described in the previous chapters reveals the inter-relatedness of money, culture and financial decision-making for the participants of my study. In chapters four and five, I explored how the culturally distinctive understanding of 'Indigenous money' influences behavior by examining how participants manage and control money in their households. I discussed the participants' understanding and knowledge of money, how they practically employ these in real-life decisions, as well as their attitudes to, and confidence with managing money. I found that the understanding of 'Indigenous money' influences how participants think and feel about money, and how they manage and use it in daily life.

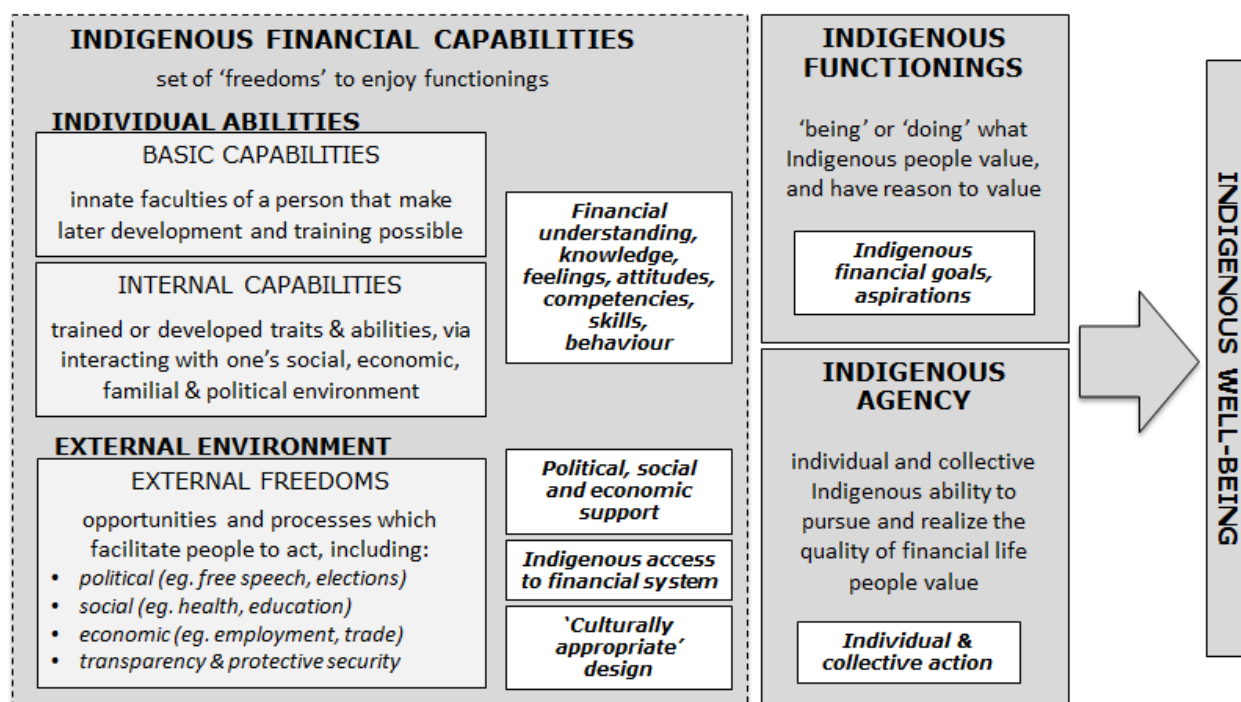
In this chapter I investigate Indigenous financial well-being within the context of the human development and capability approach, and the components of well-being described in chapter two, through exploring participants' stories. This approach offers a people-centred explanation of development, positing that the aim of development efforts should be to enable well-being by expanding people's freedom to live the life they value. Three main components of this approach are described below:

- 'Functionings' are 'being' or 'doing' what people value, and have reason to value.
- 'Capabilities' are a person's 'freedoms' to enjoy various functionings i.e. to be or to do things that contribute to their well-being. Capabilities are multi-dimensional, encompassing internal abilities and external opportunities or 'freedoms'.

- 'Agency' is a person's ability to pursue and realise goals they value, and have reason to value. Agency is not just individual, but also what one can do as a member of a group, collective or community.

These components need to work in concert to enable people to achieve well-being i.e. people must consider goals they value, have the capabilities and desire to act, as well the opportunities and processes via which they can achieve these goals.

Placing my findings on 'Indigenous money' within this framework, financial 'functioning' refers to Indigenous goals and aspirations about money, and the financial lives they have reason to value. Financial 'agency' refers to their ability (individually and collectively) to pursue and realize their financial goals. Financial 'capabilities' refers to the set of 'freedoms' Indigenous people have access to (encompassing internal abilities and their external environment) to achieve financial goals and aspirations that contribute to their own well-being. This is described in the diagram below:



**Diagram 4: Indigenous financial well-being: Indigenous functionings, Indigenous financial capabilities & Indigenous agency – adapted from human development and capability approach**

As this framework clearly highlights, it is important to recognise that financial capability does not reside solely within individuals - understanding financial capabilities involves consideration of both internal abilities and the external environment. Global research from the field of behavioural economics which combines economics and consumer behaviour with psychology, has explored these internal factors. These studies (see Kempson & Whyley 1999; Kempson, Collard & Moore 2005; de Meza, Bernd & Reynier 2008) link people's ability to make informed decisions about money to their knowledge and understanding of money, their ability to translate such knowledge into skills, their feelings and attitudes to money as well as their confidence and attitudes relating to money.

More recent studies (Sherraden 2010; Sherraden 2013) also support Sen's approach that in addition to internal abilities, people need external opportunities or 'freedoms' which can facilitate their ability to act. These include essential public freedoms (encompassing adequate political, social, and economic opportunities including the freedom of speech and action, access to appropriate education, health, employment, enabling regulatory framework), as well as institutional arrangements such as a supportive financial ecosystem. In particular these studies have focused on the need for appropriate access to, and design of, financial products and services.

Viewed from this approach, public policy aimed at enhancing Indigenous financial well-being should enable Indigenous people to determine their own financial goals and aspirations ('functionings'), promote the development of Indigenous financial 'capabilities', as well as

empower Indigenous 'agency' (individual and collective action) in order to achieve the financial lives they desire. Any discussion of financial capabilities would include consideration of 'internal' factors such as culturally-influenced feelings, attitudes and behaviors relating to money, alongside 'external' factors such as access to appropriate education, health and employment opportunities and an inclusive, 'culturally-appropriate' financial system which allows Indigenous people to choose their own financial 'identity' without losing the respect of others, or being excluded from other choices.

In the sections below, I explore each of the elements described in this approach, which constitute Indigenous financial well-being. First, I piece together a view on participants' financial 'functionings' based on stories about their goals and aspirations regarding money. Next I consider participants' views on financial 'capability' by exploring how they talk about their feelings and attitudes to money, as well their external environment. Finally I discuss how 'agency' or how participants want to act, regarding their financial futures.

### **Indigenous 'Functionings': Goals, aspirations, choices and 'Indigenous money'**

Financial functionings, as per Diagram 4 and the description above, are the financial 'beings' and 'doings' or the financial lives that Indigenous people value, and have reason to value. In real terms, this refers to people's goals and aspirations about money, and the financial choices they make. In a world where one cannot have everything one wants, people need to make choices and consider the consequences of those choices (Roberts 2005) based on their financial situation. Goal-setting can help people in evaluating which choices they wish to pursue, and research finds this attribute is strongly correlated with positive financial

capability (Fry et al. 2006). Success in achieving small financial goals is also found to positively reinforce people's motivation to set incremental goals.

In the course of my study, I found that participants in remote communities did not talk about their financial goals, aspirations about money or how they wanted to use it in future, till I asked about this. When prompted, they described money as a survival tool, the 'white-fella' way to now get the things they need for everyday life. As described in chapter four, money is shared to meet needs across extended family and kin until it is all used up, often within a few days of receiving it. A few participants do talk about putting money away to save for a one-off purchase such as furniture or a car, or a treat to take their children to the Darwin show, but no one talked about investment or wealth creation.

Discussing this observation with bank staff Gulara, Akala, Maiya and Nadda provided some useful insights. Asked whether there is a word in traditional language ('Yolŋu Matha') to describe saving, Maiya offers '*rulbaŋ-dhun*' which she explains as "saving for later - is like when I put money away in the safe" at the end of the banking day. Elder Ganan tells a similar story about how being a '*djambatj*' ('expert') hunter, he has the traditional knowledge of how to 'put away' and preserve 'big meat like kangaroo' for many days.

In both instances, the participants' explanation of 'saving' and the choices and goals they described, are more about delaying consumption than about taking a longer-term view of money. Akala further explains that the concept of 'growing money from money' over a longer time-horizon has no place in traditional knowledge systems. Setting shorter-term goals relating to money could offer some explanation for why Indigenous people are less likely to have savings and accumulate assets (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008 ), just as the

disconnect from knowledge systems may explain why they are also the least likely to stay informed about money.

