

## **The Reconciliation Barometer and the Indigenous Imaginary**

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In February 2009, Reconciliation Australia released a four part study called *Australian Reconciliation Barometer*. The product of research by Auspoll, the Barometer has been set up to 'measure the progress of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' (ARB Comparative Report 2009, p.10. All bracketed page references in this paper are to this report, unless otherwise specified). The Barometer will be repeated every second year.

The Barometer breaks new ground in the campaign for 'reconciliation' by constituting the two parties to 'reconciliation' as two comparable publics. As well as asking questions of a representative National sample (n= 1007), in which Indigenous Australian respondents would be only a tiny few (20-30 respondents), Auspoll solicited an 'Indigenous' sample (n= 617). Although the Indigenous sample is not 'representative' (it is 68 per cent female, and responses came through the internet), this is a welcome acknowledgment of the 'Indigenous public'. Yet, in some ways that I will point out below, the Barometer has yet to realise the potential of constituting 'the Indigenous public'.

Since February, Reconciliation Australia has been publicising the Barometer, highlighting certain findings:

- A majority of both groups believe the relationship is important and improving.
- A strong belief among both groups that Nationals should know about Indigenous culture and history
- A majority of non-Indigenous Australians would like to have more contact with Indigenous Australians.
- There are low levels of trust between the two groups.
- We don't recognise qualities in each other that we value in ourselves.
- Non-Indigenous Australians don't know what they can do to close the gap.
- Many shared 'Australian' values – each group is strong on family orientation, pride, an easy going nature and sense of humour.
- A majority of non-Indigenous Australians have taken steps to advance reconciliation in the last twelve months.

In this paper I want to discuss these and other findings, in order to answer the question: what does Reconciliation Australia understand by 'reconciliation'?

### **The many meanings of reconciliation**

There continues to be a struggle over the meaning of 'reconciliation'. Angela Pratt's content analysis of Parliamentary speeches between June 1991 and December 2000 (Pratt 2005) distinguished nine senses:

1. Recognition of Indigenous-specific rights
2. Not recognising Indigenous-specific rights
3. Should not be about guilt for past wrongs
- 4. Practical improvements to Indigenous life chances**
- 5. Recognition of Indigenous, history, culture, heritage**
- 6. Relational and/or attitudinal**
- 7. 'People's movement'/'grass-roots'.**
- 8. A general sense of good will, including national unity**
9. Cynicism of reconciliation as 'politically correct'

As I read the Barometer, it posed questions about senses 4-8. That is, the Barometer does not test the public's opinions about Indigenous-specific rights (1 and 2); and it does not explore the public's sense of guilt (or rejection of guilt) (3), and nor does it explore the public's cynicism about 'reconciliation' as an imposed 'political correctness' (9).

Behind the different senses of 'reconciliation' is a word whose complexity is rarely noticed: 'relationship'. When the Barometer refers to 'the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' the term 'relationship' has at least three possible meanings:

- The *statistical relationship* between two measured entities: the similarity/difference between the value of a variable measured in one population and the value of the same variable measured in the other population. For example the Barometer can tell us the size of the difference between the answers that the Indigenous and the National samples give to the question: '*As an Australian, I feel proud of Indigenous culture*'. (Only 1 per cent of Indigenous people disagreed with this proportion, and 50 per cent of the National sample disagreed with it.) The Barometer has a lot to say about 'relationships' in this quantitative sense, and it sometimes refers to such big disparities in the two samples' answers as 'gaps' (see p.6), and implies that the gaps should be smaller. I wonder if the word 'gap' is being asked to do too much work – referring not only to measured inequalities of wellbeing (such as the 'mortality gap') but also to measured differences in answers to attitudinal questions.
- The *interpersonal relationships* between indigenous individuals and non-Indigenous individuals. There are a number of items in the Barometer that evoke this sense of 'relationship'. For example, a question about whether you would *feel comfortable if a member of your family married an Indigenous person*, and a question about whether you wanted to *have more contact with Indigenous people*. One of the problems with such questions in the Barometer, as I will explain below, is that they were asymmetrical: the questions about relating to an Indigenous person were not always matched by questions about relating to a non-Indigenous person.
- The *political relationship* between two collective entities. The Barometer has little to say about this. Although the study constituted an 'Indigenous public' methodologically, it did not explicitly entertain other ways that Indigenous Australians as a whole could be politically represented and thus enter into a political relationship with the structures (the Commonwealth parliament, the main political parties) that represent those in the 'National' sample. However, the study did include a question that referred to the relationship between

