The Yerin Dilly Bag Model of Indigenist Health Research

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Abstract

In this article, we discuss indigenist approaches to health research, including indigenist knowledges, cultural proficiency, and core values. We also highlight the importance of conducting Indigenous research in ways that are congruent with the needs and interests of Indigenous peoples. The discussion includes consideration of how indigenist approaches can be utilized to generate new Indigenous knowledges, in culturally appropriate ways. We then introduce the Yerin Dilly Bag Model for indigenist health research, an approach that allows for indigenist knowledges to be employed and created by the research/er/ed within an Indigenous framework. Use of the Yerin Dilly Bag Model enables research/er/ed concordance, together with the privileging of Indigenous voices. This is achieved by guiding researchers to align their research with the core values of the researched, with the Yerin Dilly Bag a metaphor for the holder of these core values.

Keywords

Indigenous peoples; Aboriginal Australians; culture; health care; Australia; research methods; qualitative; indigenist research

Introduction

The substantial gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is now well documented (Rosenstock, Mukandi, Zwi, & Hill, 2013; Taylor & Barnes, 2013). This has led to considerable growth in health research related to Indigenous Australians and communities, with government-funded institutions and organizations supporting studies that lead to better health outcomes for the relevant peoples and communities (e.g., Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2016; Lowitja Institute, 2016). The growth in indigenist health research also explains the push to develop methods that resist ongoing colonizing influences and facilitate self-determination and healing for Indigenous peoples (Shahjahan, 2011); support Indigenous communities to create and control research processes to self-define their relationships with others and the environment (Carm, 2014); and in so doing, give rise to conditions where the researched become the researchers (Henry et al., 2002; Sithole, 2012).

Indigenist research is located within an Indigenous context and modeled according to associated knowledges and values (Putt, 2013). Culturally appropriate approaches to indigenist research comprise the methods and rules employed by researchers when studying Indigenous peoples or communities (Wilson, 2001). The main aim of indigenist research methods is to ensure research on Indigenous issues is undertaken in a way that is respectful; appropriate for the setting; and beneficial for community, as perceived by and in light of the needs and interests of the Indigenous people(s) involved in the research (Rigney, 2006).

Before any concordance between the research/er/ed (i.e., the research itself, those undertaking the research, and participants in the research) can be reached, however, an understanding of indigenist knowledges must be achieved. The main reason for this is the central role played by indigenist knowledges in the development of indigenist research approaches. As such, this article begins by defining what is meant by the term “indigenist knowledges,” then moves on to unpack the terms “indigenist research,” “cultural proficiency,” and “core values.”

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Against this background, the article introduces an indigenist research approach—the Yerin Dilly Bag Model—to demonstrate how research/er/ed concordance can be achieved and Indigenous voices and knowledges privileged.

**Indigenist Knowledges**

The term “Indigenous” is contested by some Australian and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Even so, it is used in this article to align with the notions of “indigenerist” or “indigeneity,” which refer to the sphere of commonality shared by those who form a collectivity of Indigenous peoples (Merlan, 2009). The terms “indigenerist” and “indigeneity” are not capitalized in this article as they are viewed as more generic than the term “Indigenous.” When referring to Indigenous peoples who hold a part of Australia as their country, the article employs the term “Indigenous Australians.”

Definitions of the term “indigenerist knowledges” are similarly contested in some Indigenous contexts (Phillips, Phillips, Whatman, & McLaughlin, 2007). One reason for this is the inherently Western orientation of the notion “definition.” This orientation can be problematic for some Indigenous peoples, who are generally colonized peoples, with the colonizers imposing a distinct ideological benchmark against which those who are the colonized, including their knowledges or cultural values, are measured (Macedo, Semali, & Kincheloe, 1999). Forcing Indigenous epistemologies into neat Western categories, therefore, risks a perpetuation of the colonization of Indigenist knowledges (Shahjahan, 2011).

Even so, some categorization can be useful because it enables understanding of Indigenous matters for non-Indigenous peoples. A first step in gaining this understanding is to note that Indigenous bodies of knowledge are not siloed in academic or educational institutions nor specific disciplines, professions, or fields. Nor do they belong exclusively to those who have succeeded in being formally educated. Rather, they are an integral part of what it means to “be” for Indigenous peoples and communities.

In this article, the term “Indigenous knowledges” is used to refer to the distinct ideas, information, and skills held by Indigenous peoples, in contrast or when compared with Western scientific knowledges (Shahjahan, 2011). The term is pluralized because there are many different Indigenous cultures, each generating its own particular body of knowledge. At the same time, there are also some common patterns of meaning. Notably, Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg (2000) suggest that Indigenous bodies of knowledge can be conceptualized as

... associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place. This knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values, as well as to mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate the peoples’ ways of living and making sense of their world. (They are) ... the sum of the experience and knowledge of a given social group, and forms (s) the basis of decision making in the face of challenges both familiar and unfamiliar ... (They are) accumulated by the social group through both historical and current experience ... This body of knowledge is diverse and complex given the histories, cultures, and lived realities of peoples. (p. 6)

