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Exploring Critical and Indigenous Research Methods with a Research Community: Part II – The Landing

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Exploring Critical and Indigenous Research Methods with a Research Community: Part II - The Landing



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In Brief: This article is the second and final installment of my research exploring critical and Indigenous research methods and their relation to LIS. What is the context of these twentieth century methods and what might they mean to a librarian in the twenty-first century? Read along as I discover, for myself and my “research community,” some unexpected, and perhaps profound, aspects of these research methods and their associated worldviews.

When we last met I was heading off to discover “...critical and Indigenous research methodologies and what relevance they might have to librarians and the field of LIS” and also what it was like to research with community. ((Robert Schroeder, “Exploring Critical and Indigenous Research Methods with a Research Community: Part I-The Leap”. In the Library with the Lead Pipe, (2014). <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2014/exploring-the-leap/>)) (See the set-up of this research at “Exploring Critical and Indigenous Research Methods with a Research Community: Part I - [The Leap](#).”) Gr Keer, one of the reviewers of this article, noted the idea of discovering things that are already there is especially poignant in a context of things Indigenous. So I’ll qualify this word discovery by noting that the process of researching and writing this article was a discovery of things unknown to me and the members of my research community. The critical and Indigenous scholars who created the scholarship upon which I relied already knew and embodied this knowledge, and I thank them at the outset for their cogent articulations of various ways of knowing. Many of you reading this article will also already have discovered the ideas here — but I offer my own personal journey as an organic part of this academic research. This may be heresy to many, but I feel it germane to the topics at hand. Over the past few months my mind lived in these new places of critical and Indigenous research and I’ve come to see my self as part of my research. ((A serendipitous email from a librarian colleague, Anne-Marie Deitering, clued me into the method of autoethnography, and I think I may have been on the path of partially recreating this method. For more on autoethnography see <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095>))

This article is the second and final installment of this research, “The Landing.” First I will provide some needed history and context of extant research methodologies (and what lies behind them), next I will explore critical and Indigenous paradigms, then I will discuss ways they might relate to librarians, and finally I will conclude with reflections on the process of researching with a community. As you may recall, inspired by my initial readings in Indigenous research methods I formed an ad-hoc research community. They gave me information and sources that helped jumpstart my research and they helped me formulate the original research questions for this article. ((See

By their research methods ye shall know them

As an academic librarian I have a working knowledge of quantitative and qualitative methods, and I utilize this basic knowledge as I conduct reference interviews and individual consultations with students. In order to understand critical and Indigenous research methods and how they differ from other methods, I realize that I first need to find their context and locate them within the larger historical landscape of academic research. It quickly became apparent to me that methods were just the tip of an existential and cultural iceberg, and I had never looked below the water line. As Jerry Willis, in his *Foundations of Qualitative Research*, eloquently states:

In the social sciences there are a number of general frameworks for doing research. The terms qualitative and quantitative often are used to describe two of these frameworks. However, these terms imply that the main difference between the different frameworks is the type of data collected: numbers or something else such as interviews or observations. Actually, the differences are much broader and deeper and beliefs on several different levels, from philosophical positions about the nature of the world and how humans can better understand the world they live in to assumptions about the proper relationships between social science research and professional practice. Terms such as worldview and paradigm better capture the nature of the difference between different approaches to social science research... ((Jerry Willis, *Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches*. (Thousand Oaks, CA ; London: SAGE, 2007): 22-23.))

I asked an unassuming question of method and suddenly philosophy was rearing its intimidating head! While I prefer to not have to use philosophical jargon, we will use a bit because the scholars we will meet here use it. So for the concept of “the nature of being” or “the nature of reality” we will use the word ontology, and for the ideas of “knowledge” and “the relationship between what is known and the knower”, we will use epistemology.

When most of us think about traditional research methods we are actually thinking about a much more qualified subset of research methods. Perhaps we are not conscious that in our academic library worlds we are (mostly) talking about research methods developed from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries by rich, western-European, heterosexual, abled ((I use the term “abled” here, and not “able-bodied” as the abilities in question are not merely physical ones, but mental, emotional and social as determined by the culture in question.)), academic, men. What you are reading now, an academic peer-reviewed article, is a partial descendant of this lineage, tempered of course with later twentieth and twenty-first century developments. I think it is important for me to recognize this as one of the lenses through which I write, and through which you are probably reading this. While lenses can help to focus our minds, they can also limit and distort what we perceive.