Goals and financial choices which focus on individual needs alone do not sit well within a sharing culture. As described in chapter four, the few participants like Hanya who have refused to share money in order to save up for individual needs, face criticism from others – this makes them feel guilty about their saving, further exacerbating the stress associated with managing money. Goals which have a collective benefit such as individuals 'chucking-in' to contribute towards shared expenses (a funeral or wedding) or towards shared communal facilities (a local recreation or sporting education, or etc.), or even a vehicle which can be used by the wider community for hunting (as described by Pindan in chapter four), are more likely to be accepted by the community as a whole.

Financial education programs which include exercises encouraging participants to visualize their financial goals, have been found to be particularly useful for Indigenous participants (Russell, Yoosuf & Cattlin 2011). My study would imply that in addition to individual goals, if such exercises could encourage family and community goal-setting, they might resonate better with Indigenous participants, particularly those in remote communities.

In contrast to the remote experience, I found that in regional and urban areas, participants make it a point to talk about the lack of real choices available to Indigenous people, particularly within the context of discrimination from the mainstream society. "If an Indigenous fella hasn't made what you think are good money decisions, I wonder what kinda choice that individual has been given anyway" says Jarri. "If they are not able to get employment because they belong to a particular race of people, then what choice did they have?" she asks.



Kaiya agrees, linking the reason why Indigenous people don't have the same choices available to them, don't participate fully or even drop out of the system, to racism. "It's not because they don't want to, but it's because something happens to them in the system, that rejects them and often it is racism" she says.

Elders such as respected leader Warra similarly reflect on how Indigenous people have been given only one choice or vision of the future – that of assimilation. "There is a real assimilative push to say - you go and you pick up all these skills, learn all these things – only then you can become a part of the mainstream and achieve parity" he says. Many participants feel that some of their younger folk are now starting to mould themselves based on this vision of assimilation, just in order to survive.

Kaiya tries to explain why a younger person may just give up trying to fight to retain their own cultural identity and accept the 'white ways'. She says:

"We are a disadvantaged group of people and it's sometimes tiring and exhausting to be constantly fighting that. Sometimes it's easier to succumb to your lot in life. It safer - it becomes acceptable, because it's easier to just let it go, than to challenge it".

However, this giving up of their own value system "eats into their soul" says Jarri, which is why money is a 'shame-thing', a topic which invokes shame for many people, who avoid engaging with it.

"Internally people are dying, because there is a lack of vision of how their future and cultural identity can be" says elder Ghera. Elders Coorah and Barina agree, talking about the frightening increase in poor health and suicides in the FruitTown community, which they link to a lack of people's ability to visualize their future. "There is no easy fix to these issues - all

these lifestyle deaths and poor health. It's because people can't visualise what their future might look like" they say.

Any talk of choices about the future, goals and aspirations about money in regional and urban areas, is therefore wrapped up in people's choices, goals and aspirations about creating an Indigenous cultural identity vis-à-vis mainstream Australia. "Talking of aspirations" says elder Warra, will first require an acknowledgement of Indigenous knowledge vis-à-vis Western knowledge. "The trading of aboriginal knowledge with western knowledge about money – it has to have reciprocity" he says, yet it is currently missing. "We have to both feel that this is something that is really valuable to all of us – that is not really present". Warra feels that Indigenous people can never feel equal to others in the absence of a mutually respectful exchange of knowledge, including about money.

He says:

"The value attached to money, and its ability to create better futures will always be measured in relation to the choices that money requires people to make. Money's a tradeable commodity. We've always traded, so its' value is what you trade for it".

However, historical experiences of colonization have shown that the 'trade' when money was introduced to Indigenous people, was not reciprocal.

"People measure value in terms of what they've had to give up" says Warra. If people have to give up their cultural identity in order to relate to money, that's an impossible choice. "If you give up all your own knowledge, you won't have a sense of cultural identity, we won't ever get parity" says Warra. Mallana, talking about her experiences with money, echoes his words

“Why should I have to change who I am, in order to have the same dreams as everyone else?” she asks.

Despite the differences in context, this study shows that similar to the experience in remote communities, it's what Indigenous people have to trade for money - which is a fear of having to give up their culture - that results in money being seen as a problem for people, causing them stress and grief.

Respondents in both regional and urban locations talk about wanting their community to hold out and resist any assimilative push, and create a vision of their own making, about money. “It's not about us aspiring to be white people or aspiring to be what the western model of community and life is – we have to reconstruct all of that to be true to our thinking, about what our vision is” emphasises elder Warra.

Kaiya, working as a money management advisor amongst Indigenous communities, sees the power of creating such a vision. She says that when her clients are able to visualise a goal for their money, they are more likely to value it by making wise financial choices. “When people are saving for something that they want and they achieve that, then it becomes easier. They see it as more valuable” she says. Elder Ekala uses very similar language when talking about how undertaking further studies has helped her visualize how she wants to use her money. “I don't think of money as money, I think of lifestyle and choices - so whatever choice you make, money can be used as a resource you can have around you, to make that choice” she says.

The discussion above reveals how the four culturally distinctive characteristics of ‘Indigenous money’ described in chapters four and five, namely that the domestic boundary within which money flows is larger than the nuclear household; money is prioritized for

caring for family over saving; money has been imposed from the 'outside' and the role of the elders in using money wisely; influence participants' financial choices (current and future), as well as their goals and aspirations about money.

Money feels disconnected from many important elements of everyday Indigenous life including participants' sense of identity, knowledge and value systems. Elders, particularly in remote communities, want to know more about money and the rules associated with managing it in the '*balanda*' world. They want to connect money to their own cultural knowledge, and role-model how to use it wisely. Financial education which builds on cultural strengths is more likely to motivate people to engage with money and finances.

In regional and urban areas, participants financial choices, and their goals and aspirations about money are wrapped up in a wider struggle to establish their cultural identity vis-à-vis mainstream, non-Indigenous Australia. Participants acknowledge their financial goals may be different to those of mainstream, non-Indigenous Australia - in particular Indigenous people may prioritise family and community goals over individual ones. Leaders want their people to resist what they perceive as an assimilative push, and articulate for themselves, their own vision for their cultural and financial futures. The discussion in the following sections on Indigenous agency (individual and collective) builds on these learnings.

## **Indigenous Financial 'Capabilities': Internal Abilities & External Environment**

Financial 'capabilities' as described in the human development and capability approach (refer Diagram 4 above) encompass the set of 'freedoms' that are available to people, to enjoy the 'functionings' that they value. These include internal and external factors which can broadly be categorized as internal abilities and the external context or social, cultural, political and

economic environment that people find themselves in. In the sections below, I first discuss 'internal abilities' by considering participants' innate ('basic') capabilities such as feelings and attitudes to money, as well as learned ('internal') capabilities such as knowledge and understandings of financial matters. I then consider the 'external' environment facing the Indigenous participants of my study.

### **'Basic' Capabilities: Feelings & attitudes towards 'Indigenous money'**

As briefly discussed earlier, the term 'internal abilities' encompasses two aspects of individual abilities – their 'basic' capabilities which refers to the innate faculties of a person, that make later development and training possible, and 'internal' capabilities which refers to a person's trained or developed traits and abilities, which are usually developed via their interaction with their familial, social, economic and political environment.

Global literature discussed in chapter two exploring these 'internal' dimensions of financial capabilities found that individual knowledge and understandings, feelings and attitudes, as well as skills and competencies, all influence financial behaviours. In particular, Kempson (2006) identified the four major domains of financial behaviour as managing money; planning ahead; choosing products; and staying informed. Longitudinal studies on financial capability in Australia (Table 8 below) show that Indigenous respondents have lower than average scores in many of these domains, even when compared to other culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

Behavioural Dimension (The Social Research Centre 2011)	Cultural background			X = Statistically Lower than population Average
	Non-English speaking Australians	Indigenous Australians	Others	
Plan Ahead	X	X		
Choose Financial Products		X		
Financial Control		X		

**Table 8: Comparison of financial behaviour between Indigenous, English speaking and Non-English speaking Australians**

In this section of my qualitative study, I sought to explore how my participants' feelings and attitudes towards 'Indigenous money' influence their financial behavior, which within the context of Sen's approach, would equate to their 'basic' and 'internal' financial capabilities. As mentioned in chapter three on methodology, I found that some participants, particularly in remote communities were hesitant to talk openly about money, as the topic invokes shame. However, inviting participants to visualize or draw what money means to them, proved a very useful way of exploring feelings and attitudes, which they may not have openly expressed otherwise.

I find that in particular, participants' stories about the imposition of 'Indigenous money' from the outside invoke feelings of loss and confusion, inextricably linking money with the struggle to re-establish Indigenous cultural identity vis-à-vis mainstream society. Lower incomes combined with the need to manage and control money whilst maintaining relationships and fulfilling obligations, also exacerbate the stress that many people associate with money. These feelings are also apparent when I explore participants' attitudes towards 'Indigenous money'.

