based policy priorities in powerful but largely invisible ways (see Andersen in press). Little of this is critically examined with respect to thinking about the complex contexts within which this "policy population" gets naturalized as an "identity" population, nor does it assist us in thinking more broadly about what alternative—and arguably equally legitimate—identity populations might look like, ones more attentive to an Indigeneity of immediacy as detailed earlier by Hokowhitu (2009).

Aboriginal identity population estimates, shorn of this historical and contextual complexity, thus offer legitimate but predictable results. Within such narrow parameters of statistical configurations, it is little wonder that Canadian officials can speak so confidently about the(ir) statistical picture of the social conditions of Canada's Aboriginal communities and, in particular, the extent to which these communities lag behind those of the rest of Canada. Daniel Salée (2006: 5) writes that policy makers appear to possess

> a fairly good sense of what ails Aboriginal communities and individuals: the higher incidence of family violence, youth suicide, psychological distress and substance abuse, poorer individual health, weak or undeveloped capacity for economic development, the greater likelihood of exclusion from key labour markets, substandard housing and sanitary conditions—all of which makes life for them, at least on the surface, more difficult and less appealing.

It would be surprising if existing census classifications produced data on anything *but* these kinds of conditions. Not because they are not legitimately afflicting our communities but, rather, because current statistical configurations are *only* geared to produce empirical pictures of such conditions.

Indigenous Statistics, Australian Style

The Australian story of Indigenous statistics is a fraught one. Until amended by referendum in 1967, Section 127 of the Australian Constitution specifically excluded the "aboriginal race" from official population figures (Chesterman and Galligan 1997). The colonial assumption that Australian Aborigines were a "dying race" combined with concern that those states where larger numbers of Aboriginal people survived, by virtue of later colonizations, only claimed resources based on their Euro-Australian citizenry (Attwood and Markus 1999). Indigenous people were included in the national census from 1971. In 1995 the ABS formally adopted the following racial origin question as the standard for identifying persons as members of the Indigenous population: *"Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?* For persons of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin please mark both 'Yes' boxes. Response options are: No; Yes, Aboriginal; and Yes, Torres Strait Islander" (ABS 2010). In this

section we argue that while the direct racial discrimination of omission from previous censuses is remediated, the vestiges of the racialized presumptions that underpinned them remain.

Our argument that racialized presumptions remain embedded in official Indigenous statistics in Australia is centered around the political realities in which Indigenous statistics reside. As Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008: 7) note, data do not tell a story in themselves. Rather, "we use data to craft a story that comports with our understanding of the world." The first Indigenous statistical "story" influence is that in the 2010s, despite the addition of statistical collections such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS), the five-year national censuses remain the main official source of data on Indigenous Australia. As noted above, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were not included in official census counts until 1971, and then, as now, Indigenous data were primarily generated by the inclusion of an Indigenous identifier question (Altman and Taylor 1996: 193). That is, they are an add-on, collected and collated according to the national count priorities already established for non-Indigenous Australia.

Secondly, and more compellingly for our argument, the "and Indigenous people" approach to data collection is that the apparatus of the nation-state is both the primary generator and the primary user of Indigenous statistical data. In a circular process, Australian state and federal government departments and authorities not only design, interpret, and disseminate nearly all Indigenous statistical data, they are also the predominant users and commissioners of these data. Indigenous statistics are fundamentally an Indigenous free zone with Indigenous peoples firmly the object of the research. While official data collection agencies such as the ABS laud their "engagement" with Indigenous people, this engagement is deeply circumscribed. For example, the ABS reports its consultations with its Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (AGATSIS), a group drawn from commonwealth, state, and territory agencies, Indigenous peak bodies (associations of groups with allied interests), and data working groups (ABS 2007). Engagement, however, is not a "doing word," and it is clear from ABS reports that Indigenous presence within the action part on the purposive commissioning, analysis, interpretation, and use of the data is both limited and beholden.

We argue further that this circumscription is not neutral. Rather, the veiled but definite demarcation lines about the Indigenous presence in statistical space reveal the political and racial position from which Australian Indigenous data emanate. More significantly, they reveal that the dominant position in the realm that controls, commissions, analyses, and interprets Indigenous data is occupied by a group who constitutively share a social, racial, and economic

position: middle class Euro-Australian. The result is a (mostly) subconscious shaping and restriction of Indigenous statistical portrayals, confining and/or prescribing how Indigenous data are conceived.