“If you don’t know history, then you don’t know anything. You are a leaf that doesn’t know it is part of a tree. ” — Attributed to Michael Crichton

Table 1 below is a grid showing the three major historical academic research paradigms. ((This table was copied, with permission, from a series of tables by Jerry Willis’ in *Foundations of Qualitative Research* (tables 3.1, 3.2 and 4.1) with some additional information from a similar table in Allison Jane Pickard’s *Research Methods in Information* (table 1.1). Both of these authors acknowledge the previous work of Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln in aiding them in the creation of their tables. Willis based his tables on Egon Guba’s *The Paradigm Dialog*, 1990. Pickard based hers on Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba’s *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 1985.)) Remember, this is only a map and a two-dimensional representation and it is not a substitute for reality; only a potential aid to orientation to the landscape of this research.

Table 1 Research Paradigms - major issues

The first column lists our familiar friends, *ontology*, *epistemology*, and methods. This relation implies that methods are informed by how a researcher thinks about knowledge, and what constitutes knowledge is predicated on how a researcher constructs a vision of reality and their own being. Once we understand our reality, and what can be known, method becomes the answer to the question “How can we come to know it?” ((Allison Pickard, *Research methods in information* (2nd ed.). (Chicago: Neal-Schuman, 2013): 6.)) The subsequent three columns—positivism, postpositivism, and interpretivism—show the three major paradigms of Western academic research which existed up to about the middle of the twentieth century.

Positivism developed in Europe out of the scientific revolution of the late Renaissance and on into the Enlightenment. Enlightenment scholars believed that, “Knowledge that is acquired from the right use of reason is truth, in that it represents something real, unchanging and universal about the hu(man) (sic) mind and the structure of the natural world.” ((Tony

Brown, Action research and postmodernism : Congruence and critique. (Buckingham [England] ; Philadelphia: Open University Press. Brown, 2001): 21.) Rather than metaphysics and religion, empirical and quantitative methods became the basis of the natural sciences. ((Jerry Willis, Foundations, 60.)) Positivists believed, and still do, that objective facts and universal truths are out there to be discovered – quantitative data is king.

As scholars began to study people rather than matter, a fracture began to develop within the monolithic structure of positivist research. In the early nineteenth century **Auguste Comte** codified what he named “sociology.” Like the natural scientists, he was still looking for universal and generalizable laws, albeit in the realm of society. By the later part of the nineteenth century **Wilhelm Dilthey** conceptualized that the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften) were fundamentally different from the human sciences, including the social sciences (Geisteswissenschaften). Research in the human sciences meant to develop understanding (verstehen), as opposed to universal truths. ((Frederick Erickson, (2011). “A history of qualitative inquiry in social and educational research.” In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), The Sage handbook of qualitative research (4th ed.,). Thousand Oaks, CA: 2011: 44.))

By the mid twentieth century a post-positivist outlook in the social sciences developed. Post-positivists, while still sharing the ontological beliefs of the positivists, admitted that as human beings, researchers’ points of view and bias needed to be taken into account. Zina O’Leary, author of The Social Science Jargon Buster, states:

... there began to be a growing recognition of things like the fallibility of objective sciences conducted by subjective humans; the constructed nature of our world; the inconsistent and variable nature of the social; the impact of researcher worldview on inquiry; the value of the qualitative; the limits of top-down approaches to knowing; and the political nature of knowledge production. ((Zina O’Leary, The Social Science Jargon Buster, (London, England: SAGE Publications Ltd. 2007) doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857020147>: 2.))

Within the post-positivist camp qualitative methods had arrived, if not uncontestedly.