This explanation is similar to that provided by Castree, Rogers, and Kitchin (2013), who note three reasons why indigenerist knowledges are different from Western knowledges. First, indigenerist knowledges are generally context dependent or location specific to the particular places and/or regions to which they belong. As such, the knowledges are not always adaptable to other contexts or circumstances—for example, knowing what animal to hunt, when and where in a changeable environment may not be readily transferred to another geographic location (Hill et al., 2012). Second, indigenerist knowledges are shared by individuals and communities and transmitted orally by stories, songs, dances, or learning through observing and imitating others. It is important to note, however, that some indigenerist knowledges can be the privilege or right of one gender or age group only—not all members of a community will have access to all of the knowledge of that community. Third, indigenerist knowledges are embedded in the lived experience of people and communities and are, therefore, not readily categorized into notions of economy, ecology, or other branches of the science. Indeed, while Western or scientific knowledges often create a distinction between sacred and secular, indigenerist knowledges make no such distinction and are more holistic in orientation (Carm, 2014).

In summary, “indigenerist knowledges” are tied to notions of place, community, relationships, and the world in which the community(ies) live(s). They are also dynamic and adaptive, evolving over millennia and successfully adapting to changing environmental and social conditions (Millat-e-Mustafa, 2000); they include the spiritual aspects of life (Mazama, 2002) that go beyond the cognitive, as well as other ways of knowing, such as dreams, visions, feelings, and intuition (Rendón, 2000). Because of their uniqueness, the use of indigenerist knowledges to frame and inform indigenerist research will enrich that research (Castree et al., 2013; Dei, 1994). As will be argued in the next section of this article, the utilization of indigenerist knowledges in indigenerist research will also enable the empowerment of Indigenous peoples.

**Indigenous Research**

Research methods, including the research approaches employed in any given research project, will be inevitably
influenced by the philosophical stance of the researchers undertaking the research (Holden & Lynch, 2004). These philosophical stances are doxological (what is believed to be true) and also epistemological (what is known to be true)—with researchers engaging in activities that transform doxa to episteme (that is, things believed into things known: Pizzi, 2012). Researchers’ philosophical stances also frame the decisions made about research questions; the hypotheses made (in quantitative research); and the way in which data are best gathered, analyzed, and used—in short, a philosophical stance, including the values contained therein, provides the context for the processes that ground the logic and/or criteria of the methodological approach(es) utilized (Crotty, 1998; McMillan, 2015).

Over the years, Indigenous peoples, communities, and cultures have been the subjects of research undertaken in the tradition of Western science (Sherwood, 2010). The approaches to this research were chosen according to the philosophical positions or core values of the associated Western researchers. As a consequence, the practices and theories embedded within these Western approaches served to legitimize the underlying assumptions of the Western paradigm (Saunders, West, & Usher, 2010). Similarly, results or findings of the research were communicated using Western (non-Indigenous) languages that spoke/speak to/for Western (non-Indigenous) audiences—for example, Western language privileges notions of “logic,” “rationality,” “science,” and a mind/body dichotomy in a way that is not congruent with indigenist knowledges (Gough, 2002). A consequence of this situation is that some indigenist knowledges have been viewed as “Other” or inferior (Foley, 2003), with the findings of Western research thereby permissioning, even perpetuating the processes of colonization that have served to subjectify Indigenous peoples and discount Indigenous values, including Indigenous ways of being and knowing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Sherwood, 2010).

Rigney (2006) describes the challenging of Western-style research by Indigenous scholars as “indigenism.” In so doing, he conceptualizes indigenist research as complex because it employs a variety of approaches that value Indigenous experiences, interests, and goals. He also calls for indigenist epistemologies that are emancipatory, liberatory, and employ post-colonial methods/ologies to construct, rediscover, and/or reaffirm indigenist knowledges and cultures, unobscured by the cultural lens of the non-Indigenous researcher (Rigney, 2006). For this reason, he argues, it is important that indigenist research focuses on the “the lived, historical experiences, ideas, traditions, dreams, interests, aspirations and struggles of Indigenous Australians . . . (and) contributes to methodological reform for social justice” (Rigney, 2006, p. 43). Rigney (2006) goes on to suggest that indigenism, including the epistemology behind indigenist methods, is framed by three principles: first, resistance as the emancipatory imperative; second, political integrity; and third, privileging Indigenous voices, with social justice achieved by resisting the White, Western hegemony. Rigney (2006) is also of the view that Indigenous researchers must be responsible for Indigenous research, as they are more likely to be aware and respectful of Indigenous cultural traditions, as well as feel a degree of accountability to their communities.