The social, economic, and racial distance of those producing data from the object of the data, Indigenous peoples, reinforces a largely uncontested, in Bourdieu's (1984) terms, a "synthetic unity" of dominant perspectives. Their underpinning ontology is clear in their genesis, practice, and interpretation. Within this worldview the Euro-Australian is the (unacknowledged) norm and the consistent Indigenous failure against these normed standards across multiple measures is deemed the problematic. The ontological frame is a presumption of pejorative Indigenous racial/cultural difference and a norm of Indigenous deficit. The discourse underpinning this ontological frame is common across the colonizer settler world and variously theorized as the deficit model along the lines of the culture of poverty thesis (Lewis 1966), or the poverty of Indigenous culture thesis (Sutton 2009). Within these theses, the common explanatory for statistical socio-economic differences between cultural sub-groups and the majority are posited as the values, behaviors, attitudes, and capacities of the "underperforming" group—in this case, Indigenous peoples. The questions generated from this ontological frame are "what" questions. They seek to establish/re-establish the degree of that "what" via a constant probing of measures of the deep social, health, and economic inequalities that plague Indigenous peoples.

From an Indigenous ontology the more important question is not what differences exist, but why? A reversing of the ontological lens would compel different questions in a different research agenda. Yes, there are strong similarities in the social deprivation and marginalization of colonized Indigenous peoples in first world nations. Yet, culturally and experientially, our major similarity is our dispossession and subjugation by Anglo colonizers. Is this the central explanatory facet? Should the research agenda focus on probing the dimensions of white colonizer settler privilege to identify how societal resources and opportunities can be shared more equally? Such questions are more than just the inverse of questions related to Indigenous disadvantage. They resituate the problematic from the "deficit" Indigene to ask how the processes of colonization remain inextricably entwined on contemporary patterns of settler privilege. They also bring into the examination the concepts outlined earlier of liberal Western thought, civilized society, and how these are operationalized in contemporary settler states to embed and sustain race and culture aligned inequalities.

The overtly benign evidence base of Indigenous statistics, therefore, we argue, is methodologically embedded within a dominant middle class, colonizer settler ontological, epistemological, and axiological frame. Not surprisingly, it produces data that conform to its underpinning assumptions, values, and ways

of understanding Indigenous reality. In the next section we use two examples to demonstrate how the dominant quantitative methodology of how Australian Indigenous statistics are done shapes the emergent statistical picture.

Simple Presentations, Difficult Interpretations

For State and Federal Government departments and authorities, the primary producers and consumers of Indigenous statistics, the criticality of Indigenous data has risen with the evidence base prerequisites for determining Closing the Gap policy directions. The disparate socio-economic position of Indigenous people is deemed so urgent that progress on closing the gap must be reported annually to Federal Government. The fifth prime minister Closing the Gap speech was made to the Australian Federal on February 6, 2013 (Closing the Gap 2013). There is, therefore, an increasing imperative as time since policy implementation elapses for data to indicate not only demographic and socio-economic patterning, but a (positive) change in that patterning. The polity of the Closing the Gap policy direction is a neo-liberal project with its focus on applying market solutions to Indigenous social and economic arenas (Walter 2009). Implicit in this frame is the individual as the object of enquiry. Yet, within the individualized focus, the racial demarcation remains undisturbed. The Indigene is a raced individual, and the statistical evidence on the position of these raced individuals is political territory.

The Indigenous statistical yardstick by which policy success, or lack of success, of measures such as Closing the Gap are publicly reported tend very strongly toward simple comparison and limited interpretations. The primary Indigenous statistical publication, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, provides an example of how such presentations operate to entrench the position of the Indigene as deficit and to underplay the lack of policy outcomes. For example, the 2008 publication reports the Indigenous unemployment rate decreased (from 20 percent to 16 percent) between 2001 and 2006, an absolute positive change, adding that the ratio of decline is similar to that of the non-Indigenous population. What the term "similar ratio" does not make clear is that the relative proportional change is negative; the gap increased. The non-Indigenous unemployment rate declined by around 29 percent, but the Indigenous rate, off a much higher base, declined by only 20 percent (Walter 2008). The 2011 publication, while noting that the halving of the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Australians by 2018 is a key policy objective of governments, reports no direct comparison. Rather, it is just noted that "the unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians was higher than for non-Indigenous Australians across all age groups." This statement is accompanied by an aggregated bar chart with no percentage figures given and which compares Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment

proportions to a total of 100 percent. The portions of the bars comprise the proportion of each group undertaking CDEP employment (the Commonwealth Development Employment Program is an Indigenous only "work for welfare payments" program), the proportion employed non-CDEP, the proportion unemployed, and the proportions of each population categorized as "Not in the Labour Force" (AIHW 2011a: 19). It is nigh on impossible to assess from this figure if the Indigenous/non-Indigenous unemployment gap is widening or closing. Given the highlighting of even marginal statistical improvements in other parts of the publication, we can only assume that the gap has widened.