“Things fall apart; the center cannot hold.” - Yeats, The Second Coming

In the later part of the twentieth century the small fracture in academic research that began in the eighteenth century grew into a chasm, or perhaps a series of chasms. At this time many researchers, especially in the social sciences, adopted new paradigms, which are collectively called Interpretivism. Researchers in interpretivist paradigms see reality and knowledge as socially constructed, and allow for more subjective methods of research. Alison Pickard, author of Research Methods in Information, sees two general subgroups within the interpretivist camp. Under “Human Inquiry” she sees many modern social science disciplines and outlooks including Constructivism, and under “Critical theory” she includes Feminism, Marxism, Post-modernity, Post-structuralism, and Structuralism. ((Allison Pickard, Research methods in information, 12.)) Other researchers choose to break out Critical theories, Constructivism, and the Participatory paradigms from the term Interpretivism in order to emphasize some of the major differences in each approach. ((Yvonna S. Lincoln, Susan A. Lynham, and Egon G. Guba. (2011) “Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences, Revisited.” In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), The Sage handbook of qualitative research (4th ed., pp.97-128). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. Publications Ltd. 2007.)) As the emphasis of this paper is on critical and Indigenous methods, I will use the latter, more expanded view. Table 2 expands the Research Paradigm chart to encompass the critical paradigm and one possible model of an Indigenous worldview. ((This table draws upon the work of the authors cited in Table 1 (above), plus the author’s reading of the Indigenous scholars’ work cited in regards to an Indigenous paradigm.)) I offer it as a map to the next few sections of this paper.

Table 2 Research Paradigms - major issues

Critical Research

As mentioned above, the critical paradigm encompasses many modern movements such as Feminism, Marxism, Post-modernity, Queer Theory, Critical Race theory, and Post-Colonialism. ((A great series is published by Peter Lang called Critical Qualitative Research edited by Shirley Steinberg and Gaile Cannella.)) Each movement brings unique characteristics and outlooks to bear on the questions of research. Here I will reflect on concerns and questions that many critical researchers often hold in common. Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren describe a criticalist as:

...a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constructed; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of

ideological inscription;...that certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them; and, finally, that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression (emphasis added). ((Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren. "Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research". In Sage handbook of qualitative research, 303-342. (2005): 304.))

I will focus on what this description tells me are the differences between a critical worldview and positivist or post-positivist worldview. Critical researchers do not merely describe or understand reality; they critique it. They ask limited questions of a socially and historically constructed reality — questions of power, privilege and oppression. They recognize their own values and ideologies, put them front and center in their work, and constantly offer up self-critiques in order to better understand the influence they and their points of view have on their work. Criticalists, by centering their ideologies in their work, hold up a mirror to researchers in the positivist and post-positivist traditions. What is reflected is that the positivists' assumptions in regards to their methods, that they are neutral and objective, are not true. Positivist inquiry is also underpinned by often unarticulated values and ideologies. As Marion Nemenwirth states, "Scientists firmly believe that as long as they are not conscious of any bias or political agenda, they are neutral and objective, when in fact they are only unconscious." ((Namenwirth, Marion (1986) "Science Through a Feminist Prism", in Ruth Blier, Feminist Approaches to Science, (pp 18-41) NY Pergamon Press (1986): 29.))

The most telling is the part of the Kincheloe and McLaren quote above, is that it notes that scholars using traditional forms of research, consciously or unconsciously, are reinforcing and reproducing an oppressive system. Also, it would seem that critical research methods are not restricted by a specific form — either quantitative or qualitative. Similar to Freirean pedagogy, these methods are critical in that they are in line with the goals of emancipation and empowerment of both those researching and those being researched. ((Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, "Introduction: Critical Methodologies and Indigenous Inquiry," in N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, and L. Smith (Eds.), Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies, 1-20 (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2008): 5.)) Critical research is unabashedly political and often transformative. As critical researchers are often based in the social sciences, people are their subjects. However, the critical understandings and positions of researchers might not be shared with those being researched; can this be seen as colonizing? After exposure to critical theory, if those researched do not see themselves as oppressed in the ways explained to them, what are the options? Perhaps the researcher, in a dialogic manner, will work with those researched to redefine the local condition in local terms? One such critical method is **Participatory Action Research (PAR)**. PAR also includes the community in the research process in a democratic fashion, from the setting of the research agenda to the analysis of the findings. The boundaries of research and participants are blurred, and the research is meant to change and liberate the researcher as much as it is those researched. ((Allison Pickard, Research methods in information, 164.)) Others, too, have also noted contradictions in critical methods. Gaile Cannella and Yvonna Lincoln note:

Indeed, knowledge production, traditionally the province of the scholarly profession, has finally seen its flowering in the information age and the information society. However, even when we recognize this research/power complicity we must still, as academic knowledge generators and producers, conduct research, both because of the influence that it holds within dominant discourses and, more selfishly, because that is what we are hired to do in certain kinds of institutions. Critically-inclined academics, however, continue to struggle with how to rethink our fields in ways that generate critically oriented questions and methods, even while addressing issues such as voice, representation, and the avoidance of new forms of oppressive power. Although qualitative methods and alternative paradigm inquiry offer possibilities for the generation of epistemologies and methodologies that insist upon the examination of themselves, even qualitative inquiry creates power for, and all too frequently, a focus on the researcher herself. Thus, we are caught in the paradox of attempting to investigate and deconstruct power relations, even while we are ourselves engaged in a project which creates and re-creates power accruing to us. ((Gaile Cannella and Yvonna Lincoln, "Deploying qualitative methods for critical social purposes," In Critical qualitative research: A reader, 104-115 (2012): 106.))