In remote communities, I found discussions about money primarily invoked feelings of loss and confusion. Elders repeatedly talked about how their lives were happier without money, when traditional ways of ensuring individual obligation for collective benefits were understood and enforced by the community as a whole. The abrupt imposition of money from the outside without much opportunity to learn more about it, has also left 'Indigenous money' disconnected from these traditional norms, compromised the role and authority of elders, and

left many people confused about how to use this resource wisely to achieve their own goals. The loss of economic independence leaves people dependent on welfare programs (Trudgen 2000) whilst the loss of traditional roles and mastery can translate into destructive social behavior - all these factors combine to make 'Indigenous money' a problem for many people.

Warrun, talking about his experience of growing up in a remote community, says he has seen the bad side of money – it invokes envy, greed and jealousy amongst many people. He says he would paint money as a snake in the grass, as “you have to know where the poison is, so you can remove it before you eat it, and nourish yourself”. The poison-sacs of this 'snake' are the negative feelings of envy and greed and Warrun describes how he had seen elders burn a hundred-dollar note to prevent fighting over it, and women who have torn up notes and thrown it in men's faces, when they come bullying them for money. If you are able to remove these poison-sacs, then you can safely eat the snake and it can help keep you and your family alive. If however, you cannot remove this poison, then instead of providing nourishment, the snake can harm you, warns Warrun. Other participants similarly warn about the 'dangers' of not managing money wisely.

In regional and urban areas, I find that along with feelings of loss, prejudice and a struggle to establish a cultural identity within the broader mainstream society, some participants also talk about how Indigenous people can 'take control of their own money', and make it 'work for them'. In regional FruitTown, elder Yarran relates a similar story to Warrun, saying he would paint the dollar symbol ('\$') as a snake in the grass. He feels money is something that Indigenous people don't know fully about, yet they have to be careful of it as not using it well can be dangerous for them, especially if it attracts others' jealousy and greed.

Young FruitTown mother Kaiya says her Indigenous partner's family sees money as evil. "I can see how my partner's brother and sister feel that money is evil. To them, shared money equals close relationships" she says. Before the couple had their own children, her partner shared money freely with his brother and sister. Now that they have children of their own to care about however, Kaiya says she has had to pressure her partner to reduce this sharing. "Now that he doesn't share his money, there is a sense that he is not as connected and close to them anymore - and money is the cause of it" she muses.

Young Wilga in a NorthCity yarning circle, expresses a similar, if slightly more optimistic view about money. She says she would paint money as a boat as "it can help you cross dangerous waters, but you'd better look after it and make sure it doesn't have a hole in it, or you'll drown before you know it". Urban-based artist Barwon too describes both the good and bad sides of money. Asked how he would paint money, he says that he would paint it as 'bush-honey' to reflect its good side. Bush-honey is traditionally gathered by women and girls, who bring it home and share it with the family. He tells a story about a grandmother giving her grandson a fifty-dollar note to buy lollies - this might seem excessive to white people, but for her, it's her way of expressing her love. On the bad side however, money can be a poison berry, which can make you sick when you eat it, so you need to be careful of how you treat it.

Feelings about money are ambivalent says elder Warra, because there is no agreed position on whether or not money has helped Indigenous people to achieve the quality of life they desire. He also highlights that without an agreed frame of reference including the rules, values and behaviours that are associated with money, it is difficult for Indigenous people to connect to the role that money can play in their individual, family and community lives.



Reflecting on the participants' stories about 'Indigenous money', it is clear that whether their feelings were positive or negative, they are framed in terms of the ability of money to facilitate caring for family. This then, is the lens that participants 'see' money through – summarising the words I often heard, 'money is for caring'.

In addition to participants' feelings, I have also explored attitudes to 'Indigenous money'. Any discussion on attitudes to money must consider five dimensions which the literature on financial capability (The Social Research Centre 2011) commonly refers to. These are time-orientation (i.e. having a short-term vs. long-term view of money); self-efficacy (i.e. confidence and belief in one's own ability to make a difference to one's financial situation); stress associated with money; thrift and risk-taking.

Listening to my participants stories about money, I find that many respondents have a shorter-term focus on using money for survival. Kaiya describes how she feels many people in her community feel about money:

“It's easy come, easy go - there is no respect given to it. People share it like a thing that will get them through to the next day – it's not taken as something for their future. It's just for here and now. We'll spend it today and we'll worry about getting more for tomorrow”.

Having a short-term orientation to money implies people prefer to live for today, and don't attach much future importance to money. Elder Coorah tries to explain why people may think about money as only a survival tool. “People in community live in a crisis situation. They think about money in a crisis way - that they will worry about things later, but this is what we're gonna do right now” she says.

Self-efficacy and feeling in control of one's money are associated with higher financial capability (The Social Research Centre 2011). However, Jarri talks about how Indigenous people don't feel in control of their lives as a whole, not just money. "Even if is a small income, they want to control it and they also want to be in control of a certain lifestyle" she says. Lower self-efficacy makes people more 'passive' (apathetic) and fatalistic about their ability to influence their financial situation which possibly explains why studies find Indigenous respondents are least likely to say they are in control of their finances (The Social Research Centre 2011).

Clearly participants in all locations find dealing with money is stressful. They also prioritise sharing over individual saving. The notion of being thrifty with one's money viewed from an Indigenous lens, could equate to the notion of being selfish and greedy by not sharing, as participants Hanya and Daku described in chapter four have found. As elders repeatedly point out, younger people in particular are not using money wisely, and are likely to take more risks with their money. Finding money dealings stressful, undervaluing thriftiness and exhibiting a risk-taking attitude towards financial matters (such as purchasing on a credit card instead of saving up, spending to impress others) are all associated with lower financial capability (The Social Research Centre 2011).

Participants including Kaiya and Jarri comment that the 'crisis mode' that people find themselves in when they are on low incomes, means they cannot focus on the 'big picture' such as considering their financial capability or being motivated to improve their financial situation. "Most people are in the crisis mode all the time and they don't get to stop and think. People stress in different ways, some people just back away from the whole thing and withdraw and they can't think about money" says Kaiya. Jarri agrees, suggesting that even

though it would be more useful if people could focus on their longer-term financial situation, people instead get stuck in their current behaviour patterns. “A part of being poor is people just don’t think so much about their environment” she says.

Recent research suggests that rather than being the exception, this kind of ‘irrational’ thinking is actually a universal phenomenon (Mullainathan & Shafir 2013; Mani et al. 2013). These studies say that ‘scarcity captures the mind’ and remodels patterns of thinking, irrespective of whether the absent resource is time, food or money. For people on lower incomes, even if they do have a good understanding of value and cost, it translates into an obsessive concentration on where the next dollar is coming from. This leads to lower ability to make rational financial choices or see a bigger picture, lower resistance to self-destructive temptation and even a diminishing of intelligence which results in worse financial decisions being made. The problem is not so much related to the person or their ‘internal’ abilities, but to the context they are inhabiting.

The discussion above could provide some valuable insights into why Indigenous participants may be more likely to exhibit money-related feelings and attitudes that are associated with lower financial capability. As research from the field of behavioural economics reveals, financial behaviour is often more likely to be influenced by internal factors including individual feelings and attitudes towards money, than access to financial knowledge (de Meza, Bernd & Reynier 2008). My study contributes to this debate by also considering how social and cultural norms can influence both the financial decisions and choices people make, as well their motivation to make behavioural changes.

### **'Internal' Capabilities: Knowledge and understandings of 'Indigenous money'**

Given my research is about investigating the understanding of 'Indigenous money' my focus in this section is on participants' knowledge relating to money and financial matters as a whole. As discussed in chapter two, existing studies consistently find that Indigenous people are over-represented amongst Australians with lower financial capability and knowledge (The Social Research Centre 2011). They are also least likely to stay informed about money matters, or ask for help.

Through the course of my own study, I found that in remote communities, many people are confused about '*balanda*' money. This, in combination with the range of factors discussed in chapters four and five, means money is a topic that invokes shame, and is seen as a problem by many participants. Elders in particular, say they want to know more about money and connect this with their own cultural knowledge, so that they can role model to their people, how to use it wisely.

In regional and urban communities I found participants say they are uncomfortable with having to deal with mainstream institutions such as banks, as they do not find them to be 'culturally safe' or welcoming. Participants talk about being confused about the range of financial options available to them, the terms and conditions (especially fees) attached to products and services and in particular, the knowledge of wealth creation and investment (or 'growing money from money'). Women with Indigenous partners are more likely to say they want to learn more about money - they also report having to take on the responsibility for managing and controlling the household finances, as their partners avoid having to do this.

Accounts describing learning practices and the dissemination of knowledge in the oral tradition of pre-colonial Indigenous life highlight the leadership role played by the elders as

the custodians of traditional knowledge (Coutts 1981). Indigenous knowledge, a part of their cultural heritage, is best described as a system of protocols, values and beliefs, encompassing both physical, tangible or 'seen' aspects such as the knowledge of lands, as well as 'unseen' or intangible aspects (Ninti One Limited 2012).

