



Cultural Identity and Financial Literacy: Australian Aboriginal Experiences of Money and Money Management

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Abstract

This paper explores Australian Aboriginal experiences of money and money management, with a focus on cultural identity and financial literacy. Within a framework of the literature on the history and cultural identity of the Indigenous Australian community, we draw on a section of a qualitative study on banking, security, privacy, identity and trust. The data presented in this paper focuses on face-to-face interviews and yarning circles with Aboriginal elders and community people in Brisbane, Queensland. Preliminary results show that a history of Aboriginal people's experience of money and social obligation to kin and community influence money management. The results indicate that cultural identity shapes money management practices. The paper concludes by presenting our planned continuation for this research project, particularly in the area of diversity between urban and remote groups in relation to money and money management.

1. Introduction

At 30 June 2001 the estimated Indigenous or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population¹ was 458,520 or 2.4 percent of the total Australian population (ABS 2003a). 29 per cent of the Indigenous population reported living in New South Wales, twenty-seven per cent in Queensland, fourteen per cent of Indigenous peoples live in Western Australia and thirteen percent live in the Northern Territory (ABS 2001c, 2003a). Almost 90 per cent of these Indigenous individuals identified as Aboriginal, 6 per cent as Torres Strait Islander, and a further 4 per cent as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

We examine Australian Aboriginal² experiences of money and money management within an historical framework of colonisation and dispossession. These experiences have a significant impact on attitudes to money and money management practices. The cultural values surrounding money as a medium of relationship and obligation to kin and community also are an important factor in sharing, savings and spending. In this paper we look at the way these historical and social factors impact on financial literacy among the Aboriginal people.

This paper draws on a qualitative study of banking and money in Australia. It is part of a project with the Smart Internet Technology Cooperative Research Centre – a partnership between the Commonwealth Government, state governments, universities, industry and small and medium enterprises. The study aimed to study money and banking from the perspective of consumers. Money and banking activities were placed within the context of social relations and cultural values. One of the frameworks for the study was that money is a medium of relationships, as well as a matter of finance. The focus was on issues of trust, security, privacy and identity, contributing to a user-centred design of technologies.

In section 2, we present the research design. In section 3, we sketch the history of Aboriginal experience with money from a historical perspective. In section 4, we draw on existing literature to outline the social and cultural values relating to money. In section 5 we turn to our qualitative study, connecting the historical, social and cultural factors. In the concluding section we summarise our work and suggest areas of future research. We also recommend ways in which financial literacy can take account of the cultural background as well as cater to individual aspirations.

¹ The estimated population parameter is an adjusted figure that attempts to account for instances where Indigenous status is not stated. This parameter is higher than the population parameter based on census counts (410,003) (SCRGSP 2003).

² We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are culturally distinctive peoples, and use the term 'Indigenous' in this paper only where it has been used in the literature. The focus of this research is on Aboriginal people currently residing in Brisbane, Australia.

2. Research Design

The qualitative study was aimed at understanding money and banking use. The qualitative study covered 89 people from diverse backgrounds. In total, our sample of 89 participants had:

- 37 men and 52 women. This dominance of women was partially explained because women typically manage the money, particularly in the lower income households;
- 4 participants were aged between 18-24, 23 aged 25-34, 19 aged 35-44, 16 aged 45-54, 11 aged 55-64, and seven aged 65 or over. The 18-24 age group was under-represented for few of them were yet in de facto or marital relationships;
- We had a range of annual household income levels: 15 had an income below AUS\$25,000; 18 between AUS\$25,000-49,999; 12 between AUS\$50,000-\$74,999, 10 between AUS\$75,000-\$100,000 and 20 had over AUS\$100,000 a year. 5 participants did not want to disclose their household income;
- We had 54 Anglo Australians, 15 from Europe, 6 from Asia, 4 from Africa and the Middle East, and 9 Indigenous Australians, 8 of whom were Australian Aboriginals.

We conducted open-ended interviews with people from diverse socio-economic categories and cultural backgrounds. Our aim was to cover the diversity of the Australian population to understand the issues rather than to generalise.

In this paper we report on results from the eight Aboriginal participants in three open ended interviews and two yarning circles. The yarning circles, which had three female participants and four male participants, were respectful conversations with elders and members of the Brisbane Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The closest method that can be compared to a yarning circle is the traditional focus group method.