Being aware of ourselves, our research, and how we and our methods are situated in regards to larger society as well as those researched, does not absolve us of the implications of our position. But perhaps this awareness can be a first step toward social justice?

"The word itself, 'research,' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's

vocabulary.” ((Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). (London ; New York : New York: Zed Books, 2012): 1.)) - Linda Tuhiwai Smith

Regarding Indigenous peoples and research, Linda Tuhiwai Smith goes on to say:

When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. ((Ibid., 1.))

As I write them Smith's words make me pause again, as I paused when I first read them. They make me aware of the position I hold as a researcher in the culture of a dominant imperial power in the early twenty-first century. I am arrogant enough to attempt to shoe-horn Indigenous paradigms into a grid, Table 2, the concepts of which grew out of a Western academic worldview and philosophy. But hearing her words, and those of the other Indigenous scholars who I have been privileged to read over the past few months, I was able to reflect on what I was attempting. I realize that my goal with this table is not to capture or colonize Indigenous methods, but rather to see, on this small stage of research methods, what arises when Indigenous worldviews meet Western schema over 500 years after that first, disastrous meeting. I am hoping that my struggle here may, in a concrete way, help to illuminate some of the characteristics of Indigenous paradigms.

The word indigenous (small “i”) means “produced, growing, living, or occurring naturally in a particular region or environment.” ((Merriam-Webster online, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indigenous>)) It comes from the Latin *indu*, within, plus *gignere*, to beget. In terms of “Indigenous research” or “Indigenous research methodologies,” ‘indigenous’ most often means research by people who, until recently, were not associated with the Western academic traditions. Indigenous scholars note that this term (capital “I”) has political connotations and most Indigenous peoples have experienced, and continue to experience colonialism. ((Shawn Wilson, *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. (Black Point, N.S.: Fernwood Pub. 2008): 16.))

‘Indigenous’ is not universally seen as a positive term. As Smith remarks, “Identifying as ‘indigenous’ can be dangerous in some parts of the world; it can be associated with dirtiness, savagery, rebellion, and since 9/11, with terrorism.” ((Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies*, xii.)) While theoretically this term could refer to people from any continent, the scholars that I have studied are Indigenous North Americans, Aboriginal People of Australia, and Maori from New Zealand. ((For two resources for research beyond the geographic areas I've concentrated on, see *Indigenous Pathways into Social Research* (2013) Mertens, Cram, & Chilisa (Eds.), and *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies* (2008) Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith (Eds.)) Scholars such as Shawn Wilson, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Margaret Kovach, and Mary Hermes have articulated an understanding of the complexities and benefits of Indigenous research methods—in part as a defense of their methods and their cultural values in academe, but also for the benefit of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. It wasn't until the late 1990's that this articulation appeared in academic writing. ((Cora Weber-Pillwax, “Indigenous research methodology: Exploratory discussion of an elusive subject,” *Journal of Educational Thought/Revue de la Pensee Educative*, 33(1)(1999): 33.)) It would seem logical as it was only at this time that Indigenous scholars worldwide had reached a small but critical mass in western academic institutions and could begin researching and publishing in scholarly venues. Many of these researchers, schooled in critical ways of thinking, began to focus on their own unique, existential, and cultural circumstances.

