

**From sending a message stick to having your message stick:
A critical analysis of Indigenous Australian public relations, from the
standpoints of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women**

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Under the supervision of Professor Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews and

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Treena Clark declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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I am an Aboriginal woman descended from the Eurocentric defined borders of South Australia and the Northern Territory. My groups, my peoples, and my ancestors come from the Kokatha and Wirangu Nations (on my mother's side) and Warlpiri, Gurindji, Warumungu, and Yankunytjatjara Nations (on my father's side). I acknowledge my ancestors and their knowledges, experiences, and resistance efforts that they have encountered and experienced. I also acknowledge the beautiful Sydney lands that I have lived and work on, predominately the land of the Gadigal peoples of the Eora Nation.

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Supervisor Confirmations

The research participants who joined as co-authors have provided confirmation of their co-authorship to the researcher. I have sighted email or other correspondence from all co-authors confirming their certifying authorship and endorse the above stated contribution of work undertaken for each of the published (or submitted) peer-reviewed manuscripts contributing to this thesis.

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Terminologies

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represents the two broad categories of people Indigenous to the country now known as Australia. Aboriginal peoples are originally from the mainland and Torres Strait Islander peoples are originally from the Torres Strait Islands. This term should always be capitalized, and it is commonly the preferred and culturally appropriate expression to use.

Blackfulla is a colloquial term referring to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

Blak is a term that has been altered and appropriated from its historical use as a slur and in its contemporary form refers to being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The artist Destiny Deacon first used the term in 1991 in the exhibition “Blak lik mi”.

Colonization refers to the process of invading and/or settling in a land that was previously established by Indigenous peoples.

Colonial or *Colonialism* relates to the acts and characteristics from and of a colony and its practice of colonization.

Country (with a capital C) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples describes the connections of family and ancestral origins with particular parts of the Australian landscape.

Decolonization describes the process of healing and restoring the damaging acts of colonization through ways of economic, cultural, political, spiritual, and psychological means.

Decolonial refers to the dismantling of Eurocentric and western knowledge production and episteme.

Elder refers to an Aboriginal person who is a respected and bestowed a cultural Knowledge Holder in their community. This term is not necessarily assigned to an older person.

Eurocentric or *Western* refers to peoples, cultures, or systems that hold European worldviews and practices.

First Nations peoples is a relatively new term that is embraced by many peoples and groups who are Indigenous to countries around the world. This term should always be capitalized.

Indigeneity refers to the connection, membership, and essence of being a person who is Indigenous or First Nations.

Indigenous peoples or *Indigenous Australian peoples* refers to all people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. There are contentions with using the term Indigenous, as the homogenization of the two are argued as disrespectful. Both terms should always be

capitalized. These terms will be used alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, however, throughout this thesis.

Knowledges is used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander beliefs and understandings.

Mob refers to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander nation, clan, or language group.

Nations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples refers to their group affiliation of their ancestral, Country, family, and community place(s) of connection.

Post colonization or *Postcolonial* refers to the aftermath of colonization and the rebuilding of a society following the departure of the colonists.

Self-determination in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts describes the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to determine their own economic, social, cultural, and spiritual practices, customs, and systems.

Sisters or *sistergirls* is a term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to demonstrate connection with each other as strangers, friends, or family. It can also refer to transgender Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Abstract

This thesis highlights the practices of colonization and whiteness within the Australian public relations discipline and the processes of decolonization from the standpoints of Indigenous women working within the profession. Within this thesis, the specialization of Indigenous Australian public relations has been framed as a function that manages relationships between stakeholders, communicates for social change and self-determination, challenges deficit discourses, and is mostly built upon Indigenous cultural protocols and values. The practices within Indigenous Australian public relations have been utilized since time immemorial and are strongly evident within the protesting and campaigning movements that emerged from the invasion of Australia in the late eighteenth-century. Yet, within mainstream public relations there is a lack of acknowledgment of the historical and contemporary roles that Indigenous Australian public relations provides to the profession. Within the specialization of Indigenous Australian public relations itself, Indigenous women's standpoints and voices are absent within research.

This thesis, therefore, aims to decolonize the practices and paradigms of Eurocentric understandings within the Australian public relations profession. As an interdisciplinary body of work, this thesis is guided by conceptual frameworks of Indigenous and public relations decolonizing theories and intersectional and Indigenous women's models. Specifically, Indigenous Decolonization theory and Indigenous Women's Standpoint theory guide the positioning and research approach of an Indigenous storytelling methodology and Indigenous yarning method. Five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

women from public relations and communications provide individual and collective themes and narratives through the Indigenous yarning interview data and thematic analysis.

The resultant findings of this thesis are disseminated within research journal papers and demonstrate theoretical and empirical understandings of the profession of Indigenous Australian public relations. The first paper examines colonization and whiteness in Australian public relations and the influence of Eurocentric narratives and paradigms. The second paper interrogates colonial and white historical public relations narratives and asserts decolonization through the identification of Indigenous public relations practices since time immemorial. The third paper provides insight into the practices of Indigenous Australian public relations and the development of a theoretical framework of this specialization. The fourth paper provides insight into the definition and role of activism practices within the personal lives of Indigenous women. The fifth paper explores Indigenous women's rationales and motivations of Indigenous Australian public relations as a career. Lastly, the sixth paper examines the positive and negative experiences as Indigenous women working within the profession.