However, yarning circles differ from focus groups in a number of respects. First and foremost, by their very nature, yarning circles, as intimate and closed forums for participants to share their stories and voice their experiences, can only take place where at least one of the researchers is known to the participants. This is due in part to the fact that 'some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations remain mistrustful of the enterprise of research' (National Health and Medical Research Council 2003). Another difference is that yarning circles do not follow the approach of having pre-defined focal questions for which answers were sought.

In our study, the Aboriginal participants were urban, based in Brisbane, though with links to communities elsewhere in Australia. In that sense, we present only a small slice of Aboriginal experience. We present these preliminary findings because there is a currently a dearth of contemporary empirical research on Aboriginal money management and financial literacy, particularly in urban Australia. The paper is intended to be a starting point for further research on the Aboriginal community, money, banking and financial literacy.

3. A History of Aboriginal People's Experience of Money

This section draws on existing studies to provide a snapshot of Aboriginal people's experiences of money from the pre-mission days and colonial years to the current time.

3.1 Ceremonial Exchange, Trade, and Reciprocity

Donald Thomson lived in Arnhem Land for four years, 1935-37 and again in 1941-43. He observed an industrious people (1949). Aboriginal people were engaged in ceremonial exchange as a way of fulfilling kinship and community obligations. There were elements of economic exchange to the giving of gifts, but it was the ceremonial aspect that was more important for the social and cultural world of the people. He said it is the clan relationships that give rise to obligations that have to be fulfilled.

On the faithful discharge of these, on his ability to hunt, to bring his contribution of food to the group, to make payments, to give and return presents of food and objects of value, depends his reputation as a man, his prestige, his feeling of success as a human being (pp.34-35)

According to Aboriginal historian Darryl Phillips (2006), trading posts were in operation across Australia, where fresh water was plentiful and accessible. Aboriginal people traded a variety of valuable and scarce items from one's place. These items, according to Smelt (1980, p.206), 'originate in sacred objects, which, surviving over time, become involved in exchange' (Smelt 1980, p.206). For example, Pituri, a psycho-active drug, was collected in western Queensland and traded down into South Australia, where it was exchanged for ochre, which served as currency.

3.2 From First Contact to Unfair Employment and Wage Practices

Although Aboriginal people occupied Australia for approximately 60,000 years, colonisation by the British in the late 1770s devastated Aboriginal life (Robertson, Demosthenous & Demosthenous 2005). First contact resulted in violent conflict with the colonisers, who 'assumed that the Aboriginal inhabitants were so few, so uncivilised and so unwarlike that their land was available for the taking – that it was in law terra nullius' (Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath & Quartly 1994, p.27, original emphasis). Describing the status quo in this no man's land, Justice Michael Kirby (in Hazlehurst 1987) states,

A charitable interpretation of the relationship between the Australian system post-1788 and the Indigenous Aboriginal people of the continent is that it is a tale of indifference and neglect. A less charitable interpretation is that it represents a cruel assertion of power: sometimes deliberate, sometimes mindless, resulting in the destruction of Aboriginal culture, unparalleled rates of criminal conviction and imprisonment and massive deprivation of property and land (p.15).

Aboriginal people were marginalised, dispossessed and displaced from their lands, and forced onto missions that were set up by the churches to Christianise and 'civilize' Aboriginal people. Huggins and Blake (1992, p.43) state:

Remnants of tribes and clans were forcibly removed and placed under the control of either colonial governments or missionary organisations. Aborigines were deliberately and systematically cut off from their traditional way of life and forced to conform to a dependant European lifestyle. Traditional customs and practices such as languages, corroborees, ceremonies, religious beliefs and marriage laws were regarded as "heathen" or "primitive" and were strongly discouraged or condemned.

Following the enforcement of the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act in 1897, it became law that any person of Aboriginal descent could be declared wards of State, with the exception of mixed-race males over 16 years living as Europeans. Placed on missions, Aboriginal boys and girls were taught skills that were needed for the new economy. Girls, for instance, were taught how to cook, clean, mend clothes and perform other domestic duties, needed in white homes (Gunson 1974).

Physical abuse and sexual assault of both boys and girls was common. To complain to the protector commonly brought allegations of lying, deviousness or the “cheekiness”, which routinely resulted in being “taught a lesson” (The Cape York Justice Study Report 2001, p.2).