Looking at Table 2, at the column for an Indigenous paradigm, we can see that the idea of relationships resonates throughout. From the very outset the Indigenous paradigm resists the schema of Ontology/Epistemology/Methods, a schema inspired by Western philosophy. Wilson, in *Research is Ceremony*, repeatedly highlights that in an Indigenous worldview the ways of knowing about the world and the nature of reality are the same — epistemology is ontology. Wilson notes, “There is no word for ‘grandmother’ in Cree — it is either ‘my grandmother’ [Nookoom] or ‘your grandmother,’ [Kookoom]. When I have asked people how to say grandmother, the response was, ‘You can't be a grandmother without being attached to something.’” ((Shawn Wilson, *Research is ceremony*, 73.)) Multiple realities exist as multiple relationships exist. It would seem that knowledge is not so much contained in facts, like who people “are” (in an objective way), but rather knowledge is the relationship itself. These reality-making relationships are not just with people, but with the environment, culture, the cosmos, and spirituality. ((Ibid., 74.)) It must be stressed that Indigenous knowledge, true to its meaning of “being born from the place,” is rooted in the local. With each group of people and location an Indigenous worldview will be different, as the relationships in any specific instance will be unique. Nothing scientifically generalizable can be known and applicable to all Indigenous worldviews; better words to use would be somewhat resonant with or suggestive of. I cannot talk about the Indigenous paradigm, but rather an Indigenous research paradigm, based also on my relationship to the knowledge with which I have come in contact.

So what does this mean for Indigenous research methods? They, too, are linked organically with Indigenous ontology and epistemology. As we can see from the “Indigenous” column of Table 2, they are centered upon relationships; the relationships of the individuals within a community, of a community to its place and to the cosmos, and the relationship of a community to a researcher as well. All of these relationships will affect the methods used. In the Cree tradition such methods might be sharing circles, story, or protocol. ((Margaret Kovach, (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. (2009) 36.)) Obviously the research methods will be locally derived and intended to support and benefit all members of the community studied. Think of a spider’s web, with all of the strings being the relationships between the parts. If you touch one string the effect is felt throughout the web, and so you must take care to cause the least disruption. Regarding one of her research projects in a Canadian First Nations community, Mary Hermes’ notes:

I approached the research methods as something that could change over the course of the research. To start, my only guide was that what I did and how I did it were ‘situated responses,’ specific to the culture, the problems, and the dynamics of the particular context. One other guiding principle emerged over time: **Be in the community as a member first and researcher second**. In this way the community itself influenced and shaped the methods. The relationships I enjoyed were not designed just to extract information or to exploit an ‘insider’ perspective. The work I did was based on mutual respect and reciprocity, as a person who was deeply invested in studying a problem but not willing to prioritize this over the relationships created in the process. This meant that I had multiple responsibilities (not just to a university or a ‘committee’) and relationships with people had a variety of dimensions. Within this context ‘methods’ took on new meanings; methods were no longer simply tools for taking or discovering something. As textbook and tradition took a backseat to ethics and responsibility, methods began to feel like a recursive process rather than one procedure, apart from the whole. (Emphasis added) ((Mary Hermes, “Research methods as a situated response: Towards a First Nations’ methodology.” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), (1998) 166.))

My added emphases above point to another unique feature of Indigenous research: researchers prioritize good relations over the research product. In fact the strengthening of relations between researcher and those researched is always part of the process. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, research must go even further, educating, healing, and empowering Indigenous peoples in their struggle for self-determination. ((Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies*, 130.)) Indigenous research methodology also shares many characteristics with participatory action research (PAR). ((Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous methodologies*, 27.)) However the points made by Hermes and Smith above set Indigenous research apart from PAR. PAR may be employed by Indigenous researchers but Indigenous research is not by definition PAR.; Indigenous research privileges Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and is heavily centered on relationality. Reality (ontology) and what we can know about it (epistemology) are both products of relationships.

“If research doesn’t change you as a person, then you haven’t done it right.” ((Shawn Wilson, *Research is ceremony*, 135.)) - Shawn Wilson

What then might critical or Indigenous methodologies mean for libraries and librarians? This question does not mean we should inappropriately appropriate indigenous methods. Rather, what can an awareness of these differing methodologies and paradigms mean to our professional lives and practices, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous librarians? This is a question that arose from my engagement with my research community in my first article. ((Schroeder, “Exploring Critical and Indigenous Research Methods.”)) Library collections immediately come to mind. By being aware of the large variety of methodologies available to researchers and the worldviews they represent, we might better build balance into our collections. Most of the disciplines with which subject librarians liaise are anchored in specific paradigms. For example, the Curriculum and Instruction faculty at Portland State University with whom I work are critical constructivists. Knowing this helps me when I purchase material for their students, but knowing more about their theoretical base (which happens to dovetail nicely with my nascent praxis), I’m able to connect with these faculty on other levels. I realize, too, that for many Indigenous scholars the act of adapting to western research and publication norms can be stressful, and much Indigenous research may not be always come to us via the formats and publishers with which we are used to dealing.