Simple frequency counts also occlude vital aspects, such as the dramatically different demographic composition of the aggregate Indigenous population. The AIHW (2008) reports an increase, from 20 to 23 percent between 2001 and 2006, in the proportion of Indigenous people aged fifteen years and over who had completed Year 12 (the final year of secondary schooling in Australia)—a positive absolute change. Incorporating the very youthful profile of the Indigenous population into the analysis, and given that the vast majority of Year 12 completers are aged seventeen to nineteen provides a different interpretation. The higher proportion of the Indigenous population (more than double) in this age range means Indigenous Year 12 achievement rates should be rising faster than in the older non-Indigenous population (Jackson 2008). But it is not. In relative terms, the ratio of non-Indigenous to Indigenous Year 12 education achievement also rose (Walter 2010c). In the 2011 edition (AIHW 2011a), there is no comparative percentage reported for the proportional rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people holding a Year 12 achievement. There are data on retention rates from Year 7/8 (the start of Australian secondary schooling), with the text reporting that the 2010 Indigenous retention rate to Year 12 is 47 percent versus 79 percent for non-Indigenous school children. But while the text says that halving the school retention rate gap by 2020 is a government policy and that the retention rate has increased from 29 percent in 1996, there is no information provided on whether the relative retention rate gap is still declining. Again a hard to interpret graph suggests that the gap is not narrowing. The simplicity of the presentations belies the statistics' active existence as racially politicized objects. This is not a claim of ideological subjectivity. Instead, the purpose is to highlight the context in which data are produced and presented. While the overt intention is to disseminate a neutral statistical reflection of the Australian Indigenous social and economic reality, this perception fails to acknowledge that it is a particular view of reality being reflected. The difficulty of the data interpretation highlights the implications of these data. A simple, undemanding, but very difficult to interpret analysis keeps the focus on Indigenous people and culture, epistemologically situated as "the object problem," as Hokowhitu (2009) argues: a problem with problems. Covertly

then, such statistical "results" prove that Indigenous peoples and culture are in deficit and both must be reshaped to remediate their lack of fit, axiologically and ontologically, into "normal" Australian society.

The Orthodoxy of the Dichotomy

While the process vagaries of simple presentations and difficult interpretations obscure policy outcomes while highlighting deficit, the practice of comparison is itself deeply political and methodology entrenched in the way Indigenous statistical data are done. The default analytical norm of Australian Indigenous data is their comparison with data from the non-Indigenous population. Yet, such methodological practice operates to place the Indigene as the Other before data are even examined (Walter 2010c). It is the Indigene compared to the rest in a way that allows the ordinariness of this dichotomized portrait to be infused by a subtle depreciatory tone.

The comparatively small Australian Indigenous population magnifies the dichotomizing pejorative effect. This statistical imbalance leads to the analytical and interpretive tendency to aggregate, via the broad category of the "Indigenous population." While conventionally categorized as one group for statistical purposes, Australian Indigenous peoples are by no means homogeneous, and significant demographic, social, and cultural differences exist within and across populations. Even the existing aggregations are a statistical convenience rather than a reflective picture. There are more than 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations, and before colonization more than 250 distinct languages were spoken. More than 145 are still spoken today (Office offor the Arts n.d.). Today, it is Indigenous peoples such Dharug, Noongar, Yorta Yorta, and Larrakia who make up Indigenous Australia. Each of these peoples has a unique history, a unique historical and contemporary affiliation to country and each also has a unique and living cultural identity, (Walter 2008; 2010c). State, geographically remote or urban disaggregation does occur, but usually only for limited variables. The outcome is a dichotomized, mostly nationally aggregate comparative norm that, while supporting statistical function, is an essentialist positioning. It disregards and nullifies, in both policy and Indigenous understanding terms, the diversified identity and reality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. It also decontextualizes the dire picture of embedded social, economic, political, and cultural inequality that the data represent from the places and spaces where this inequality is taking place on a daily basis.

Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1 presented earlier in this chapter are examples of how Indigenous data are commonly presented in both Australia and Canada. And as argued earlier, the "what" and "how" of the comparisons and the methodological presumptions shaping how these comparisons are conceived and