The 'right' Indigenous knowledge, transmitted in accordance with customary rules, laws and responsibilities, was passed down by word of mouth through the generations, to the right people at the right time, mostly by the respected community elders. The outcome was a collective-driven approach to the acquisition, management, distribution and preservation of valued resources for the benefit of the community. The elders' leadership in disseminating knowledge, promoting understanding and guiding social attitudes and practices ensured that individual skills contributed to the collective benefit.

Global research highlights that financial skills are typically learned from family and friends, and built progressively (Lusardi 2008). A motivation to learn about money and finances is also vital. For Indigenous people in remote communities, the lack of intergenerational skills in understanding and managing money restricts parents' ability to pass these skills to their children (Demosthenous et al. 2006). Moreover, the lack of financial activity in their homes, role models or an ongoing support network compromises the ability of young people to practise and refine their financial skills (Russell, Yoosuf & Cattlin 2011).

The current government strategy of building the financial skills of young people through the formal education system (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2014) is vital, however, in the Indigenous context, focusing only on the young does not allow the elders to exercise their traditional role as leaders, upsetting the social fabric of community life (Martin 1995). Studies (Bin-Sallik, Adams & Vemuri 2004) also show that Indigenous students learn

best in a 'natural-learning' environment where instructor-led lessons are supported by 'scaffolding' opportunities to practise complex skills in a 'learn-by-doing' style. Content should be customised to suit Indigenous needs and the support of elders is vital (Lahn 2008; Brimble & Blue 2013). Also young Indigenous people may feel embarrassed or ashamed to have knowledge that their elders lack (Trudgen 2000), so may pretend they do not know, which could further compromise their ability to practice financial skills.

My research highlights a need to enhance the financial capability of Indigenous elders alongside the young. Other research (Kral 2010) has shown that harnessing the support of elders has empowered young Indigenous people in some remote communities to proactively use 'new' knowledge (technology) to develop local internet content, better suited to their own cultural context. This model of elders supporting the young as a bridge between 'old' knowledge and 'new' technologies, could well be extended to financial management.

Enhancing the financial capability of elders in remote communities could empower them to connect knowledge about '*balanda*' money with their own cultural knowledge, as participants such as elders Ganan and Jarrah have pointed out. This could enable them build on their traditional authority as the ones who are trusted to role-model the 'right' financial behaviour and lead efforts to build their people's knowledge in ways that make sense to them, thereby reinforcing learnings from ongoing curriculum-based financial education.

Building the financial capability of families and the community may also strengthen the ability to set family and community-based financial goals, and harness collective support for individual financial goals. Such a strengths-based approach which builds on valued social norms could also motivate and encourage Indigenous people to apply financial knowledge and skills in real life. Social marketing has shown that investigating psychological and

behavioural 'triggers' is a powerful way to change longer-term financial behaviour (Lee & Miller 2012). The evaluation of financial education programs for Indigenous people (Lahn 2008; Russell, Yoosuf & Cattlin 2011) have similarly emphasised the importance of providing social support such as mentoring and ongoing collective support via networking, in reinforcing financial education about good financial habits.

### **'External' environment and 'Indigenous money'**

In addition to individual abilities, people also need a supportive external environment in order to develop their capabilities and facilitate their ability to act to enhance their well-being.

These 'external' freedoms include political rights such as freedom of speech and election; social opportunities such as access to health and education; economic entitlements such as access to employment and trade, as well as overall governance, transparency and protection.

For the purpose of my study, I focused on my participants' political, social and economic context, their access to the financial system, and wherever possible, an exploration of their views on culturally appropriate design of financial products and services. In chapters four and five, I have described in detail the main features of the socio-economic context that participants find themselves in, based on where they are located. In this section, I focus first on access to the financial system, and next on participants' views on what culturally appropriate design might look like.

#### *Access to the financial system:*

The Australian financial sector is the single-largest contributor to national output (11%), and Australia is a one of only a handful of high-income countries with virtually universal (99%) access to banking. Australia also boasts a well-established banking infrastructure, including bank branches and Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) however, public debate has long

recorded the inequity in distribution of this infrastructure, particularly the decline in the availability of banking and financial services in rural and remote Australia, as shown in the extract from an existing study (McDonnell & Westbury 2002) below:

**Table 2. Bank branches, metropolitan and elsewhere, by State<sup>a</sup>**

	NSW		VIC		QLD		SA		WA	
	1993	2000	1993	2000	1993	2000	1993	2000	1993	2000
Metropolitan	1397	979	1294	759	542	416	338	229	402	303
Elsewhere	1042	731	689	458	576	537	239	197	242	157
Total	2439	1710	1983	1217	1,118	953	577	426	644	460
Per cent change: metropolitan <sup>b</sup>	-30		-41		-23		-32		-24	
Per cent change: elsewhere	-30		-34		-7		-7		-35	
Per cent change: total	-30		-39		-15		-26		-29	

**Table 2 contd. Bank branches, metropolitan and elsewhere, by State<sup>a</sup>**

	TAS		NT		ACT	
	1993	2000	1993	2000	1993	2000
Metropolitan	60	101	19	23	106	78
Elsewhere	102	21	15	17	1	4
Total	162	122	24	40	107	82
Per cent change: metropolitan <sup>b</sup>	+68		+135		-27	
Per cent change: elsewhere	-80		+113		+400	
Per cent change: total	-25		+66		-23	

Notes: a. All figures as at 30 June of the year in question.

b. Metropolitan branches are defined as those in capital cities and surrounding suburbs.

Source: RBA Bulletins

**Picture 3: The distribution of bank branches in Australia (Metropolitan vs. Elsewhere)**

Whilst not directly comparable, a national study of socio-economic disadvantage (Cuirej, Tanton & Sutcliffe 2006 ) finds that although only 2.7% of Australians live in remote or very remote areas, 13.7% of them are in disadvantaged locations, as compared with 5.1% of people in major cities. In particular, over 15% of people in the Northern Territory live in disadvantaged locations, as compared to less than 1% of people in the Australian Capital Territory. Given that Indigenous people are over-represented in the Northern Territory, it is



possible to extrapolate their over-representation amongst socio-economic disadvantage in Australia.

The lack of access to banking infrastructure combined with the growing 'digital divide' in access to information and communications technologies (ICTs) experienced by regional and remote Australia (Department of Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy 2012) has disproportionately impacted Indigenous people due to a number of socio-economic factors impacting their daily lives (McDonnell & Westbury 2002; Taylor 2012).

Also whilst changes in the competitive forces within the banking sector, the introduction of new technology, and changing consumer demands may have had positive impacts on many consumers, they have had a number of negative impacts for low-income consumers, among whom Indigenous people are disproportionately represented (Altman & Taylor 2002). In particular, the higher ATM fees paid in remote Indigenous communities (Financial Counselling Australia 2010) and the lower take-up of electronic banking (Department of Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy 2012) in communities which lack access to digital and banking infrastructure, have been highlighted.

The dearth of financial infrastructure in the remote communities I studied was clear – InlandTown has only one bank branch, whilst CoastalTown has none. Both locations have access to two ATMs but participants say these are often not working, which further restricts their ready access to cash. Basic telephony and access to the internet is also limited on the communities, so it is not surprising that many participants have not used internet or mobile banking options. When asked, some participants in CoastalTown which has no bank branch, say they rely on the local money management workers or phone banking, else travel to Darwin in order to conduct their banking.

The general lack of banking and digital infrastructure also means that participants living in remote communities have fewer opportunities to learn about new financial products and services. Also, there is only a single remote store on each community, where participants can purchase goods and services for their everyday needs. This restricts their ability to 'shop around' for products, and exercise financial choices, which research finds are associated with higher financial capability. Regional areas enjoy greater access to financial and digital infrastructure than in remote areas, as well more options to 'shop around' and exercise financial choices and discretion. Urban areas of course have the easiest access and greatest opportunities.

### *Culturally appropriate design*

As described in chapter three on methodology, I flexibly employed 'yarning circles', informal story-telling and conversations together with participant observation in order to answer my research questions. This meant that I encouraged participants to share their stories about money in their daily lives, either in a public setting where individuals were able to contribute to a public discussion on money, or in more intimate settings where I was able to speak to individuals about their own experiences.

It was not always appropriate or relevant to ask participants questions about the design of culturally appropriate financial products and services, particularly in public consultations undertaken in the remote community. On reflection, I find that many of the points discussed in this section arose out of one on one discussions with elders and key informants included in my study, wherein I also discussed the related issue of agency for enhancing Indigenous financial capability, and where the accountability for ensuring such action lay. As a result, I

have included participants' views on culturally appropriate design of financial products and services in the section below, which relates to agency.

Reflecting on this entire discussion on financial capabilities, it is possible to see how the four culturally distinctive characteristics of 'Indigenous money' described earlier, have influenced both internal and external aspects of capabilities or 'freedoms' available to participants. The historical experiences of money being imposed on Indigenous people from the outside, has made it difficult for many participants to know more about it. This leaves many people confused about financial matters, reduces their self-confidence and feeling of control over their financial situation, as well as their ability to pass on financial skills to the next generation.