The Cape York Justice Study Report (2001) maintain that,

The norm was to work extreme hours, surviving on poor-grade food, sleeping in open-sided lean-tos and lacking clean water and basic sanitation.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, white men and women relied heavily on Aboriginal men and women to work on stations and towns (McGrath 1997). Aboriginal men and women performed a variety of tasks. For instance, large numbers of Aboriginal women were employed as domestics on cattle and pastoral properties, where they were responsible for managing the cooking and cleaning, acting as midwife and providing care to the children of the station managers (Robertson, Demosthenous & Demosthenous 2005). Many Aboriginal workers were paid in alcohol, cast-off clothing, and rations or food scraps and/or were provided basic accommodation in corrugated iron ‘humpies’, without flooring, sanitation, or cooking facilities. However, many Aboriginal people were never paid.

According to the Cape York Justice Study Report (2001), in the Cape York communities of Northern Queensland,

Nearly 1,200 work contracts were processed by June 1900, and to counteract continuing labour exploitation a monthly minimum wage of five shillings [\$23 in today’s money] was introduced the following year when the 1897 Act was amended. In theory, contracts and permits were voluntary. In practice, refusal to work incurred physical assault, banishment to a reserve or imprisonment (p.2).

In Queensland, in the early to mid 1900s, the government withheld or underpaid wages earned by Aboriginal workers (McGrath 1997). Subsequent to the passing of the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act was passed, removing many civil rights of Aboriginal people. The government controlled virtually every aspect of daily life, including whether one could marry, who one could marry, whether one could keep or see their children, where people could live, work and the money they received. So called ‘pocket money’ was handed out to Aboriginal people, who could work all their lives and see very little of their own money.

Despite the introduction of wage scales into Queensland, a large proportion of those monies were compulsorily saved into government trust accounts, without consultation of and/or obtaining consent from the employee (to whom the system was not explained) (McGrath 1997). However, in more recent times, the Queensland Government has offered Aboriginal people living there a settlement totaling \$55million (European Network for Indigenous Australian Rights 2004), of which \$17 million has already been distributed (ABC News Online 2006).

3.3 Continuing Disadvantage

Aboriginal people continue to experience disadvantage. In terms of education, in 2002 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were said to comprise 1.2 per cent of the university student population (Demosthenous & Demosthenous 2004, p.259). This figure dropped as the period 2002-2004 saw a decline in the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing and participating in universities (ABS 2001a; Anning, Robertson, Thomas & Demosthenous 2005, p.24).

In table 1, we show that during 2001, the rate of unemployment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders was almost three times the rate of non-Indigenous unemployment (20.0% as against 7.2%, respectively (ABS 2001b; SCRGSP 2003). Fewer Indigenous than non-Indigenous people in 2001 were purchasing a home (19.4% against 27.6%) or owning their own home (12.6% & 40.4%, respectively) (ABS 2001b; SCRGSP 2003). High numbers of Aboriginal people live in over-crowded conditions (ABS 2001b; SCRGSP 2003). This negatively impacts health and wellbeing for Aboriginal people, which is poorer than for non-Indigenous Australians.

Table 1: Continuing disadvantage of Indigenous people in Australia

Area of Disadvantage	Indigenous	Non-indigenous
Housing (2001)		
Purchasing home	19.4 %	27.6 %
Own their home	12.6 %	40.4 %
Unemployment	20.0%	7.2%
Life expectancy (1999-2001)		
Males	56.3 years	77.0 years
Females	62.8 years	82.4 years
Infant death (1999-2001)	12.7 per 1000 live births	4.8 per 1000 live births

Sources: (ABS, 2001b; SCRGSP, 2003)

During the period 1999 to 2001 it was found that the rate of Indigenous infant death was found more than two and a half times greater than the total infant mortality rate for Australia (12.7 per 1,000 live births & 4.8 per 1,000 live births, respectively). Life expectancy was found to be much lower for Indigenous males (56.3 years) and females (62.8 years) than non-Indigenous males (77.0 years) and females (82.4 years) (See also Table 1). Further, the health status of Aboriginal people is impacted by a lack of access to clean drinking water and functional sewerage, particularly in the more rural and remote areas.

Over-representation in the prison system is another area in which Aboriginal people experience disadvantage. Langton (1999, p.201) found that the Indigenous Australians have 'the highest recorded imprisonment rate in the world'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders comprise only 2.4% of the total population of Australia, but represent 20.5 percent of people in prisons and detention (ABS 2003b). And, there has not been any improvement to the number of Aboriginal deaths in custody, despite the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) more than (now) fifteen years ago (Collins 2002).