In contrast, others suggest that not all research undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers is necessarily complicit in the subjectification or ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples. Indeed, Sillitoe (1998) suggests that many non-Indigenous researchers have fostered the development of indigenist methods by promoting a collaborative approach with Indigenous peoples and a reinterpretation of indigenist knowledges. This view is supported by Cary (2004), who argues that post-positivist epistemologies have given a “voice to the voiceless” (p. 57). Similarly, Stump (2013) posits that indigeno-centric epistemology has come from a desire to give respect to the beliefs, practices, and property of locals, while Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008) point to the collaborative goal of some Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike, of social change for Indigenous peoples. For example, using local protocols to empower Indigenous participants (Sillitoe, 2002), and ensuring that Indigenous participants be treated equally to other participants, research using Western methods does have the potential to be emancipatory. What is perhaps most important, then, is that researchers, first, carefully consider how their philosophical stance, including their core values and practices, may influence research on Indigenous matters; second, consider how best they can privilege the interests, knowledges, and experiences of Indigenous peoples, communities, and cultures, through the hermeneutic processes within the research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009); and third, ensure that the construction of new knowledge(s) about Indigenous peoples, derived from the research is not only culturally safe, but also culturally appropriate and proficient (Rigney, 2001).

**Cultural Proficiency in Indigenous Research**

The concept of “cultural safety” was introduced by Irihapeti Ramsden (1990), a Maori nurse, in 1990s, to define the nursing practice that respects the cultural diversity of an individual, family, or community. Researchers soon began to apply the concept to research, including indigenist research. One reason for the need for cultural safety in research was the increase in research, at that time, that involved the mystification of Indigenous peoples—that is, the representation of Indigenous peoples as “exotic” (Foley, 2003).
Alternatively, some researchers have engaged in the fragmentation of indigenist knowledges—either consciously or as a function of hegemonic influences—by conducting research only on the lives and cultures of Indigenous peoples that suited the needs of the researchers or affiliated institutions (Nakata, 1998; Sherwood, 2010; Struthers, 2001). This has led to commentators such as Scheurich and Young (1997) arguing that the values informing research at that time were based on epistemological racism, therefore unlikely to be emancipatory.

This situation explains why some researchers have taken on Rigney’s position (already considered above) and suggest that true cultural safety can only be achieved when Indigenous researchers undertake Indigenous research (Austin, Parkes, & Antonio, 2015). They argue that Indigenous researchers are uniquely positioned to hold the privileged knowledge(s) that belongs to their own community/ies and so are well placed to examine the issues from an insider or “emic” approach. Such an approach, however, challenges the notion of diversity in Indigenous populations, understandings, and knowledges—for example, an Indigenous researcher from one community will not necessarily have an insider view of another community as there are many and varied Indigenous communities, even within a single nation state (Kingsley, Townsend, & Henderson-Wilson, 2014). In addition, and as noted by Foley (2003), limiting the conduct of indigenist research to Indigenous researchers alone may be problematic if the researcher is directly responsible to or a part of the community under investigation. Cultural bias, regardless of the culture in which the researcher is located, will always have the potential to influence research outcomes.

The notion of cultural competency and proficiency provides some answers to these dilemmas (White & Denborough, 2014). Over two decades ago, Archibald (1992) and Moody (1993) argued that research must be deemed by the target Indigenous population as “culturally safe” before commencement and, as such, include overt rules to protect the findings from misinterpretation. However, Rigney (2001) later suggested the need for researchers to have greater accountability to research participants in relation to, for example, the intellectual property and ownership of the indigenist knowledges employed or generated. More recently, a culturally proficient approach to research is said to contribute to reconciliation, create sustainable cultural transmission for the past to the present and into the future, demonstrate cross-cultural research capacity, as well as acting as the basis for research publications and multimedia tools (Cleaver, 2015).

The aim of a culturally proficient and inclusive approach to research is to bring about congruence or concordance between the core values and the multiplicity of the voices and experiences of the research/er/ed. Ways and means of achieving this are discussed at length in later sections of this article—at this point, it is suggested that Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers alike, as well as participants of the research, must each reflect upon their own cultural biases, including their core values; consider the points of similarity and difference; and determine how to bridge the differences to avoid offense and thereby ensure that the research they conduct is safe for all those involved. This consideration would necessarily include discussion about which of the indigenist approaches or methods will best match the context of the research.

**Approaches Derived From Western Philosophy**

As already argued, it is impossible to develop a single indigenist approach or method to fit all Indigenous contexts or settings, given the diversity of Indigenous peoples and knowledges worldwide. Similarly, it would be impractical to have a single indigenist method/ology in Australia, with Indigenous Australians comprising >200 distinct nations/language groups and indigenist knowledges just as diverse (Kingsley, Townsend, Henderson-Wilson, & Bolam, 2013). There is a need to develop research approaches, however, that challenge the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples, communities, and knowledges and achieve cultural proficiency by ensuring concordance or congruence between the core values of the research/er/ed. In this section, we consider the principles that inform a range of Western research approaches and consider the importance of these principles when undertaking indigenist research.