Indigenous and non-Indigenous political leaders, and this implied that political ‘relationship’ and not just an interpersonal one. The study missed an opportunity when it omitted to ask whether there was a need for a body to succeed ATSIC in giving political representation specifically to Indigenous Australians.

Without saying what it meant by ‘relationship’, the Barometer (p.35) asked people if they agreed that *‘the relationship between Indigenous and other Australians is important for Australia’*. The entire Indigenous sample (100 per cent) and 91 per cent of the National sample agreed that it is important. The survey (p.34) then asked respondents what they thought of the relationship between Indigenous people and other Australians. About half of the National sample (46 per cent) thought the relationship to be ‘fairly poor’ or ‘very poor’; and about half the Indigenous sample (51 per cent) thought this. A slight majority of both samples (53 per cent Nationals, 56 per cent Indigenous Australians) thought that ‘the relationship’ is improving (p.15).

In what ways did people think the relationship is poor or very poor? The Barometer explored at least two distinguishable dimensions of relationship quality. One had to do with such material (in)equalities as have been the focus of the slogan ‘Closing the Gaps’. The other highlights attitudinal variables such as perceived trust. I will deal with each of them – the material and the attitudinal – in turn.

### **Perception of the relationship as material (in)equality**

One question (p.25) stated *‘Indigenous people are mostly disadvantaged and live on the edge of mainstream society.’*

National: 40 per cent agree

Indigenous Australia: 75 per cent agree.

Another question (p.43) asked people whether they agreed with certain statements including: *‘Being born Indigenous makes it harder for an individual to achieve in Australia today’*.

National: 36 per cent agreed

Indigenous Australia: 70 per cent agreed.

Among those who agreed with this proposition about *‘harder...to achieve’* there were some who strongly agreed. The strongly agreeing endorsement of the *‘Being born indigenous...’* statement was weaker among Nationals (5 per cent of total responses) than among the Indigenous sample (38 per cent out of the total responses).

Another question (p.43) asked people to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous ‘access to opportunities’. A slim majority (53 per cent) of Nationals thought Indigenous access to opportunities was *‘better or the same as others.’* However when the Barometer nominated specific dimensions of wellbeing, Indigenous people were (apparently) judged by National sample respondents to be worse off than non-Indigenous:

Housing 67 per cent (maximum possible agreement, as non-response not given)

Education 73 per cent (maximum, ditto)

Employment 77 per cent (maximum, ditto)

Health 81 per cent (maximum, ditto)

Indigenous Australians' perceptions of Indigenous people's dimensions of disadvantage were almost universal. Only 12 per cent of the Indigenous sample thought Indigenous access to opportunities was '*better or the same as others*'. And for specific dimensions of disadvantage, almost the entire Indigenous sample saw Indigenous Australians as disadvantaged.

Housing 94 per cent (maximum possible agreement, as non-response not given)  
Education 94 per cent (ditto)  
Employment 94 per cent (ditto)  
Health 92 per cent (ditto) (p.40).

The survey posed one other question about socio-economic inequality, about knowledge of the life expectancy gap (p.27). 71 per cent of the National sample thought that there is a life expectancy gap of more than ten years (which I take to be a clear perception of disadvantage); 90 per cent of the Indigenous sample thought the gap was more than ten years.