Shawn Wilson notes that for Indigenous scholars these culture clashes are numerous. The western norm of anonymity for research subjects is often in direct opposition to the Indigenous ethics of relationality, where a person’s words are always credited to the speaker – remember knowing the relationship between the speaker and the listener is paramount. ((Shawn Wilson, *Research is ceremony*, 130.)) Western random sampling is also antithetical to the idea of choosing subjects based on the connections that researchers have with those researched. ((Ibid., 129.)) Even the format of western scholarly articles (including this one), where the author discovers truths for others, and reiterates the important and salient features of the research, can be insulting in many Indigenous cultural contexts. ((Ibid., 133.)) In this regard I reiterate my hope that you see this article in the framework of the growth of my personal understanding, and my story that I offer. Your comments requested and offered below will hopefully include your understandings.

Margaet Kovach brings to light other complexities faced by Indigenous researchers when she writes:

The act of compiling and organizing research findings for publication in and of itself presents a tension for Indigenous researchers who do not wish to compromise or diminish the power of oral culture in knowing. Yet, to remain viable in academic, our research must be written, assessed, and published...The incorporation of narrative story, and self-location found within Indigenous writing is perceived as indulgent rather than being recognized as a methodological necessity flowing from a tribal epistemology....The difficulty is that it is measured against a contrasting worldview that holds a monopoly on knowledge and keeps different forms of inquiry marginalized. ((Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous methodologies*, 84.))

Knowledge of these two paradigms can also help inform our library instruction. Subject librarians often teach instruction sessions for methods classes or classes where advanced undergraduates or masters degrees students are learning the ethos of their discipline, including what counts as knowledge, and what methodologies are privileged within a discipline. By introducing the ideas that research is never neutral, objective, or apolitical and that method and epistemology are choices, librarians can interrupt hegemonic discourses a bit, and allow students a place to consider alternatives.

When appropriate, librarians can also consider using their understandings of critical or Indigenous methods in their own research projects—always being aware of the potential for misappropriation. When we work with a group of “subjects” in our research, perhaps students, faculty, or other librarians, what role do they play? Are they subjects from whom we extract knowledge, which we then interpret and publish as our discovery? As I write these words I see even the kind of research that I’m doing here, researching in previously published works, follows this method. Would a critical stance make our research more emancipatory and might we use more democratic and participatory methods; ones that would allow the researchers and researched to become one and the same, with shared responsibility for co-creation of the questions, the methods, and the discussion? I’m hoping to have done some of this with my learning community. Linda Tuhiwai Smith also notes, that Indigenous researchers struggle with major questions, such as, “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?” ((Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies*, 10.))

Indigenous librarians can certainly discover and utilize the powerful tools and methods in their own traditions. But to what extent can non-Indigenous librarians effectively and respectfully use Indigenous methods? Here I think we need to reflect deeply. Scholars like Margaret Kovach see that critical researchers can be natural allies of Indigenous scholars in that the critical questions they ask about power and privilege open up space for discussion of Indigenous paradigms. ((Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous methodologies*, 86.)) But as scholars who represent the latest in the long line of colonial researchers, non-Indigenous researchers need to be hyper-aware of not extracting, claiming a “discovery,” and singularly profiting from Indigenous methods. We need to guard against our own misappropriation and misrepresentation of Indigenous methods. We can talk with Indigenous scholars, and learn from them, but we cannot talk for them.

There is much in the format of this article that I would credit to my exposure to Indigenous methods. I find myself being more self-revelatory, conscious of my relations to those I’m researching and for whom I’m researching, and also incorporating longer quotations from those scholars with whom I am interacting. I feel that I’m using these methods because over the last few months I have been in contact with the work of Indigenous researchers who have been eloquently articulating their worldviews and methods, and who have been modeling them in the ways they have chosen to present their ideas in their works. I am grateful for both their abilities and their devotion to starting this conversation in the academy.