Participants' feelings about money are positive when financial choices and goals are able to reinforce valued socio-cultural norms particularly in relation to kinship obligations and sharing, but negative when these instead clash. The culturally distinctive characteristics also influence participants' attitudes to 'Indigenous money', in particular that 'money is for caring', a shorter-term orientation which prioritizes money for survival, and a general lack of desire to engage with finances as a whole.

In remote communities in particular, there is a distinct lack of external opportunities to develop financial skills including poor access to banking and digital infrastructure, as well as lower access to public 'freedoms' such as education, health and employment opportunities. These, combined with internal factors which create a disconnect with cultural knowledge and value systems, exacerbate participants' feelings that the financial system is supportive, culturally safe or welcoming. There are few examples of culturally appropriate design of financial products and services.

## **Indigenous 'Agency': Who is responsible for taking action?**

Sen's approach highlights the important role that 'agency' plays, in empowering individuals to choose how they wish to act. This agency, as discussed in the previous sections, can be exercised individually as well as by the individual acting as part of a collective. In my study, I focused on how participants talk about their own actions, as well as how the actions of their family and community. Many participants talk about how Indigenous people are reluctant to engage with mainstream institutions including the financial system, as a whole, as they do not feel 'culturally safe' or welcome there. When asked who should be responsible for taking action, I received very similar responses from participants in remote, regional and urban areas, that this should be Indigenous people themselves - in particular, the elders.

I find more participants from the Northern Territory, and most particularly those in remote communities, talk about the 'two' worlds (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) that they have to live in. Participants and key informants point out that whilst the 'black-fella' needs to learn about, and live by, the rules of 'both' these worlds, the 'white-fella' can get away with knowing only the rules of their own world (Australian Securities and Investments Commission 2013). They also talk about wanting to 'walk proud' in both worlds, and learn the rules of both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews of money.

Community leaders and elders in all locations say Indigenous people themselves should be responsible for their own financial and cultural future, and work together with mainstream Australia. Participants both young and old, identify that elders in particular, are best suited to be the leaders of such efforts, as they are the ones who are looked up to, as role-models for how to use money wisely. In particular, elders in remote communities who are 'strong' in

their cultural knowledge, want to know more about money so that they are able to translate and connect the 'two' knowledge systems.

"Culture is what is important to us black-fella, not money" says Jarrah, InlandTown elder.

"We don't know that money story properly - but we do understand our culture. That's what is important to me, not money" he says. Efforts at promoting Indigenous financial capability targeting young children through a school-based curriculum (ASIC 2013) should also build the capacity of elders. Also, Jarrah feels that current financial education is trying to make his people want to manage their money better without reference to his culture, and this is why it is failing. 'All that financial education - no one is listening. Maybe if you show how culture is the most important thing, then people may listen'.

Asked how this could happen in practice, Jarrah says he could use his knowledge of 'both' the world-views, to do this for his people in a way that is true to his culture. "I got that understanding of money - and if I can use that to help me stop that humbug, then I am doing better. It will take time, but at least it is my culture that is helping me" he says. Maiya, who works in the only bank on InlandTown, explains how Nadda and Akala (non-Indigenous staff located in NorthCity) help her run her remote branch in the 'white-fella way' (in accordance with 'mainstream' norms of governance and compliance) whilst helping her clients in 'black-fella way'. She says it is hard to 'live in both worlds' bridging both cultures. CoastalTown elder Iluka sums it up very neatly "If we do it ourselves, then that is culturally appropriate".

This discussion shows that elders in remote communities have many ideas about what culturally appropriate design and delivery of financial matters should include. It should connect with and build upon traditional knowledge and help their people learn the rules of 'both worlds'; it should be undertaken by Indigenous people themselves, particularly the

elders; and it should facilitate valued Indigenous norms particularly around caring for family and community.

These views are largely consistent with participants' stories in regional and urban locations, though the disconnect here is felt not so strongly in financial knowledge, but in the need to establish their own cultural identity vis-à-vis mainstream Australia. Elders are particularly keen to consider the role that money plays in establishing this identity, so that their people can use it to thrive, not just survive. Also whilst participants from remote areas who prioritise their own needs are accused of 'acting like white people', in regional and urban areas, more participants talk about wanting to find their own way of dealing with money without having to give up their cultural values, rather than be expected to become just like white people.

FruitTown elder Ekala says "We've had to learn to live in both worlds before - we've done it quite successfully, but because a lot of us don't know much about money, we are not educated in it - so it's taking a long time". Jarri agrees that people have to be encouraged to experiment with this 'new' knowledge "else how do you know, if you don't test the waters?". Kaiya gives a practical example of how she helped a client to manage her money 'black-fella way', by including the money she expects to be asked to share with her family, in her regular budget. "She is going to budget it in, and that way she's gonna feel less guilty when it's all finished, and she doesn't have any more to lend" she says.

Elder Coorah similarly sees the need to learn more about how other cultures manage their money, as part of respecting all cultures. Her regional town now has many other culturally and linguistically diverse refugee and migrant groups. "There are so many different cultures now in Australia. We're not going anywhere – we all have to get on together. Respect other people and their culture and learn from them just as we learn from each other".

As part of this exercise in building bridges between cultures, Jarri says that it is important to acknowledge that some Indigenous people may have different aspirations about life and money, as compared to mainstream Australia, yet both are equally valid. “They may not be the same aspirations, but it doesn’t mean Indigenous people don’t aspire to see their kids grow” she says. Jarri says that society needs to accept that the two sets of aspirations could be different. “Maybe we’ve got to get to a place where it’s culturally accepted that this is the way we are, and that this is what makes it real for us” she emphasises.

Well-respected ‘strong’ women Yuka and Tarra from Northcity have the same advice about proactively taking action to improve their own financial lives – they have both made the effort to ‘learn the rules of both the worlds’. Yuka says “acknowledge both the worlds, then make up your own mind”. Tarra too says her culture has kept her grounded and strong, and able to walk in both the worlds. “You just need to know how to conduct yourself in each world” is her advice.

When asked about what action individuals can take to achieve their own financial goals, Wilga, another NorthCity-based Indigenous woman, extends her analogy of money being like a boat on which her people can sail dangerous waters. “If you understand the rules, then you can find a safe passage for yourself” she says. Tarra emphasises that the key is to be able to do this yourself, not as a handout from someone else. “Self-empowerment begins at home – what are you doing to manage yourself?” she asks.

In addition to the many comments relating to individual accountability for improving one’s own financial situation, and the role of elders in ensuring collective knowledge and role-modelling how to use money wisely, I also found examples of Indigenous-owned organisations which are proactively taking action to find ways to build financial capability for

their own people, on their own terms in all locations studied. These efforts also incorporate elements of what a culturally appropriate design of financial products and services might include, as mentioned in the previous section on 'external' freedoms.

In the remote study, I was invited to observe six participants at a private workshop on financial matters for an Indigenous governance body, conducted by a consultant who is well-known for practising 'both-ways' learning. Building on Indigenous protocols for good communication and understanding, this workshop included story-telling, visual representation and action-based learning to establish a 'common language' for financial and commercial knowledge, so that these concepts can be talked about in a way that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous listeners can understand (Godinho & Russell 2013).

A vital part of this workshop revolved around a visual model of 'Two Roads' for business management (see Picture 4 below). One represents the Indigenous road, the use of which is governed by Indigenous laws. The other represents mainstream society, for which non-Indigenous laws must be obeyed. Using this analogy, the model explores how Indigenous business owners must understand and rely on, both their own world-view and the world-view of non-indigenous people, in order to navigate the maze of everyday financial decisions. This 'both-ways' understanding of issues that are most likely to have a significant negative impact on the viability and sustainability of a cross-cultural business, is then extended to further explore business planning and risk management strategies.





**Picture 4: The Money-Story system (reproduced with permission)**

In regional and urban locations too, I was able to observe several Indigenous-led efforts to promote financial capability amongst their own community including Indigenous-specific financial literacy programs. The need for ‘both-ways’ recognition of knowledge, the important role played by the elders in role-modelling how to use money wisely and efforts to build on social and cultural norms was a common thread across these initiatives.

Connecting this discussion with the four culturally distinctive characteristics of ‘Indigenous money’ described in chapters four and five, I find that the imposition of money from the outside is reflected in my participants’ recognition of the two roads that they must follow, in the context of daily financial decisions in modern-day life. In order to succeed, Indigenous people must be able to comply with the rules of both the ‘white-fella’ road, where they must know and abide by, the rules of the Western concepts of money and money management, as well as the ‘black-fella’ road, which is ruled by Indigenous culture.

Participants highlight that Indigenous people themselves (individually and collectively), particularly their elders, should find their own way to use money to achieve their own goals, whilst retaining their cultural identity. Connecting financial education with Indigenous

cultural knowledge could reinforce individual obligations to help others to use their own money the 'right' way, as well as harness collective support for individuals to achieve their own financial goals.