In short, when the National sample was asked about *specific* dimensions of socio-economic disadvantage, very large majorities agreed with the view that Indigenous Australians are disadvantaged. Among Indigenous Australians, the perception of Indigenous disadvantage, when posed in terms of specific dimensions, is almost universal. However, when the issue of Indigenous disadvantage or '*being born Indigenous*' or Indigenous '*access to opportunity*' is put in general terms, more than half (and as many as 64 per cent) of the National sample did not agree with the proposition that Indigenous Australians are disadvantaged or have inferior '*access to opportunities*'. Indigenous Australians' systemic or structural disadvantage is not conceded by a majority of the Australian public. Even more interesting, one in four of the Indigenous Australian sample disagreed with one or other or both of the combined statements that '*Indigenous Australians are mostly disadvantaged and live on the edge of mainstream society*'; and 3 out of every ten (a large minority) Indigenous Australians do not agree that '*being born Indigenous makes it harder for an individual to achieve in Australia today*'. Perhaps one could conclude that the perception of Indigenous disadvantage is well established, but with some surprising inconsistencies.

### **Attitudinal dimensions of the relationship**

People were not asked about their own level trust and whom they trusted, but they were asked their opinion about others' level of trust (pp.36-7).

83 per cent of Nationals and 81 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought that *other Australians have a fairly low or very low level of trust for Indigenous Australians*.  
And

85 per cent of Nationals and 86 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought that *Indigenous Australians have a fairly low or very low level of trust for other Australians*.

That is, at least four out of five Australians believe that there is low trust between Indigenous Australians and other Australians. This means that for the National sample low trust is a slightly more widely perceived 'relationship' problem than 'disadvantage' or socio-economic inequality. There are no significant 'gaps'

between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in their opinions about the levels of trust. However, this question does not reveal levels of trust itself, as Reconciliation Australia's publicity would have it, only opinions about levels of trust. There is one question that seems to be to be directly measuring people's trust: their trust in the mass media. The Barometer found very few people in either sample who think that *'the media presents a balanced view of Indigenous Australia'* – 14 per cent of the National sample, 9 per cent of the Indigenous sample (p.49). (Who wants to present themselves as believing that the media are 'balanced' about anything?) If Australians' distrust of the media representation of Indigenous matters is so high, are mass media campaigns a poor investment for those promoting 'reconciliation'?

People were not asked if they were 'prejudiced', but they were asked to estimate others' levels of prejudice. The National sample (p.38) thought there was a lot of prejudice: 73 per cent of Nationals thought that the prejudice of non-Indigenous Australians towards Indigenous Australians was 'fairly' or 'very' high; and 73 per cent of Nationals thought that Indigenous Australians' prejudice against other Australians was 'fairly' or 'very' high. A higher proportion of Nationals saw 'very high' prejudice in Indigenous attitudes (31 per cent) than in 'Australian' attitudes (18 per cent).

The Indigenous sample (p.39) also thought there was a lot of prejudice: 94 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought Australians to be fairly or very highly prejudiced towards them, and 75 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought Indigenous Australians to be highly prejudiced towards other Australians. Indigenous Australians were more likely to see 'very high' prejudice (51 per cent) among other Australians. However, we should note that Indigenous respondents see their own people as highly prejudiced, and one in five (19 per cent) Indigenous respondents thought Indigenous prejudice towards other Australians to be 'very high'. I will come back to this.

Again, these questions are not measuring 'prejudice', but peoples' opinions about the occurrence of prejudice. There do not seem to be great gaps between the two kinds of Australians in their opinions about the extent of prejudice in Australia. We all seem to agree that we are nation of prejudiced people.

### **Factors promoting material inequalities**

The Barometer asked people about the factors that were important in creating Indigenous disadvantage.

It is important to note that the Barometer did not ask respondents whether they thought there was such a thing as 'disadvantage' among non-Indigenous Australians, and so it did not ask people about the causes and remedies of 'disadvantage' among non-Indigenous people. This is a pity, as we have no way of knowing whether the respondents' answers about Indigenous disadvantage exhibit their views of a form of disadvantage that is specific to Indigenous Australians or their views of social disadvantage in general. If the Barometer's notion of 'relationship is so much to do with socio-economic (in)equality, then it would be useful to know what people think about socio-economic inequality in general and about the problems of non-Indigenous Australians who are 'disadvantaged'.