**Practical Wisdom or Common Sense**

Flyvbjerg (2001) advocated for an approach to all research called “phronetic social science,” which allows for the study of social occurrences in light of contemporary interpretations of the classical Greek concepts phronesis—that is, practical wisdom or common sense. This approach focuses on the values, interests, and power relations as a basis for praxis, thus allowing researchers to create new models and perspectives. Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, and Rothengatter (2003) go on to encourage researchers to be aware of the importance of context and perspective because there is no neutral ground for researchers. For this reason, the common sense of the researched—however that is defined—must remain central in the conduct of the research, including the analysis of the data. This approach is well suited to indigenist research as it fits with the notions of cultural proficiency.
To exemplify, phronetic social science can be applied through consideration of the language of the researched, with that language enabling access to the core values of the culture in which the investigation is located (Troy, 1992). Specifically, West, Stewart, Foster, and Usher (2012) developed an indigenist approach to research that they called the Dadirri Model. The term “Dadirri” can be loosely translated to mean “deep listening,” with the word drawn from the Ngan’gikurunggurr and Ngen’givumirri languages of the Daly River mob (“mob” being a colloquial term used in Australia by Indigenous populations to describe the different Indigenous cultural groups or nations). This deep listening was positioned as the central concept or core value that framed the way in which the research was undertaken and provided an important means of ensuring the research was safe.

It is important to note, however, that the Dadirri Model is framed by the Western political and critical methodologies of Freire’s (1972) transformative education process and Habermas’s (1984) theory of communicative action. Although West et al. (2012) suggest that these liberalatory methodologies add rigor to their model and enable Indigenous researchers to promote change, there are undoubted issues with utilizing—or, perhaps, accommodating—approaches to indigenist research that are based on Western principles. This is because such approaches were developed to acquire knowledge(s) according to the culture(s) from which they arose. Differences in modes of acquiring knowledge(s) across cultures are a function of the differing core values that characterize diverse cultures. As such, some may argue that the Dadirri Model, while useful, must be used with care.

**Participation and Collaboration**

Participatory approaches link an Indigenous way of being to the research itself (Bainbridge, Whiteside, & McCalman, 2013). This is demonstrated by Sithole (2012), who developed a practical field guide, including a set of tools, to guide the research undertaken by Aboriginal researchers, including participants, in northern Australia. The field guide provides a valuable means of explaining research to Indigenous peoples and communities, and actively supports their involvement in implementing a study, and collecting and interpreting data.

Specifically, the Western approaches of participatory action research (PAR) or community-based participatory research (CBPR; Kendall, Sunderland, Barnett, Nalder, & Matthews, 2011) positions participants as co-researchers throughout a research study, with the aim of recovering “ancient” (or unconscious) knowledge(s) within and without the person and/or community. Research projects using PAR or CBPR frameworks are generally strength-based studies (Herr & Anderson, 2014)—that is, rather than identifying an Indigenous “problem,” PAR or CBPR methods capture and incorporate the perspective(s) of the communities that are part of the research and, as such, position the researched as experts in their own lives and knowledges. This in turn enables collaborative negotiation of meaning that informs the interpretation of findings. At their core, PAR or CBPR methods are premised on principles and practices that promote a commitment to action and social justice, aimed at exposing, challenging, and changing relations that are ordinarily influenced by power (Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009). While Western in orientation, then, they nevertheless provide another means of guiding indigenist researchers to join with the researched.

**Communitarianism**

Also of note are the approaches based on notions of communitarianism. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), ethical research rests upon the principles or values of respect, reciprocity, and feedback, regardless of the group that is being researched. The approach is also influenced by the tradition of feminist communitarianism, which positions the community before the person or individual as the major focus of the scholar. Adaptation of research approaches that are built on these principles serves as a first step toward ensuring the cultural proficiency of research undertaken by, with, or within Indigenous communities.

To exemplify, Bainbridge et al. (2013) argue for the use of grounded theory, based on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), when undertaking indigenist research. Grounded theory begins with a qualitative dataset that is closely analyzed for patterns and categories, to develop new theory. When used to frame the research undertaken with Indigenous communities, it provides a useful means of allowing the data to “speak for itself,” free of the limiting influences that may result from interpreting the data through a potentially colonizing theoretical lens. This is because the process of data analysis is framed by the ethics of care and responsibility, including respect, reciprocity, and feedback that have also been identified as important by Denzin and Lincoln (2011; Bainbridge et al., 2013). These ethics fit well with the social processes that are characteristic of many Indigenous communities because they are framed by notions of collectivism.

In contrast, Western cultures are considered to be individualistic, where the individual is expected to excel—therefore, knowledge acquisition, including modes of research, involves a cultural entitlement to act as an individual, be rewarded as an individual, and even be punished as an individual (Becker et al., 2012). It is acknowledged that such values and the cultures in which
these values are positioned occur on a continuum—generally, however, binary understandings viewed as reductionist and simplistic in a complex world. For this reason, Indigenous cultures have been described as more collectivist in nature than Western cultures, with the community viewed as the most important “unit” in Indigenous cultures (Newman, 2013). This is not to say that the individual located in a collectivist culture is not important—rather, the individual tends to be viewed in terms of the cultural mores that affect the individual’s “being” (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). To exemplify, public humiliation (the result of a range of situations, including task failure) will most likely cause an Indigenous individual considerable distress, arguably above that experienced by individuals in individualistic cultures, because the Indigenous individual will feel the need to remove himself or herself from the community as a means of managing the humiliation, for a length of time or even permanently (Claypool & Preston, 2013).