These paradigms, the critical and the Indigenous, open up great opportunities for librarians and all others in the academy. Critical researchers offer up a mirror to traditional researchers, one which allows them (us) to see that what we thought were pure, neutral and objective motives and methods in our research, are always political and often oppressive. As researchers we need to question our own individual reasons and practices around research – the subject has become an object of research. My seemingly innocuous question about Indigenous research methods actually opens up huge questions about academe. Margaret Kovach speaks to this point:

There is an understanding that inclusion of Indigenous knowledge requires multiple strategies for reconsidering the existing system. The strongest potential for fresh discourse rests with the ability of invested non-Indigenous academics to listen attentively to not only what diminishes Indigenous research scholarship, but also to what helps. Furthermore, a new non-homogenous academic landscape asks that it not simply listen anew, but listen differently to what is being said. (emphasis added) ((Ibid, 157.))

I feel that Indigenous ways of knowing offer a great challenge and opportunity to the academy. They ask us why we are

doing research and for whom are we doing it. More importantly who is able to do research and in what ways? Who can be an academic and how can they be one? Is the Western academy based on a worldview or big enough to include worldviews? These large questions are asked and answered in many discussions all across our campuses. Why are peer-reviewed articles privileged in promotion and tenure committees and in student papers? Where are oral traditions? What gets into our libraries and what doesn't? If you are not white, or male, or heterosexual, or middle-classed, or abled, do you have to become more like that to be a university student or a professor? In this paper I've looked at an Indigenous worldview through a lens from the Western academic tradition. It might be fruitful to switch lenses. If, as Shawn Wilson's book title says, "Research is Ceremony," what ceremony does traditional academic research perform? What mirror does it hold up to the academy — and, do we like what we see? I won't answer this question here, but I invite readers to ruminate and respond in the comments below.

Research is Relationships

Inspired by my modicum of knowledge about participatory paradigms and Indigenous methods of research, I wanted this article to reflect a community based approach to research, at least to a small degree (see the [first half](#) of this article for more detail). The [MediaCommonsPress](#) is a robust instance of research with a community, whereby book chapters are collaboratively developed and comments and suggestions are made by anyone throughout the writing process; basically open and incessant peer-review. The software used is [Comment Press](#) which is an open source plugin for WordPress. With this article I wanted to try a pilot of a low-cost alternative using Google Docs — open publishing for the rest of us.

In the first article I created a survey and 22 librarians responded to it. I used the questions and comments that these librarians gave to my survey to help inform the initial direction of this article. I found their comments to be helpful in a variety of ways; they confirmed many of my initial questions and they also provided invaluable resources for me to use to jump-start my research. Twelve of those respondents left their email addresses and volunteered to read a draft of this article prior to publication — its first tumbling through peer review. Two other librarians responded to the first article and so my review community has grown to 14 members. As wrote the first draft of this article I found that having a research community "at-my-back" to be comforting. I knew at least a few people were interested in reading it, and I also felt some of that "submission anxiety" to be alleviated. When I usually submit an article to a journal for blind peer review, I often over-obsess with getting it perfectly perfect, hoping that it will at least be accepted with revisions required. Knowing my people were there, willing to help me polish the rough edges of the first draft, made me more relaxed in my approach and allowed me to leave some i's undotted and some t's uncrossed. I knew I had time to look at this again, before submitting it for publication. But having a community made me feel more responsible, too. I have asked my community to add their comments on this process. Again, they were helpful to me as I revised this second article, and I offer them here as an appendix: [Research Community Comments](#). Researching with my ad-hoc community was interesting and helpful — I now wonder how it might work in a more formal and scaled- up version.

As I conclude this article, I offer my community a sketch of a vision. The vision has been informed by my research on indigenous methods over the past year, and my excitement for and my desire to better integrate Indigenous methods and research communities into academic librarianship. What if ACRL, with the help of a grant, were to set up a Clearinghouse for Research Community Building (CRCB)? This would be an online database of librarians who are interested in supporting others with their research (via feedback and review), and possibly also interested in co-researching with others on various topics. Librarians would enter their names and research interests into the database, along with the kinds of support they are willing to give. Researchers who are looking for feedback could query the database and find potential community, and then contact them to see if their project might be copasetic with them. The Comment Press software would then be available in the CRCB for the research community to use. They might decide to use it for just their community members to provide feedback, or they might open up the settings to allow outside feedback as well. The works nurtured in the incubator might appear in many forms. They might be manuscripts for potential submission to extant journals or they might be published within the CRCB site in a [PLOS One](#) or [arXiv](#) manner, or perhaps they would be formatted along with other articles as an edited ebook.

I hope that you might share other ideas below in the comments, and that we as a community can begin to engage in a variety of research methods, some which are based in more critical and Indigenous ways of seeing the world.

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