### **Linking 'Indigenous money' to Indigenous Financial Well-being**

Exploring the understanding of Indigenous money in remote, regional and urban communities based on my participants' stories about money in their everyday lives in chapters four and five, enabled me to answer my first two subsidiary research questions. The discussion undertaken so far in this chapter has focused on exploring every element of financial well-being within the theoretical framework of the human development and capability approach (namely 'functionings', 'capabilities' and 'agency') through the same stories. I now combine these learnings to consider my remaining subsidiary question, relating to how their understanding of 'Indigenous money' has influenced my participants' world-view on financial capability and well-being.

'Indigenous money' for the participants of my study, is culturally distinctive from middle-income, 'Anglo-Celtic' understandings of money, which underlie Australian financial and banking policy. In the communities studied, participants see money as imposed from outside their culture, yet have adapted it into their everyday lives in culturally distinctive ways. Elders talk about the difficulty of having to learn and abide by, the rules of 'two' worlds (i.e. Indigenous and non-Indigenous) including those that revolve around money. In remote locations money is seen as disconnected from traditional Indigenous knowledge and law. In regional and urban areas, money is inextricably linked to a wider, ongoing challenge to re-define Indigenous cultural identity and role, vis-à-vis mainstream, non-Indigenous Australia.

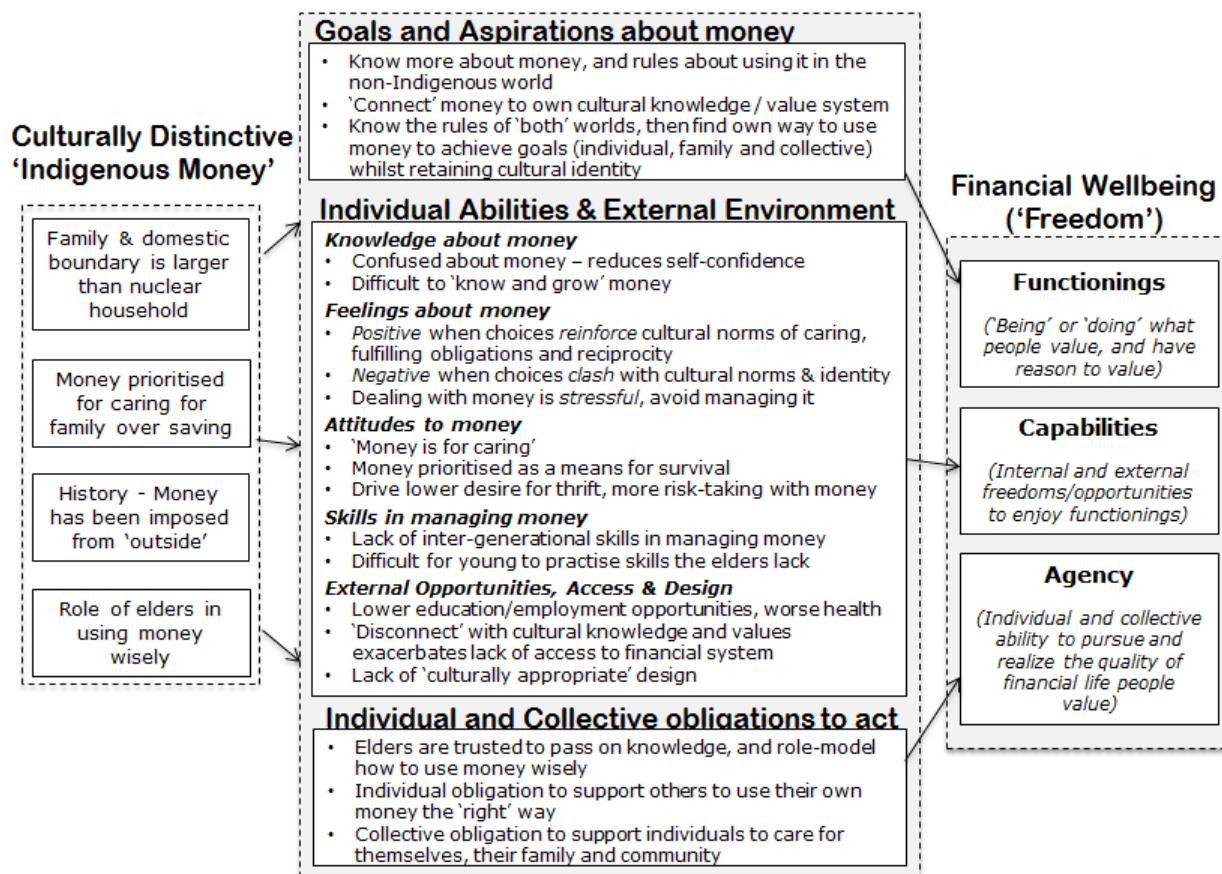
Irrespective of location, 'Indigenous money' flows between related households, rather than being bounded within a nuclear family household. Participants say they prioritize sharing money over saving it, as compared to non-Indigenous people. Daily financial decisions require participants to manage money whilst maintaining relationships and fulfilling obligations, however, the desire to control one's own money in a sharing culture can increase the stress associated with money.

Elders, particular in remote communities, want to feel more in control of money. They want to know more about money and connect it with cultural knowledge of managing valued resources, so that they can role model how younger generations should use it wisely. A limited ability to 'know and grow' money restricts its usage to a means of survival. A culturally distinctive style of 'chuck-in' household money management has emerged, which combines individual money with shared use. Many participants manage their finances in ways that incur higher costs yet earn lower returns, particularly in remote communities with limited financial and digital infrastructure.

These culturally distinctive characteristics of 'Indigenous money' have influenced participants' goals and aspirations about money ('functionings'), their knowledge, feelings and attitudes about money and skills in managing money ('individual' capabilities) as well as the way in which they want to act to improve their financial well-being ('agency').

Participants' 'external' environment points to a general lack of access to a 'culturally appropriate' financial system.

These findings, which 'connect' the understanding of 'Indigenous money' to participants' world-views on financial capability and well-being, thereby allowing me to answer my last subsidiary question, have been summarized in the diagram below:



**Diagram 5: Linking 'Indigenous money' to Indigenous financial well-being ('freedom') within human development and capability approach**

In the final chapter (chapter seven) I conclude my study by discussing how I have answered my primary research question by exploring three subsidiary questions, each of which is answered in consecutive chapters – the first subsidiary question in chapter four, the second subsidiary question in chapter five and the last subsidiary question in this chapter, or chapter six. In each of these chapters, I discuss both the findings and the conclusions I have drawn based on these findings.

I summarise the conclusions of my research in chapter seven, and discuss the implications of these findings in terms of contributing to knowledge, as well as providing an evidence-base

to inform policymakers in government, industry and civil society, who are working with Indigenous community leaders to enhance Indigenous financial well-being and inclusion. I also discuss areas for future research, which can build on the findings of my study.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

My research explores how the understanding of 'Indigenous money' amongst participants in remote, regional and urban Australia influences their world-view of financial capability and well-being. In this chapter, I reflect on findings from my study to discover how these contribute to knowledge, as well as how they could inform policymakers who are grappling with the multi-sector, multi-dimensional wicked problem that is Indigenous financial exclusion. I outline areas for future research, including how these findings can be extended to consider the design of culturally appropriate financial products and services that could better connect with Indigenous consumers. I also reflect on the fact that whilst my study focuses on how family, culture and history are inextricably wrapped up in understandings of 'Indigenous money', the sociological approach to understanding the link between money and culture could yield important insights for money in other community groups, such as culturally and linguistically diverse groups which are also over-represented amongst financially excluded Australians.

This study was undertaken in three stages, relating to the three subsidiary research questions. First, I investigated the understanding of 'Indigenous money' in remote communities. Next I considered whether this understanding differed in regional and urban areas. Last, I explored the implications of this understanding, for participants' views on financial capability and well-being.

In chapter two, I describe the multi-disciplinary literature on this subject, covering history, anthropology, sociology and economics. Studies within each discipline contribute important findings relating to money and Indigenous Australians. Anthropology traces the history of traditional Indigenous pre-colonial life without money, through to the colonization

experience of dispossession and marginalization from the economy as a whole. The sociological literature considers how money, adapted into Indigenous lives, shapes and is in turn shaped by, non-economic factors such as socio-cultural norms, relationships and obligations.

The economics literature considers financial disadvantage as a development issue, and measures Indigenous exclusion and lack of financial capability vis-à-vis mainstream Australia. Although the latter consistently demonstrates a 'gap' in Indigenous outcomes as compared to national averages, it is able to offer a limited explanation as to why this gap persists. Culture is often identified as a barrier to greater inclusion, yet few studies focus on how Indigenous people themselves understand and want to use money.

Important as these findings are, they remain in silos within the individual disciplines, and do not 'connect' with one another. I pull together the learnings from the disparate strands of literature, to explore how history, family and culture have combined to shape the understanding of 'Indigenous money' for participants in remote, regional and urban communities.