This example shows not only how the core values of a community or culture may influence the members of that culture but also the need for those located outside of the culture, including researchers, to be aware of the core values of that community and culture and consider how best to align themselves with those core values (Meyer et al., 2012; O’Neill, McLarnon, Xiu, & Law, 2016). As noted by Pyrch and Castillo (2001), the Indigenous cultural viewpoint views a person as “only one blade of grass, but that [one person] is rooted to the next blade, which is rooted to the next, and so on” (p. 380). For instance, if individualists generally value individual achievement and collectivists value community cohesion and the greater good of the group, then it is important that approaches to researching the related populations reflect the values of these populations. More specifically, questions must be asked about legitimization. Notably, how do indigenist research approaches that have been adapted from Western thought or approaches focus on or work to legitimize Indigenous ways of acquiring knowledge? How do these approaches make explicit the way in which knowledge is obtained is just as important as the discussion (and assumptions) about what and whose knowledges can actually be accessed? In the next section, we will consider the answer to such questions.

**Approaches Based on Indigenous Values**

A scan of the academic research literature on indigenist methodologies identifies a range of approaches to indigenist research that incorporate Indigenous values, including those of reciprocity (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010), respect (Bessarab, 2012), ethical interactions (Gower, 2012), participatory interactions (Kendall et al., 2011), and emancipatory designs (Zavala, 2013). A research approach that employs such principles is the Yarning approach to research (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010). “Yarning” has been defined by Bessarab (2012) as an informal conversation, recognized by Indigenous peoples as culturally friendly and a means of talking about something or someone to provide and receive information. Yarning, then, is used as a tool for engaging Indigenous Australians in respectful and reciprocal conversations (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010), with the strength of the Yarning approach lying in the cultural security that it creates for Indigenous peoples participating in research. Specifically, yarning builds on oral traditions of “handing down” information and sits comfortably with Indigenous pedagogy as it is “relaxed and informal” (Bessarab, 2012). The Yarning approach also aligns with the core Indigenous values of generous listening, as well as open and non judgmental communication; it employs an Indigenous perspective, gained from consultation with Indigenous peoples as participants rather than subjects; and it enable the use of Indigenous voices, which helps to facilitate the reporting of research findings back to community.

The principles or core values of reciprocity, respect, and ethical and participatory interactions, however, as well as emancipatory designs, are not unique to indigenist methodologies alone but rather are evident in research approaches across the cultural spectrum. For this reason, we return to the three philosophical principles identified by Rigney (2006) as essential when undertaking research with/ in Indigenous communities. The first of these principles is resistance as the emancipatory imperative, with resistance a value (as well as an action) that ensures colonizing or hegemonic influences are challenged and/or identified for what they are. The second principle is political integrity, which refers to the way in which the research itself must guide the research actions, to ensure it fits with the moral principles of Indigenous communities. The third principle is the privileging of Indigenous voices to ensure that people who have been previously voiceless in the (academic) literature are now being heard.

A further (fourth) principle or value identified by Smith (1999) relates to the notion of power, and how power can be used (or misused) in research. Indeed, Smith (1999) asserts, power relationships are an inherent part of any research study and form the greatest threats to the integrity of the Indigenous community(ies) participating in the research. For this reason, Smith (1999) suggests that a series of questions must be explicitly considered prior to choosing the most appropriate methodological approach to indigenist research:

- Whose research is this? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out?
Who will write it up? How will the results be disseminated? (p. 10)

Answers to these questions must then inform the preliminary phases of the development of the study, to ensure the research is culturally safe and that there is an alignment between the research/ed/er.

There is also a need to ponder the possible influence or outcomes of the power that is inevitably held by the researchers themselves and forms part of their research gaze (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Rigney, 2006). The work of the researcher is research—including the generation of results or findings, on budget, to meet deadlines. Balancing the requirements of this work may present challenges when working with Indigenous communities, where there is a need for the researcher/ed, together, to consider a wide range of issues. These challenges are threefold. First, researchers must ensure that Indigenous participants are encouraged to tell their stories in their own voices (Henry et al., 2002) and are acknowledged as the owners of their knowledges (Kendall et al., 2011). Second, researchers must safeguard the intellectual property rights of the Indigenous community(ies) are observed and protected from misuse (Rigney, 2001). Third, findings of the research be returned to the owners of the knowledge(s) by researchers as soon as possible, upon completion (Henry et al., 2002). Questions to consider in relation to these challenges include: how will the timelines associated with the funding of research influence the research? How will the researcher, who is required to publish, disseminate research findings that are returned to the owners of the knowledge(s) as soon as possible? Answers to these questions must then inform the preliminary phases of the development of the study, to ensure the research is culturally safe and that there is an alignment between the research/ed/er.

It is in the context of considering the power relations at play when undertaking indigenist research, as well as the need to develop research approaches that explicitly legitimize Indigenous ways of acquiring new knowledges, that a new approach to indigenist research was developed and tested across three different mobs of Australian Indigenous peoples. The approach is called the Yerin Dilly Bag Model of indigenist health research and is explained in the next section of this article.