The Barometer offered respondents nine factors that could be *'important in creating Indigenous disadvantage'*, and it allowed respondents to agree with as many of these prompted explanations as they wished. It was characteristic of the Indigenous respondents that nearly all of them considered all factors to be important. The

following factors were considered important by 95 per cent or more of the Indigenous sample (p.41):

*Alcohol and substance abuse*  
*Lack of confidence and self-esteem of Indigenous people*  
*Lack of respect for Indigenous people*  
*Discrimination*  
*Poor access to health and education services*  
*Race-based policies of the past*  
*Inadequate living conditions*  
*Ineffective government programs and policies*

Among Indigenous respondents, the only factor to rate a *relatively* low endorsement as important was '*Lack of personal responsibility (among Indigenous people)*' and this was still judged important by a very high (85 per cent) majority.

The National sample was a little more reluctant to rate any of these factors as 'important', but the ratings were still high – a range of 69 to 90 per cent agreeing that each of the nine suggested factors was important. We should remember that not all of the people responding to this question about the causes of disadvantage agree with its premise that Indigenous people are disadvantaged. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the National sample's responses is the difference between the highest rated factor '*Alcohol and substance abuse*' (90 per cent) and the lowest '*Ineffective government programs and policies*' (69 per cent). It is also interesting to notice that a higher proportion of Indigenous Australians (85 per cent) than Nationals (79 per cent) thought '*lack of personal responsibility*' to be an important factor.

The survey allowed people to differentiate between saying a factor was 'important' and saying it was 'very important'. With one exception, Nationals' ratings of factors as 'very important' ranged between 25 and 32 per cent. The exception was '*alcohol and substance abuse*' (68 per cent). We can infer that among respondents in the National sample, the idea that '*alcohol and substance abuse*' explains much of Indigenous disadvantage is very strong. Any initiative to redress disadvantage, whether by government or other agent, must address '*alcohol and substance abuse*' if it is to be taken seriously by the Australian public. When the Indigenous sample was asked to distinguish between 'important' and 'very important', all nine factors that rated 'important' were rated 'very important' by most Indigenous Australians (a range of 65-80 per cent). The factor with the highest 'very important' rating by Indigenous Australians (80 per cent) was '*lack of personal responsibility (among Indigenous people)*'.

The importance that both Indigenous and Nationals samples attached to 'personal responsibility' can be put in historical context. When the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation commissioned market research in the 1990s and asked people what they thought 'reconciliation' means, the consultant Donovan (in November and December 1991) found that nearly all respondents (95.1%) supported the proposition that 'reconciliation' should include '*Aboriginals becoming more responsible for their own lives.*' Were these respondents thinking of individual responsibility? We don't know, because Donovan's question did not distinguish individual from collective responsibility. The Barometer's data suggest that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians attach a lot of importance – in explaining the past and in projecting the future – to personal responsibility. Noel Pearson's emphasis on personal

responsibility as a factor in disadvantage seems to be strongly endorsed by both the 'National' and the 'Indigenous Australian' samples.

The Barometer includes data that we could interpret as relevant to the issue of the perceived readiness of Indigenous Australians to take responsibility for their own well-being. That is, the Barometer asked respondents to attribute certain qualities to Indigenous and to non-Indigenous Australians. Before examining these data, I would like to raise a methodological point.

The Barometer assumed that all respondents were willing and able to generalise – that is to give their 'overall impression' of 'Australians' and their 'overall impression' of 'Indigenous people' (p.17). The survey did not ask respondents whether they thought it was possible or desirable to generalise about 'Australians' or 'Indigenous people'. Does Reconciliation Australia's own methodology give legitimacy to stereotyping by assuming it to be a universal and readily available way of thinking? Might it not be interesting to find out what proportion of both samples would prefer not to attribute any qualities to all Australians or to all Indigenous Australians? The alternative method would be first to ask people if they thought it were possible or desirable to generalise or stereotype these two categories of people. The elicited data would be comparable with those collected by Lorna Lippmann and John Western in the 1960s. Independently, Lippmann and Western found that about half their respondents did not spontaneously stereotype or that they agreed with a statement that it was not possible to generalise about 'Aborigines'. Would it not be relevant to Reconciliation Australia's current efforts to discourage stereotyping to know what proportion of 'Australians' and of 'Indigenous Australians' are uncomfortable about generalising about themselves and about the Other?