The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report (2005) identified three priority outcomes of overcoming disadvantage. First, safe, healthy and supportive family environments with strong communities and cultural identities were needed. Second, positive child development and prevention of violence, crime and self-harm; and third, improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities. In a speech to the conference *Pursuing Opportunity and Prosperity*, Chairman for the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Gary Banks (SCRGSP 2005) said,

It is distressingly apparent that many years of policy effort have not delivered desired outcomes; indeed in some important respects the circumstances of Indigenous people appear to have deteriorated or regressed (p. xix).

4. Kin and Community

In this section of the paper, we draw on existing literature to outline some social and cultural values relating to money, particularly the importance of sharing money with kin across household clusters.

4.1 Money and Kin, Caring and Sharing

For Aboriginal people, cultural identity is connected to kin and community and this 'cannot be over-emphasised' (Schwab 1999, p.83). Aboriginal people value 'caring and sharing',³ which sees a high value placed on maintaining ties among kin (Keen 1999) and 'people enjoy[ing] the complete acceptance of belonging by birth and right' (Barwick 1999; Keen 1999).

Eades (1999) adds that

...while the greatest responsibility is frequently to the nuclear family, family responsibilities are generally applied within a range of kin ... with maintaining social contacts, but also to such areas as the rearing of children, the support of ill or very old people, and the sharing of material resources (p.98).

An important aspect of cultural identity is the Aboriginal person's obligation to kin and community influence on money management practices. Research by Martin (1995), McDonnell (2003) and Musharbash (2000) found that there is an expectation that Aboriginal people share and/or pool their resources. Senior, Perkins and Bern (2002, p.10) say 'the ethic of sharing and the expectation that people will share their resources if asked is well documented for remote Aboriginal communities'. Their study on the Ngukurr Aboriginal people of the South East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, found that 'the bonds of kinship' (p.46) necessitate an obligation to share.

Eades' (1999, p.28) research on Koori Aboriginal people of Victoria showed that financial obligations of strong kinship ties have 'insured the majority against want when few other sources of assistance are available'. Calley's (in Keen 1999) early work in New South Wales communities showed that a person's siblings were expected to feed his or her children, and to lend money. While Eades (1999, p.98) identifies one's 'greatest responsibility' as one to the nuclear family, Jeremy Beckett's (1999, p.117) research in a rural community in New South Wales found that 'generosity to friends was perhaps their cardinal virtue'.

It is difficult to place the Aboriginal experience in Australia within the context of international Indigenous experience with money. This is partly because the most pressing issues facing indigenous peoples are those of land and human rights Flores (2006). Money does not rate highly among Indigenous people who remain marginalised and are in a non-dominant, colonial condition (Cobo 2005). The most pertinent reference however is to the Maori and Islander experience in New Zealand (Fleming, Taiapa et al., 1997). Fleming et al show that in Maori families, monetary obligations to the whānau, the larger descent and affinal group, at times take precedence over household obligations. This becomes particularly clear at funerals, where the ritual cash payments symbolically make evident the closeness and caring within the whānau. And in Islander families, the extended family is the financial unit, for money flowing in and out.

³ Personal communication with Associate Professor Boni Robertson, 22.08.06.

4.2 Money in Communities

Much of the money that enters Aboriginal communities is known. In a Grammar of Exchange, Sansom (1988, p.160) explains, '[p]eople receive wages or welfare benefits on a fortnightly basis and every second Thursday is universally established as an Australian pay-day'. Centrelink, the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) CDEP Program, a government scheme that provides employment and training opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across a range of activities the pension (SCRGSP 2003, p.11.10). Gambling, royalties and gifts are other sources of money in Aboriginal communities (Senior, Perkins & Bern 2002).

Calley (in Keen 1999) found that a person with a surplus was subject to demands for money. Senior, Perkins and Bern's (2002, pp.43-44) research into the material wellbeing in South East Arnhem land gave an example of a young woman who spent \$420, her winnings at cards' knowing that someone would borrow it from her'. 'Family are always asking for little bits' and 'also expected to contribute to the paying off of large bills' (Senior, Perkins & Berns 2002, p.44). Senior, Perkins and Berns (2001) talk about a family who were quite comfortable going 'round the camps' to get \$820 for repairs to the family car.