The Yerin Dilly Bag Model

Principles Framing the Approach

The Yerin Dilly Bag Model or approach to indigenist health research, developed by Doyle, is informed by the three principles of Rigney (2006), as outlined in the introductory section of this article. First, the Yerin Dilly Bag Model resists the hegemonic or colonizing influences of individualistic Western approaches and instead privileges/ is framed by more collectivist values by providing a framework to support engagement and involvement with Indigenous community(ies) and draw on related Indigenous knowledges. The model does this by allowing for the identification of a set of community values to guide the way in which the research/er/ed is conducted.

Second, the model maintains Indigenous political integrity by arising from/fitting with the moral principles and/or core values of the Indigenous communities in which the research is conducted. This is because the principles and values that guide the research are drawn from the communities that hosted/were involved with the research—that is, the researched.

Third, the approach privileges Indigenous voices by enabling active participation of the Indigenous communities in the research, from beginning to end, and ensuring that it is the Indigenous voices that are heard, thereby addressing power-related issues between the research/er/ed. In so doing, the approach ensures that questions about the research ownership, whose interests are served by the research, and how the findings will be disseminated, are considered with community elders as part of its development.

Cultural Proficiency and the Yerin Dilly Bag Model

By adhering to these three principles of Rigney (2006), the Yerin Dilly Bag Model also provides the means of conducting research that is culturally “safe.” Specifically, this is achieved by resisting hegemonic influences, allowing for the incorporation of the values of the researched into the research by the researcher and, in so doing, enabling the participation of Indigenous peoples and the privileging of Indigenous voices in the research.

At the same time, the Yerin Dilly Bag Model is also informed by the core values that shape other indigenist methods. As noted in a previous section, all ethical research rests upon the principles or values of respect, reciprocity, and feedback, regardless of the group that is being researched or the method(s) employed when undertaking the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This suggestion is supported by indigenist researchers more generally who, as also noted, uphold the core values of reciprocity (Bessarab & Ng’an’du, 2010); respect (Leeson, Smith, & Rynne, 2016); ethical interactions (Gower, 2012); strength-based participatory interactions that position the researched as experts in their own lives and knowledges (Kendall et al., 2011); and emancipatory designs which, in collectivist cultures, achieve outcomes that benefit the community (Newman, 2013; Smith, 1999; Zavala, 2013). Such emancipatory designs include the need to allow the data to speak for itself without the limiting influence of (for example) a White, colonizing lens when analyzing the data and generating findings (Bainbridge et al., 2013). Similarly, and
as also suggested in a previous section, there is a need for research approaches to consider the influence of the context and perspectives of the research/er/ed (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003). This can be achieved through the use of local language, such as that advocated by West et al. (2012), together with other culturally acceptable ways of communicating, such as yarning (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010).

Indeed, rather than Indigenous core values being integrated into Western approaches, with these Western approaches leading the way, the Yerin Dilly Bag Model serves to privilege Indigenous ways of being. Similarly, the approach is more than a collection of tools to support Indigenous researchers to gain greater participation by groups or communities in the Indigenous research (Sithole, 2012). Instead, the Yerin Dilly Bag Model positions indigenist knowledges and core values at the center of the research itself as a means of, first, legitimizing indigenist knowledges and core values, and, second, acquiring or creating additional knowledge(s) that recognizes and addresses the power–knowledge relationship in the research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

Bishop (1996) reminds us that any Indigenous culture is distinctive and complex, with diversity in and between communities and mobs. To achieve greater buy-in from potential research participants, to show respect for the local culture, to be culturally safe as an approach, and to be transparent in cultural research method, the Yerin Dilly Bag Model allows for local indigenist knowledge(s) to be interpreted by researchers using a local Indigenous viewpoint.

**History of the Dilly Bag**

While it is important to reiterate that each Indigenous culture is distinctive and complex, with diversity evident in and between communities and mobs (Bishop, 1996), the notion of “the dilly bag” is commonly understood across a range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Australia as a means of holding, storing, and/or carrying goods, before and after colonization (Jenkins, 2016). Some historians report that the dilly bag has been traditionally kept by the elders, with no-one but these elders permitted to open the bag or look into the bag (Kristen, 2007). However, this was not the case in all Australian Indigenous communities, with the dilly bag often used as a container for carrying goods (Sithole, 2012). To exemplify, Australians living in coastal New South Wales (NSW) were known to, and in many places still do, weave “dilly bags” from grasses and reeds, especially those found near the ocean, and used to transport food, sometimes weapons, and often small treasures of the owner (Nugent, 2014). Dilly bags had short or long “handles” and generally went around the head and/or were carried over a shoulder. Dilly bags also keep cultural valuables, either food stuffs or artifacts.

For the Yerin Dilly Bag Model of indigenist research, the dilly bag is the metaphorical holder of the philosophical principles that frame and inform the practice of indigenist research. This is explained in the next section, in the story of the Yerin Dilly Bag.