The Barometer (pp.16-18) offered respondents a number of words and phrases that respondents might select. I will report the results only of those that have something to do with 'responsibility': the qualities '*disciplined*', '*hard working*' and '*good at working together to address the problems that confront them*' (p.17).

Are Australians '*disciplined*'?

44 per cent of Nationals thought that Australians tend to be 'disciplined'.

29 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought Australians to be 'disciplined'.

Are Indigenous Australians '*disciplined*'?

13 per cent of Nationals thought Indigenous Australians tended to be 'disciplined'?

37 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought Indigenous Australians tend to be 'disciplined'.

That is, in neither sample did a majority attribute 'discipline' to itself; and each sample was less likely to attribute 'discipline' to the 'other' than to itself.

Are other Australians and Indigenous Australians '*hard working*'?

The National sample very commonly esteem 'other Australians' (i.e. themselves, mostly) to be 'hard working' (74 per cent), but very few of the National sample (18 per cent) see 'hard working' as an 'Indigenous' quality. A substantial majority of Indigenous Australians see both themselves (69 per cent) and 'Australians' (61 per cent) as 'hard working'. The notable feature of these figures is the rarity of 'Nationals' (fewer than one in five) seeing Indigenous Australians as 'hard working'.

Unfortunately, the survey did not ask the question: 'Are Australians 'good at working together to address the problems that confront them?' For some reason, it asked this question – a question about political capacity to take responsibility - only about 'Indigenous Australians'. The result was hardly a vote of confidence in Indigenous political capacity. A bare majority of Indigenous Australians (52 per cent) attributed this quality to themselves (with 20 per cent in strong agreement). Only one

in five of Nationals agreed that this was a quality of Indigenous Australians, with only 4 per cent 'strongly' agreeing. These data suggest that there is not a lot of faith in Indigenous political capacity, even among Indigenous Australians themselves. However, it is difficult to interpret this lack of faith, as it may be that Nationals, if they were asked, would not rate highly Australians' collective political capacity either. In omitting to ask about non-Indigenous Australians' ability to work together *'to address the problems that confront them'*, the Barometer falls into the trap of assuming that only Indigenous political capacity is problematic.

### **Public policy and the scope for individual action**

'Reconciliation' is presented by the survey as a responsibility in two ways:

*political*: for governments to adopt the laws and policies conducive to reconciliation, and for Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders to 'cooperate'; and

*individual*: for individuals to act in some way that promotes reconciliation.

The Barometer collected data not long after the Prime Minister's Apology in February 2008 (p.58). Both samples thought that the Apology was important for Indigenous people (76 per cent of Nationals, 98 per cent of Indigenous Australians); and smaller but still large proportions of both samples also thought that the Apology had been *'important for relations between Indigenous people and other Australians'* (61 per cent of Nationals, 93 per cent of Indigenous Australians). Both samples include majorities who see that the relationship is partly a matter of respect and not simply a matter of material (in)equality. That so many of those surveyed in the Autumn and Winter of 2008 thought that the relationship was improving (p.15) may also be an effect of the February Apology.

Notwithstanding the respondents' sensitivity to the 'symbolic' aspects of 'reconciliation', the question of socio-economic disadvantage remains powerfully present within many people's understanding of 'reconciliation'. The Barometer asked respondents about others' responsibility for relieving 'disadvantage'. Perhaps the government was the implicit agent in many respondents' minds when they were asked if they agreed that *'Some Indigenous people need specific help to reach equality with other Australians'* (p.49). This proposition was almost universally supported (91 per cent) by Indigenous Australians and widely supported (72 per cent) by Nationals (p.49). Would these levels of support have been less had the statement specified that the 'help' was to be in the form of government programs? It would be interesting to know. Another question asked people whether they agreed that: *'The government should put measures in place to help Indigenous people in specific ways.'* The Indigenous sample very strongly supported that view (94 per cent agreement), and almost two thirds (62 per cent) of the National sample agreed (p.53). Note that the first statement says that those to be helped are 'some Indigenous people', the second says that 'Indigenous people' would be helped. It is difficult to know which of the two differences in wording (specifying that the government was the source of help, or allowing the help to go to all, not some, Indigenous people) explains the lower 'National' support for the second proposition. Nonetheless, it is clear that in both samples the idea has wide support that government has some kind of responsibility to deal with the disadvantage of Indigenous people.