In chapter three, I explain how the selection of the Indigenous research paradigm and complementary methods have helped shape the cultural lens through which I have explored the Indigenous world-view of money, financial capability and well-being. I also discuss methodological challenges and limitations of my research. In chapter four, I describe the characteristics of money as it flows through the remote communities I studied, and how participants try to manage and control it, whilst maintaining relationships and fulfilling obligations. I then piece these learnings together to create a framework to describe the culturally distinctive characteristics of 'Indigenous money' vis-à-vis the literature on 'Anglo-

Celtic' understandings of money, for participants in the remote communities studied. This chapter addresses my first subsidiary question regarding the understanding of money amongst participants in remote Indigenous communities.

In chapter five, I use the framework describing 'Indigenous money' developed during the remote consultations, to compare and contrast the experiences of participants in regional and urban communities. I answer my second subsidiary question by describing how despite some contextual differences, the understanding of 'Indigenous money' in regional and urban communities remains culturally distinctive vis-à-vis the literature on 'Anglo-Celtic' understandings of money.

In chapter six, I investigate financial capability and well-being within the theoretical framework of the human development and capability approach. I also explore participants' stories to consider how the understanding of 'Indigenous money' influences their views on financial capability and well-being. I combine the learnings described in chapters four and five with those discussed in chapter six, to answer my last subsidiary question.

### **Summarising the findings of my study**

At the completion of my study, I conclude that historical, cultural and familial factors have influenced my participants' understanding of 'Indigenous money', and their world-view of financial capability and well-being. The understanding of 'Indigenous money' in remote communities is culturally distinctive from the literature on 'Anglo-Celtic' understandings of money, which form the basis of banking and economic policy in Australia.

As contrasted to the standard economic view of money as a medium of exchange, a store of long-term value and a unit of account, 'Indigenous money' is a medium of relationships for



participants. Family is the store of long-term value and 'caring' their preferred unit of account. Though context matters, the understanding of 'Indigenous money' remains culturally distinctive vis-à-vis the literature on 'Anglo-Celtic money', for participants in regional and urban locations.

Money is disconnected from many important elements of the social and cultural world-view of participants, including traditional and cultural knowledge systems, social values and norms, and their sense of cultural identity. The understanding of 'Indigenous money' also influences participants' world-view of financial capability and well-being.

These findings contribute to knowledge and theory, as well as providing an evidence-base to inform policymakers in government, industry and the civil society, who are working with Indigenous community leaders to enhance Indigenous financial inclusion.

### **Contribution to knowledge and theory**

My thesis contributes to the sociology of money by describing the culturally distinctive characteristics of 'Indigenous money' vis-à-vis the literature on 'Anglo-Celtic' money. It contributes to the growing body of knowledge relating to the Indigenous research paradigm and the use of methods which complement and privilege the Indigenous lens.

My study provides Indigenous perspectives on money, by describing my participants' stories about money, how they make sense of money, and how they manage and control it in their daily lives. The feeling of disconnect that participants describe between money and important elements of their socio-cultural world-views, may explain why existing studies find that Indigenous people have greater difficulty in accessing banking and developing financial skills, no matter where they live.

This research also contributes to knowledge by describing participants' world-views on how they want to use money in future; the context within which they develop 'internal' and 'external' financial 'capabilities'; and how they want to act to achieve their own financial 'well-being'. In particular the discussion on cultural factors which enhance participants' sense of well-being, and suggestions for connecting Western and Indigenous ways of knowing can contribute to knowledge on culturally appropriate ways to engage Indigenous people with money matters.

My findings help to explain why Indigenous people are over-represented amongst financially excluded Australians and those with lower financial capability, no matter where they live. If the aim of human development and public policy is to empower Indigenous Australians to enjoy financial well-being, then a culturally appropriate financial ecosystem must first explore their goals and aspirations about money; their financial capabilities (both internal and external) and how they want to act (individually and collectively) to realize their own financial goals.

Focusing on how Indigenous people themselves view and want to use money, can transform cultural obligations as an enabler, enhancing Indigenous financial inclusion and capability. Connecting the social and cultural understanding of money to enabling greater financial capability and inclusion helps create a 'common language' between the sociological understanding of money, and people's greater use of market mechanisms to achieve their valued aims.

### **Contribution to policy**

Culture is an enduring strength for participants of this study. Financial 'capability' and 'wellbeing', when viewed from participants' perspectives, correspond with cultural safety

and family/community well-being. These findings have implications for both policy and action, as connecting efforts to enhance Indigenous financial well-being with knowledge about the cultural shaping of 'Indigenous money' could allow policymakers to use culture as an enabler, rather than a barrier, to greater financial inclusion and wider economic participation.

Policymakers across the government, industry and civil society in Australia recognize that achieving Indigenous well-being will require a multi-sector, multi-dimensional 'whole-of-life' approach, which balances social, cultural, economic and political factors with community objectives. In the last decade, government and financial services industry stakeholders have collaborated with the Indigenous community to explore more culturally appropriate ways to 'close the gap' and enhance financial inclusion, yet evidence on Indigenous financial needs is patchy.

Some targeted programs promoting financial education and capability-building initiatives have emerged (see ANZ Bank MoneyBusiness Program; First Nations Foundation MyMoola Program; Yarrabah State Schools's Milba Djunga Program). Yet, few program evaluations are available in the public domain. One such evaluation (van Weeren et al. 2008) found that the way Indigenous people manage their money – through the responsibilities of kinship and the exigencies of daily life on a community – can often look like 'poor' money management from a non-Indigenous point of view.

This and other studies (Lahn 2008; Russell, Yoosuf & Cattlin 2011; Brimble & Blue 2013) suggest that financial literacy education should take into account the cultural context of the targeted audience, including their values and beliefs about money, the need for it and its use, yet is often designed and delivered based on the provider's values instead. They also

highlight the need for 'tailored' financial education which begins with the 'why' behind financial management, and fits into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders worldviews, before expecting to see effective change.

The design of appropriate financial products and services has not received much focus. One study (van Weeren et al. 2008) found that a financial services provider's financial literacy training failed to problematise their structures, products and services they provided, focusing instead on the Indigenous participants' lack of money management skills. Their conclusion was that what looks like poor financial literacy, may often be the result of a dislocation between financial services and Indigenous ways of using money. To ensure good financial literacy, financial products and services must be available in times and places and formats which suit these ways of using money.

Policymakers acknowledge the long road ahead in 'closing the gap' despite ongoing collaborative efforts to address Indigenous disadvantage. The participants of this study similarly acknowledge that in order to thrive and achieve well-being (individually and collectively, as a family and a community) they must build their financial capacity and participate more fully in the mainstream economy. However, they do not want this to be forced on them from the outside. Nor do they want to compromise their own cultural identity and values in order to achieve parity with everyone else. They want to lead and determine how they should negotiate and relate to non-Indigenous Australia in every way, including with the money economy.

My research shows that financial 'capability' and 'wellbeing' when viewed from an Indigenous perspective, correspond with family and community well-being, achieved in culturally-safe ways that reinforce Indigenous socio-cultural norms. These findings can

contribute to both the national and local policy debates described in the paragraphs above, by suggesting 'Indigenous-centered', strengths-based approaches to connecting knowledge about the cultural shaping of money, financial capability and well-being, to the design of more culturally appropriate financial inclusion.

## **Future Research areas**

Innovation in user-focused financial services provision is a rapidly growing field across the globe. Some recent examples of evidence-based policymaking include social experiments undertaken in real-life contexts such as 'living laboratories' which bring together users, service providers and technologists with researchers, to co-create innovative solutions. These processes review and evaluate existing financial products, services and capability-building programs to identify gaps, and then consider how best future design can address these gaps. Often these laboratories produce and test low-cost prototypes of financial services, programs and products in partnership with financial services providers and users.

Future research could build on my findings to engage with Indigenous communities in remote, regional and urban communities and collaboratively develop, test and modify these products, services and programs to ensure they can effectively support their needs, particularly their ability to use money for caring and to connect with each other. Although out of scope for the purpose of this PhD research, in the next few paragraphs I discuss some specific suggestions emerging from the participants' stories, regarding practical ways in which future research can help policymakers design culturally appropriate financial products and services including financial education and capability-building programs.

## **Financial education which connects Indigenous and Western knowledge systems**

Indigenous elders are traditional custodians of knowledge and trusted role-models, who are relied upon for advice on how to use money wisely. Building the elders' financial capability alongside current national efforts to promote financial literacy through the formal education system, could strengthen their traditional roles whilst also encouraging young people to practise financial skills within families and the community.

Given the disconnect between knowledge about money and traditional Indigenous cultural knowledge systems, financial education programs could focus on ways to better connect the two knowledge systems. A practical first step could be to acknowledge the proud history of pre-colonial Indigenous cultural knowledge of managing, allocating and preserving valued resources such as land and food sources, as well as their trade and exchange of scarce resources. In addition, program content could highlight that many other Australians, including culturally and linguistically diverse community groups, lack financial capability and confidence with managing money. These simple steps could help allay some of the 'shame' that Indigenous participants may feel about their own money skills, enable them to start from a strengths-based understanding of their own knowledge and build their confidence.

Program content which explicitly acknowledges the cultural shaping of 'Indigenous money' and reflects its culturally distinctive characteristics could further help to bridge the two knowledge systems. Exploring money-related wants and needs, and exercises to prepare budgets are typical components of financial education programs – these could flexibly allow participants to envision money as a medium of 'caring' alongside a medium of exchange.