**The story of the Yerin Dilly Bag.** There is a variety of land and seascapes on the Central Coast of NSW, Australia, where the salt seawater meets with the fresh waters from the streams, mangroves, and creeks. At one time, these places teemed with sea food, and there are many middens dotted along the coastline that attest to these places being traditional meeting places. Elders who know the area call these places ceremonial where, in seasonal times, other Indigenous mobs would come to the coastal areas and exchange food and stories. The word for the mixing of salt sea and creek fresh waters in Eora/Cadigal is *yerin*, and means not only brackish water but also where two or more ideas, stories, or peoples are intermingled in an unconditional way, giving rise to cultural enrichment. Interestingly, there is evidence the word was also used to describe similar concepts in Indigenous languages in the Sydney area, including a metaphor for Western and Indigenous knowledges integrating (Troy, 1992), and has similarities in the Gurunggai language, including *ganna* in Arnhem Land (Hughes, 2000).

The dilly bag, then, is a metaphor (Pyrch & Castillo, 2001). The philosophical principles—or core values and behaviors—carried in the Yerin Dilly Bag and used to frame and inform research undertaken in the Sydney and nearby regions are *nawa maur* (hold), *waranara* (seek), *ngara ngara* (listen), *nganaga* (ask), *wingara* (think), *burbangana* (help lift), and *bulbanga* (hold up). These values were derived from careful discussions with community elders—discussion that were approached with care, with due consideration given to the way in which the core values of the researcher(s) may influence the conversations. The principal researcher, Doyle, and advisor, Hungerford, are both mental health nurses, educated and trained to enable others to take the lead in conversations and manage challenging discussions.

It is important to reiterate that the philosophical principles identified in the process of discussion with community elders can be changed according to the region in which the research is undertaken. For example, researchers who undertake research in other regions of Australia would meet with the relevant elders, to consider the core values or behaviors that are most important to them and which would “fill” the dilly bag, accordingly, for that particular piece of research. The Yerin Dilly Bag Model, then, is transferable because it can be used in other locations and cultures, including other Indigenous communities that may have different core values; and allows for the inclusion of those different core values in the dilly bag, rather than imposing of other core values onto the researched.

For this particular piece of research, each of the principles utilized, as described in turn in Table 1, represent...
Table 1. Yerin Dilly Bag Model of Indigenist Research: Philosophical Principles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Value or Behavior</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
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<tr>
<td>nawa maur (hold)</td>
<td>“Holding” means that the information shared between people is regarded and kept as sacred. Researchers only “hold” the knowledge; they cannot keep it or own it. An example of holding in the dilly bag model is when an Indigenous person shares their story. That story, either positive or negative, is held—it is not used to stigmatize or sensationalize an issue in community. “Holding” demonstrates respect and engenders trust in the researcher, as to “hold” a community, person, or issue is to communicate to the participants the importance of the individual or group to the researcher. A comment or issue may be parked, by putting one’s hand in a cupping position and saying “I will hold this until later.” Holding also means caring as the researcher needs to demonstrate that the Indigenous person(s), community(ies), or issue(s) is important to that researcher. Imagine cradling something with both hands, keeping it safe, respecting its power—that is what nawa maur means.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waranara (seek)</td>
<td>To “seek” means to actively look for an item of interest or path. In a research setting, “seek” means to look to learn. Indigenous peoples often learn by observation, and “too many worry” questions may mean that a researcher is avoided by the Indigenous group (Sheldon, 2010). Seeking makes sure the behaviors of the research are in harmony with the Indigenous community. For example, it is important to ask permission before entering a community (Jackson-Barrett, Price, &amp; Walker, 2015). This can present challenges to researchers, as many communities are fractured, and have different “culture carriers.” While official permission might be awarded from a land council, Indigenous or Aboriginal health service, or other organization as appropriate, it is often one elder or one group that will permission the community to participate. Getting an elder or other group to permission the research requires trust and a community member to vouch for the researcher for this to occur. This might take more than one meeting, and the research team needs to demonstrate cultural proficiency from the initial contact. To seek in this context also means to be able to identify and measure the importance of an issue to a community or individual. For example, in one community, the most pressing need, decided by the elders, might be the employment of young men, while to the researcher, it might be reducing cannabis use in the young men. While elders may concede that reducing cannabis use is important, they may also see that cannabis use would reduce if the young men had jobs. In an example like this, the research team may not receive the support it requires to collect representative data from this population set.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ngara ngara (listen)</td>
<td>Listening is important—not just for what a researcher might hear but also for that which is not heard (Ezzy, 2013). Silence is not always uncomfortable for Indigenous peoples, and researchers need to know when to hold, when to seek, and when to listen. Respect is the core value informing listening (Tedmanson, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nganaga (ask)</td>
<td>Some non-Indigenous peoples may feel as if they are “walking on eggshells” around Indigenous people(s). Even Indigenous persons living on another group’s country will be reticent about speaking up or “big-noting” themselves. Putting “ask” in your research dilly bag means that researchers have enough humility to recognize they are not the keepers of all knowledge, that researching in Indigenous communities is a privileged position (Prout, Lin, Nattabi, &amp; Green, 2014). One way to make sure a researcher does not breech cultural and a community protocol is to ask for cultural assistance. To ask someone for clarity regarding an issue in a respectful manner is to demonstrate respect for that culture. Asking the Indigenous persons in the research program to clarify and contribute to the research will be emancipatory for some communities. Generally, Indigenous people tend not to relate to a “big noter,” so humility is the core value that informs “ask.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wingara (think)</td>
<td>When entering an Indigenous community, it is necessary to be ever-mindful, until the researcher has reached the stage where he or she is culturally safe and proficient. A researcher with cultural humility will have an observable understanding of power relationships and a respectful demeanor toward Indigenous participants. This researcher will think of the effect that his or her actions will have on the community pre, during, and post the research event. Thinking requires time to reflect. Indigenous persons might prefer that researchers take time to consider an Indigenous perspective, rather than imposing a Western parameter on the interactions. Researchers are expected to consider, reflect, and think about the stories shared and seek clarification in a respectful manner.</td>
</tr>
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knowledge that has shaped the worldview—including the way of life—of the Indigenous community/ies involved. This knowledge was shared with the researcher by the community, including the elders, prior to the research commencing; was then used to shape the research approach; and thereby became an integral part of the research, making the crucial connection between the researcher/er/ed.