However, the survey also revealed widespread doubts about the efficacy of past government action. For example there is a popular view that '*race-based policies*' have been harmful in the past (pp.41-2). Indigenous Australians hold almost universally to the view that this was an important factor in creating Indigenous disadvantage (97 per cent 'important', 84 per cent 'very important'). Nationals were less likely to blame '*race-based policies in the past*' (70 per cent 'important', 30 per cent 'very important'). Clearly, history has taught Australians that 'race-based' policies *may* be harmful. A large majority of Nationals (69 per cent) agreed that '*ineffective government programs and policies*' have helped to create Indigenous disadvantage, and 28 per cent said this was a very important factor (pp.41-2). Nearly all of the Indigenous sample (97 per cent) agreed (78 per cent 'very important') that '*ineffective government programs and policies*' helped to create Indigenous disadvantage (pp.41-2). A similar question asked for respondents' assessment of '*past programmes designed to address Indigenous disadvantage*' (p.55). A relatively high proportion of the National sample (13 per cent) did not have a view (a rare but welcome instance of the Barometer reporting respondents' unwillingness or inability to respond), but 96 per cent of the Indigenous sample had a view, and it was largely negative – 74 per cent said 'fairly unsuccessful' or 'very unsuccessful'. A bare majority (52 per cent) of the National sample agreed with this negative verdict on '*past programmes designed to address Indigenous disadvantage*'.

There is a paradox here. The Indigenous sample supported more strongly the views that past policies have not been successful and that race based policies have been a factor in causing Indigenous disadvantage; yet, at the same time, the Indigenous sample supported more strongly than the National the idea that '*The government should put measures in place to help Indigenous people in specific ways*'. History has taught Indigenous Australians that governments can do them great harm, but their expectation and hope remain high that governments can do them good. Or is the Indigenous view an uncomfortable combination of two thoughts that are in tension with each other: governments have great responsibilities to help Indigenous Australians, and governments have a tendency to fail when they exercise those responsibilities?

The Barometer does not test support for specific government programs. In particular, it does not explore support for ways that the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders could be improved, though it asked whether people thought there was '*good cooperation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders*' (only 29 per cent of the National sample, and 22 per cent of the Indigenous sample thought that there was). The absence of more specific question about the forms of Indigenous leadership is a pity, as a post-ATSIC body is on the government's agenda, and it would be interesting to explore views about whether such a body would contribute to or detract from 'reconciliation.'

As I pointed out earlier, one important sense of 'relationship' is to do with how individuals behave towards other individuals whom they see as belonging to the opposite social category to themselves. The Barometer asked some questions about the two samples' disposition, as individuals, to '*help disadvantaged Indigenous people*'. It came up with some data that I find poignant. The Barometer asked (p.53) people if they agreed with the statement: '*I would like to do something to help disadvantaged Indigenous people*'. It also proposed the statement: '*I know what I can do to help disadvantaged Indigenous people.*' In both samples there was a significant gap between the proportion of respondents agreeing that they wanted to help and the proportion who said they knew what help to give. This difference was 17 per cent in

the National sample (37 per cent wanting to help, less 20 per cent knowing what help to give); and 13 per cent in the Indigenous sample. That is, the National and the Indigenous samples had similar proportions of people who did not know how to help Indigenous Australians, when they wanted to help. The Barometer tested the strength of people's commitment to helping by asking if they *strongly agreed* with the two statements. Among Nationals the gap between strongly wanting (8 per cent) and strongly knowing how (5 per cent) to help disadvantaged Indigenous Australians was small (3 per cent), but among Indigenous Australians the gap between strongly wanting (68 per cent) and strongly knowing how (49 per cent) was quite high (19 per cent) (p.53). In short, the Barometer has uncovered a significant problem of what we might call 'baffled willingness to help' disadvantaged Indigenous people, and that problem is no less apparent in the Indigenous sample.