Case-studies and real-life examples could highlight that money may be prioritised for sharing

between extended family alongside saving for individual needs. Budgeting tools could be developed, which cater for an informal 'chuck-in' style of money management, involving clusters of related households instead of just a nuclear household.

Goal-setting exercises are popular with many participants from disadvantaged backgrounds - if these could allow participants to envision family and community-based goals, in addition to individual goals, they could 'connect' better with Indigenous participants. Also, recognising the gap in Indigenous knowledge about 'growing money from money', more advanced financial skillsets such as wealth creation and investment strategies, could be included in financial education curriculum, which facilitators can use based on the needs of their participant cohort.

In this way, financial capacity-building efforts can build on traditional Indigenous understandings of preserving valued resources and valued social norms, as well as increase participants' motivation to use money wisely to meet their own needs whilst retaining their cultural identity.

### **Social marketing which builds on Indigenous social norms**

An area of growing interest for policymakers focused on enhancing financial capability is the social marketing of norms relating to good financial habits. Social messaging has been particularly successful in community-focused campaigns promoting health and road safety.

My research suggests that messages crafted to promote good financial habits could connect to Indigenous cultural and social norms. The Indigenous desire to use money for caring, sharing and ensuring collective benefits could be connected to individuals obligations to use money wisely, so that people can better care for family and kin. Social norms of harnessing

collective support could be connected to obligations for the community, particularly the elders, to support individuals in managing their money well.

Saving is difficult for many Indigenous people, and focusing on individual goals can be seen as selfish in a sharing culture. A possible way to create a more culturally appropriate story of saving could be to re-conceptualise saving as 'caring for oneself' so that one is better able to care for others. Thinking of saving in this manner may encourage people to have savings goals without incurring feelings of stress or guilt, or having to compromise valued cultural norms.

### **Culturally appropriate financial product and service design**

In the last section, I have suggested how future research on financial education and capability-building initiatives can build on my study to consider more user-focused, culturally appropriate design. In addition, future research should also focus on supply-side issues such as the design of culturally appropriate financial products and services, and access to the financial system.

Reflecting on participants' stories I found very few examples which would be directly relevant to product and service design, as this was not an area of focus. However, future research could further investigate the potential for some findings to inform product design, as briefly discussed in the next few paragraphs. Given the culturally distinctive 'chuck-in' style used to budget and manage money across related households, budgeting tools which allow monitoring and tracking expenses across larger household boundaries may be more relevant to Indigenous needs. Technology-based solutions which have transformed financial inclusion in the developing world such as auto-reminders, alerts, auto-debits and pre-allocation of



regular expenses may also help Indigenous consumers, particularly those in remote communities, avoid fees.

The lack of banking infrastructure in remote areas means that voice-based services (especially if they are able to be offered in Indigenous languages) may help service providers create more relationship-based, personalised yet virtual options for servicing Indigenous needs. Future research will need to thoroughly investigate these suggestions, and also consider the specific needs of different segments of the population based on factors such as geographic location, age, education, employment etc.

### **Extending research to other culturally and linguistically diverse community groups**

Given Australia's increasingly diverse population, future research could extend this approach of studying the social and cultural shaping of money to other culturally and linguistically diverse ('CALD') community groups. Existing research already demonstrates that CALD groups are over-represented amongst financially excluded Australians, making it important to study the culturally distinctive ways in which they use, manage and control money, reflecting their varied attitudes, historical backgrounds, family and household structures. Such research could also contribute to a greater understanding of being 'under-banked' in Australia, and provide an evidence-based to develop specific policy interventions, which are currently not on the government's radar. In this way, a greater understanding of the cultural shaping of money could help policymakers to design a truly inclusive financial system, enabling all Australians to confidently use money to achieve their own goals.

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## Appendix 1 Participant Details

**Table 9a: Participant Details – REMOTE consultations**

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Highest Education	Household Type	Usual Household Size	Usual Household residents
Allora	Female	45-54	Year 12	Multi-family	9	Husband, Offspring & families, Sibling. Runs small business.
Bakana	Female	18-24	Year 12	Single family	5	Parents, Siblings
Camira	Female	35-44	Year 10	Multi- family	15	Parent, Siblings & families
Daku	Male	35-44	Primary	Multi-family	9	Wife, offspring, Parents in law, wife's siblings & families
Darri	Female	35-44	Tertiary	Multi-family	4	Offspring & family
Elanora	Female	35-44	Tertiary	Single family	3	Offspring
Ganan	Male	45-54	Year 10	Multi-family	18	Wife, Offspring & families, Parent, Uncle, Nephew
Gulara	Female	45-54	Year 10	Group	12	In shared accommodation (11 others) with husband
Hanya	Female	55-64	TAFE	Multi-family	5	Offspring, Nephews
Maiya	Female	35-44	Year 10	Multi-family	8	Husband, Offspring, Parents
Olba	Female	18-24	Year 12	Multi- family	6	Parents, Siblings, Grandparent
Orad	Male	55-64	Year 10	Multi-family	9	Wife, Offspring & family, Parent, Sibling & family
Pengana	Female	18-24	Year 12	Multi-family	5	Husband, Parent, Cousins
Pindan	Male	45-54	Year 10	Multi-family	12	Wife, Offspring &

						families
Tarana	Female	45-54	Tertiary	Multi-family	11	Husband, Offspring & families, Sibling & family
Tuart & Coreen (couple)	Male, Female	35-44	Year 10	Single family	4	Offspring
Umina	Female	18-24	Year 10	Single family	2	Partner
Warrina	Female	45-54	Year 10	Multi-family	7	Offspring & families
Yindi	Female	18-24	Year 10	Multi-family	8	Husband, Offspring, Parent-in-law, Siblings & family

**Table 9b: Participant Details – REGIONAL consultations**

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Employment Status	Household Type	Non-Indigenous relative (if known)
Arika	Female	55-64	Year 10	Part-time	Multi- family	Parent (mother), partner
Ellin	Female	35-44	Year 12	Full-time	Single family	Parent (mother), partner
Ghera	Female	55-64	Tertiary	Part-time	Single family	Partner
Jarri	Female	35-44	Tertiary	Full-time	Single family	Parent (father)
Jiba	Female	55-64	Primary	Retired	Multi- family	Parent (father)
Kaiya	Female	35-44	Tertiary	Part-time	Single family	Ex-husband
Kala	Female	Over 65	Primary	Unemployed - carer	Single family	Parent (father)
Korra	Female	25-34	Year 12	Full-time	Single parent	Parent (father), ex-partner
Leewana	Female	45-54	Tertiary	Full-time	Single family	Parent (father)
Lemana	Female	35-44	Tertiary	Unemployed - student	Single family	Parent (mother), Partner
Mallana	Female	45-54	Tertiary	Part-time	Single family	Partner

Manya	Female	45-54	TAFE	Unemployed	Single family	Partner
Nama	Female	45-54	Tertiary	Full-time	Single family	-
Naretha	Female	35-44	TAFE	Unemployed - student	Single person	Parent (father)
Uwan	Male	25-34	TAFE	Full-time	Single person (shared housing)	-
Warra	Male	55-64	Tertiary	Full-time	Single family	Daughter's partner
Warrain	Male	55-64	Year 10	Unemployed (disabled)	Single person	-
Yarran	Male	Over 65	Year 10	Retired - volunteer	Single person (shared housing)	-
Yileen	Male	25-34	Year 12	Unemployed - student	Single parent	Parent (father), ex-Partner

**Table 9c: Participant Details – URBAN consultations**

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Highest Education	Employment Status	Household Type	Non-Indigenous relative (if known)
Arora	Female	35-44	Tertiary	Small business	Single person	-
Barega	Male	45-54	Tertiary	Full time	Single family	Parent (father)
Barwon	Male	45-54	Year 10	Small business	Single family	Partner
Burnu	Male	25-34	Year 12	Small business	Single family	Parent (mother), partner
Coorain	Male	25-34	Tertiary	Full time	Single person (shared housing)	Partner
Derain	Male	45-54	Tertiary	Small business	Single family	Business partner
Dheran	Male	35-44	Year 10	Small business	Single parent	-
Kambala	Female	35-44	Tertiary	Full time	Single parent	Parent (father)

Konol	Male	55-64	Tertiary	Small business	Multi-family	Business partner
Leura	Female	45-54	Year 10	Part-time	Single family	Ex-partner
Mandu	Male	35-44	Tertiary	Full time	Single family	Parent (mother)
Marlee	Female	25-34	Tertiary	Full time	Single family	Parent (father)
Tarra	Female	35-44	Tertiary	Full time	Single parent	Grandparent (grandfather), ex-partner.
Tinka	Female	55-64	Tertiary	Retired	Single person (shared housing)	Partner (deceased), son's partner
Warrun	Male	45-54	Year 10	Part-time	Single parent	-
Yuka	Male	35-44	Year 12	Small business	Single family	Partner