Perhaps even more important than the principles themselves—nawa maur (hold), waranara (seek), ngara (listen), nganaga (ask), wingara (think), burbangana (help lift), and bulbanga (hold up)—is the way in which they inform the research approach and also one another, with this interconnectedness reflected in the research itself. For instance, and as illustrated in Figure 1, it is by seeking and listening that the researched become the researchers; which, in turn, enables the researchers to lift up the community to be heard and hold, as well as hold up the Indigenous knowledge(s) created with/by/for the Indigenous community(ies). The notions of “hold” and “hold up” in this context can be loosely connected to the Western Desert concept of “hold” or cultural value of kanyirrinpa (McCoy, 2008), suggestive of the attitude of nurturing, standing alongside, building, and developing. Embracing the seven concepts of nawa maur (hold), waranara (seek), ngara ngara (listen), nganaga (ask), wingara (think), burbangana (help lift), and bulbanga (hold up) enables a process of knowledge transfer that...
includes/involves the community, maintained the reputation of the community, and leads to self-determination and healing for the community.

Involvement of the researched—that is, the local Indigenous communities within which the research was undertaken—in the development of the research from the outset, including identification of the core values that framed the research and its findings, ensured the achievement of cultural congruence and proficiency. Such involvement also meant that the members of these local communities were supported to create and control the research processes themselves, as they were supported to articulate their knowledge, and also use this knowledge to define themselves and the research, as well as their relationships within the community, with other communities, as well as the environment. The core values of the researched were used to enable concordance between the researcher/er/ed, together with the research findings, thereby legitimizing the practices, principles, and knowledge(s) of all those involved. In so doing, the Indigenous knowledges of the communities involved was employed to frame the new knowledge(s) created through the research.

More generally, it is important that researchers also consider the possible challenges to this process. These include supporting researchers to develop the skills required to engage with community elders or members and facilitate conversations that may be difficult. To exemplify, for a range of reasons, some communities may not feel receptive to the notion of joining with researchers or sharing core values; similarly, they may resist discussions aimed at unpacking their core values or seeing what the benefits of the research may be for them. There is a need for researchers to be equipped to manage such conversations to achieve the connections and participation required to generate meaningful outcomes.

Regardless of these challenges, the Yerin Dilly Bag Model represents an important step forward in the development of indigenist research approaches. Specific methods or approaches to collecting data (e.g., Yarning or even a Western approach such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions) can be incorporated into this approach. This is because the Yerin Dilly Bag Model ensures that issues related to local core values of an Indigenous community and power relations are addressed, and cultural proficiency, at all levels, is guarded. In addition, the Yerin Dilly Bag Model provides a useful framework to guide research that is undertaken in Indigenous communities, providing the means by which Indigenous peoples, communities, and voices can participate; Indigenous knowledges and core values are privileged; and findings and recommendations benefit the community. In so doing, researcher/er/ed concordance is achieved.

Conclusion

There is a need for the research, which is being undertaken worldwide to close the gap in health indices in Indigenous communities, to be culturally congruent and safe. This explains the need to develop indigenist research approaches that resist hegemonic influences, including the ongoing colonization of indigenist knowledges; have political integrity according to the Indigenous communities in which the research is located; and privilege the voices of Indigenous peoples and communities. The Yerin Dilly Bag Model of indigenist health research provides a useful and adaptable framework to inform the conduct of research in Indigenous communities, as it allows for the researcher/ed to consider the core values of the community; draw from the Indigenous knowledge of that community; and use this information to frame the research design and approaches, including data collection, analysis, and creation of new knowledge. This gives rise to researcher/ed concordance. The principles advocated by the Yerin Dilly Bag Model of indigenist research are, therefore, transferrable to other communities. As such, the approach provides an important means by which researcher/ed can help to “close the gap” of health disadvantage in Indigenous communities.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge Associate Professor Cressida Fforde (Australian National University) and Professor Yin Paradies (Deakin University) for their support when developing this piece of work.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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