### **Do Indigenous actions matter?**

The Barometer's approach to the interpersonal dimension of reconciliation is flawed, in my view, by its instances of what I call asymmetry. That is, it asks what non-Indigenous Australians might or might not do with or for Indigenous Australians, but it does not ask Indigenous Australians about what they might or might not do with or for non-Indigenous Australians.

People were asked whether they agreed that '*Indigenous people are open to sharing their culture with other Australians*' (p.32). Might it not have been relevant to reconciliation to find the extent of agreement with the statement: 'Non-Indigenous Australians are open to sharing their culture with Indigenous Australians'?

The Barometer asked if people agreed that '*Non-Indigenous Australians are superior to Indigenous Australians*' (p.43) (and it is curious that Indigenous Australians were slightly more likely to agree with this evaluation). If such attitudes ('racial superiority', in the Barometer's words) are a hindrance to reconciliation, might it not be relevant to find the extent of agreement with the converse statement: 'Indigenous Australians are superior to non-Indigenous Australians'? After all, in the opinion of the Indigenous Australian sample, there is a lot of prejudice among Indigenous Australians towards non-Indigenous Australians. Are these respondents right?

The Barometer discovered the extent of agreement with the statement: '*I would feel fine if I had a child who decided to marry an Indigenous person*' (62 per Nationals; 93 per cent Indigenous Australians, p.49). But the Barometer did not ask: 'I would feel fine if I had a child who decided to marry a non-Indigenous person' - a scenario that a great many Indigenous Australian parents confront. Do Indigenous Australians welcome or fear such intimate associations?

Similarly the Barometer asked whether respondents desired more contact with Indigenous people '*than they currently have*' (National sample 76 per cent; Indigenous Australians 100 per cent, p.51). But it did not ask whether respondents desired more contact with non-Indigenous Australians than they currently have – surely a relevant piece of information about Indigenous Australians.

The Barometer asked if, in the last twelve months, a respondent had '*built personal relationships with Indigenous people*' (Nationals 26 per cent, Indigenous Australians 85 per cent); but it did not ask if respondents had 'built personal relationship' with non-Indigenous people.

Nor did the survey ask if a respondent, in the last twelve months, had '*reconsidered your views about non-Indigenous Australia*'. It asked only if respondents had reconsidered their views about Indigenous Australia.

By such omissions, the Barometer implies that while the interpersonal aspects of reconciliation are open to the initiatives of non-Indigenous Australians, the reciprocal efforts of Indigenous Australians are not worth asking about.

### Conclusion

If one were to examine closely all the data collected by Auspoll and to conduct multivariate analyses of its micro-data, one could no doubt come to conclusions about the associations between the demographic characteristics of the two samples and their responses to questions. I am less concerned with the Barometer as social science and more concerned with the Barometer as an intervention into our understandings of 'reconciliation'. I have tried to do things: to trace the notions of 'reconciliation' that are implicit in the Barometer; and to highlight some similarities and differences between the two 'publics' that have not been highlighted by Reconciliation Australia itself in its public interpretation of the data.

The idea that reconciliation is about 'relationships' tends to be inflected by three features of the Barometer: (a) the strength of the idea of Indigenous disadvantage; (b) the asymmetrical questions about interpersonal relationships; (c) the absence of questions about the political relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The result is that the 'relationship' problem is understood to consist largely (though not exclusively) of two matters: helping Indigenous Australians to overcome their disadvantage, and persuading non-Indigenous Australians to come to a positive view of Indigenous Australians. These two specifications of what 'the relationship' is about are in some tension with one another. That is, when the Barometer evokes the topic 'Indigenous disadvantage', it cannot help evoking, at the same time, features of Indigenous Australians that are not so likeable, such as their attributed failure to take responsibility for themselves.

### References

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