4.3 'Book Up' in Communities

In some remote areas of the Aboriginal community, access to cash, loans and financial services can be limited. In some of these communities, some stores, and taxis provide a service known as 'Book-Up'. This is where traders - such as stores, taxis and hawkers offer small amounts of short term credit to customers. Traders often demand security before issuing a loan, such as holding a customer's debit card and PIN, social security cheque or a signed bank withdrawal form. While book-up is a means for people to access otherwise unavailable credit, it can lead to consumer difficulties. For example, if the store owner holds a customer's card, it means the customer is tied to that store alone, and cannot shop elsewhere if they do not own any other accounts. Other difficulties faced can be overpricing by the store, and also poor account keeping on the part of the provider (Renouf 2002).

A 1991 study of the Ngukurr community in South-East Arnhem Land showed that in Aboriginal communities, EFTPOS passwords are regularly shared with members of a household cluster (Senior, Perkins & Bern, 2002). Access to limited cash is only through EFTPOS after a purchase of at least \$10. There are no local banking facilities. This lack of access together with the norm of sharing financial resources means that individuals give their key cards and access codes to other members of the family, especially when traveling outside or on a school excursion. As one of the persons said, 'I know that key cards and the numbers should be confidential, but that's not Blackfella way' (p.41).

The lack of financial services in the remote communities has also meant poor financial literacy. As Senior, Perkins and Bern (2002) note:

People do appear to have difficulty in understanding the rules and procedures that are adopted by local government and private financial institutions. [...] their difficulties are compounded by remoteness and the absence of direct interaction. The information needed to manage their financial affairs is often not easily available. Institutions assume that their customers have easy access to a phone and are able to navigate the intricacies of telephone banking. This situation leaves community members with the dilemma of giving someone else control over their key card in order to maintain a line of credit or meet a social obligation. [...] Many of (the financial transactions).. take place through the shops which provide cash-back facilities under certain conditions but also have their own interests to pursue such as customer loyalty and credit control (pp. 45-46).

4.4 Avoiding Sharing Money

While Keen (1999, p.15) found that 'kin do have the right to make demands on each other for hospitality, food, financial help and other services', Beckett (1999, p.129) found that the obligation to share money 'with kin is loosely defined and frequently evaded'. One such example of evading the sharing of money comes from Sansom's (1999, p.165) research on the Aboriginal fringe dwellers of Darwin and its hinterland. In that study, a woman 'declared that her money was for her children and not available for anyone else to ask for'.

Senior, Perkins et al (2002) found that saving was seen as selfish and stingy, but there are various strategies for saving. The most successful are to earmark money for special purposes, or spend it fast on something you want. Talking about what he calls the 'misuse of family income' in the Cape York communities, Pearson (2000) explains,

[m]isusing of money might initially be due just to thoughtlessness and lack of purpose. But after some years of destructive spending, an indigenous couple may have damaged their health, their capacity to become socially and economically integrated, and their children's life prospects (p.4).

Hence, the obligation to share money can seriously impede the person and his or her immediate family's quality of life and wellbeing.

4.5 Saving Money

One of the consequences of sharing money is that it inhibits a potential to save, as Senior, Perkins and Berns (2002, p.6) have found. However, other research has found that some Aboriginal people tend to see saving as a self-interested act. For instance, Musharbash's (2000, p.56) research in the Yuendumu community found that 'attempts to save are regarded as selfish and stingy' and that it adversely impacted social obligation. This perhaps explains why Senior, Perkins and Berns (2002, p.6) say there seems to be 'a desire not to appear as better off than others'.

5. Some Aboriginal Experiences with Money

In this section we turn to the findings and results of our qualitative study. We aim to connect the experiences of the Aboriginal individuals in our study with the historical and cultural factors discussed in the previous sections.

5.1 History and the Money Experience

Jordon, in his early 40s and a single parent, says,

The reason our people have trouble managing money nowadays, seeing other young people, buying a house, driving a car, these things only come to us in the last, late number of years.

Past experiences of money have shaped Aboriginal people's current understanding and experiences with money. Uncle Gordon, an Aboriginal elder aged in his late 60s, believes that in order to understand the Aboriginal experience of money one has to 'go back to contact time when the white man became lord and master'. 'Contact time' refers to when 'the white population became prevalent'. It is a time marked by 'a shift to the white man's way'; where 'men were sent out to work and women worked as domestics on stations'. He says, 'it's what Charlie Perkins says, it's all about getting on a level playing field'.

Aunty Ruth, is aged over 65, and is an elder from the western Queensland region. While reminiscing about life as a domestic on a cattle property, she interrupted herself, casually remarking, 'come to think of it, I don't think I got any pay'. Aunty Ruth speculated that it would not have been her employers who withheld her wages, but the government.

James, 40, father of two and clan member of the Traditional Owners of Brisbane, believes that Aboriginal people were 'ripped off'. He said

wages were supposedly banked for when people needed to do their own business, food clothing, rations like that... Aboriginal people were not allowed to take receipt of their wages or, in most cases, even paid for the work they did.

For James, one of the repercussions of not having one's wages stolen, 'has been the lack of trust that Aboriginal people experience when dealing with institutions...'

These accounts of the historical relevance of the money experience are taken from our small sample. While there are no claims for their perceptions to be universal, their stories are relevant. It is suggested that historical connections of the money experience with today's circumstances may be a field for future research.

5.2 Kin and Community and the Money Experience

The boundary of money in the Aboriginal context extends beyond the immediate nuclear family with people often sharing money with parents, siblings and the wider family networks. In both yarning circles and the one-on-one interviews, participants spoke of how they shared money beyond their nuclear family.

Aunty Ruth had saved over \$100,000 after a lifetime of working and saving. Speaking of her savings balance at that time, Aunty Ruth said 'I wouldn't say I gave it away. It just melted down. I'm a good hearted person. I helped the family out.'

Ruby, aged 35, is a single mother of five children. She has a part-time job and receives a family allowance. She also has the option to borrow from her sister. She says 'Well my sister said if I ever wanted to purchase anything she would buy it with her credit card for me and I'd just pay – give her the money.' Despite the fact that Ruby lives from pay to pay, she still lends money to family and friends. When asked what she would lend money for, she tells of a time when she lent money to a friend, 'Well she wanted to get some nappies or something for the baby so I lent her some money'. But Ruby feels more comfortable lending smaller amounts of money like twenty dollars; 'I'd loan someone 20 bucks, but I wouldn't loan anyone more than that because that's not a lot of money.'

While Ruby has been speaking about lending money to friends, as the interview unfolds it appears that Ruby is no longer speaking about loaning money, but 'giving money'. It is not a question of loaning to family, but of giving to family. Ruby, speaking about her mother, says '... like just if she sees me she asks me if I've got any money and I give her some.' Ruby adds, 'My mum hits me up every time she sees me, but I don't - actually – like, I don't go out of my way to give them money.'

While her mother and other family members, such as aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, have a claim on Ruby's money, she does not volunteer to give away money.

Hank also 'gives' money. Hank works in a university. He is in his early 40s, and is married with two children. He says,

... if somebody needs a dollar and you can afford it you can give it to them but don't expect it back because if they're struggling ... they're not going to have a \$100 next week to give you back. I mean, students around here [are asking for money] all the time but it's only like a \$5, \$10 thing, you know. That doesn't bother me, you know, and it's never a loan. It's - the money's just straight out given and I don't expect it back.

While these two participants said they did not believe in lending money, they practice 'giving' or sharing small amounts of money with others that they do not expect to be repaid. This exemplifies a culture that is based on caring and sharing.

5.3 Money Management and Financial Literacy

Our qualitative research gives a taste of some of the issues related to money management and financial literacy in people's lives today.

Talking about how she used to manage on a pension, Judy, aged 35, is currently in a de facto relationship and has five children, three from a previous relationship and two from her de facto's previous relationship. She took up full time employment this year, and prior to that was on a government pension, where she reports managing her money 'very well'. Talking about those times, she says,

You know when electricity comes in that you've got two weeks before they send out a reminder and you've got twice a year that you can ask for an extension. You learn how to shop and budget and what things you can give up. And, when somebody else is needy, you find that you've even got enough to give them.

Jordon, who is 40, and a single father to children from a past relationship, is 'annoyed with people who complain that Aboriginal people can't manage their money'. Jordon, who discovered his Aboriginal heritage about thirteen years ago and has since become a strong advocate on Aboriginal issues, says he is tired of stereotyping Aboriginal people as poor money managers. He says, that 'young Murri'⁴ mums from Inala [a socio-economically disadvantaged region in Brisbane] might not be putting [their children] in new clothes' but, 'They budget their butts off to feed them kids everyday of the week.'

As a single parent, Judy says she knew which bills were urgent, and which ones could be paid a few days late - she was 'making ends meet, with nothing to spare', but 'without getting into debt'.

Judy's income is currently greater than her expenses, and she said that once this started to happen, she did not know how to manage. She handed the finances over to her current partner, as she did not know what to do with the remainder, this is despite her previous unhappy experiences with partners who left her in a penurious state. Judy says, 'He sort of keeps it all and decides everything to do with money, he does everything'. She adds, 'that's fine with me because if I did [have access to the money] I'd probably "dip into it"'.

Ruby, who is currently working part-time and also receiving a part-pension, paints a poor picture of her financial management skills and practices. She claims 'I'm really bad with money. The minute I have it it's gone... it's fair to say that I live from pay to pay'. Unlike her ex-husband who is 'good with money' and 'a real miser', Ruby does not save, as she does not see herself as having a lot of money. While she does not see herself as being a saver, she does spend money on her children for their birthdays and at Christmas. She uses her tax refund for the purchases.

It is, according to three of our participants, James, Gordon and Jordon, 'good education' that is the key to sound money management practices. James says that while it is the history that impacts contemporary Aboriginal money management practices, education and practical experience is essential to financial literacy. Drawing connections between the historical experience and financial literacy, James said:

...our money was managed by managers of properties, by organisations, shop keepers...Our people handed over their cards, their pin numbers, and they were exploited, heavily. Our people never had large lumps of money, no education whatsoever on banking, on how to make their money grow...They've never had people come in and do workshops on that sort of thing. We have never had that education of growing our money because our money has been managed for us.

James' experience is that Aboriginal people have not had those experiences of 'knowing and growing' money.

According to Ruby, the bank's interest in its customers arises out of the amount of money one has in savings.

Look my sister gets asked a lot of that stuff by her bank and that's because they have lots of money in savingsYes, I think when you have a lot of money they're willing and help you and whatever...because... they want your money in their bank. But when you don't have any money

⁴ A 'Murri' is an Aboriginal person from the broader Queensland region.

they don't come and bother you.

While James believes that a history of not having had the opportunity to manage one's money has contributed to poor money management practices, Hank says that being Aboriginal has influenced the way in which money is managed, at least in his family.

Hank says that his father was a European, who worked 12 hours a day, six days a week. Hank's father gave his wages to his wife, who would then 'distribute it' amongst kin. Hank said that if his mother's brothers or sisters or kids needed money his mother would 'just give them money'. Hank says, 'very few [of the Aboriginal side of his family] actually purchased houses'. But Hank's philosophy is, 'you can do more things with more money'. 'Money', Hank's says, 'means lifestyle ... the food you're eating, the schools you're going to, so it really associates a lot with health and wellbeing of your entire family ... as well as just a quality of life'.

6 Summary and Further Research

In this paper we have presented the existing literature on Aboriginal history, work, kin and community, as it relates to money and money management. We have explored Australian Aboriginal experiences of money and money management, and linked those experiences with cultural identity and financial literacy. We reviewed some of the literature relevant to the Aboriginal experience of money from the pre-Mission days, and colonial years to the present time. We found that one's experience of history influenced money and money management. We saw that social obligation to kin and community influenced money and money management. We found that cultural identity influenced financial literacy and shaped money and money management experiences.

We also presented in this paper the results and findings of the initial stages of our research on the Aboriginal community in Brisbane, and found that some of the themes of the literature continued to have resonance. We went further as we began to explore the implications of this history and culture for money management and financial literacy.

This research is still in the exploratory stages. Our research has concentrated in Brisbane. The research in the future needs to cover the diversity of Aboriginal groups and the differences, particularly in relation to money, between urban and remote communities. Three topics are of particular interest for our planned continuation of this research project:

1. Exploring ways in which systems such as 'Book-Up' differ between urban and remote communities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Book-Up is used routinely in some parts of Australia can be a trusted way of payment and money management.
2. Investigating the efficacy of microfinance and financial literacy initiatives directed to Aboriginal communities.
3. Investigating the ways in which Aboriginal communities can get financial services in remote communities through secure technologies.

Such research will enable greater understanding of the different financial situations common to the Aboriginal community. Our hope is that this can lead to the design of tailor-made banking and financial products and services that will be in line with the money management practices of the Aboriginal community in Australia.

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