Article

Considering Indigenous Research Methodologies: Critical Reflections by an Indigenous Knower

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Abstract

Within the domain of academic inquiry by Indigenous scholars, it is increasingly common to encounter enthusiasm surrounding Indigenous Research Methodologies (IRMs). IRMs are designated approaches and procedures for conducting research that are said to reflect long-subjugated Indigenous epistemologies (or ways of knowing). A common claim within this nascent movement is that IRMs express logics that are unique and distinctive from academic knowledge production in "Western" university settings, and that IRMs can result in innovative contributions to knowledge if and when they are appreciated in their own right and on their own terms. The purpose of this article is to stimulate exchange and dialogue about the present and future prospects of IRMs relative to university-based academic knowledge production. To that end, I enter a critical voice to an ongoing conversation about these matters that is still taking shape within Indigenous studies circles.

Keywords

American Indians, Indigenous knowledge, alternative research methodologies, marginalized epistemologies, academic knowledge production, orality and literacy

Beginning with the American Indian Civil Rights ("Red Power") Movement of the 1970s, Indigenous people in the United States pursued social justice and self-determination with explicit interest in reclaiming or revitalizing traditional—usually framed as prereservation or even precontact—culture and spirituality (Nagel, 1996). With the increasing presence of Indigenous faculty and researchers in university settings, this commitment has taken shape through critique of the status quo in academic knowledge production. A recent phase of this history was inaugurated by the appearance in 1999 of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies*, an analysis of how university-based research about Indigenous peoples has legitimated and advanced imperialist agendas in settler societies. By centering the perspectives of Kaupapa Māori people on the reigning academic research enterprise, Smith invited the community of scholars to reconsider the crafting of knowledge with respect to more ethical relationships with Indigenous communities.

Lately, this initiative for recovering and deploying Indigenous knowledges through academic research has been referred to as Indigenous Research Methodologies (IRMs). That is, Indigenous knowledges have been cited and celebrated not just for what they claim or reveal about life, experience, the world, and the cosmos, but also for how they might afford the *making of academic knowledge* in distinctive and illuminating ways. In other words, these approaches are now being discussed not just for the knowledge they afford (i.e., domains of content), but also for the knowing they afford (i.e., processes of inquiry). Crucially, these Indigenous ways of knowing are described as applicable and beneficial for academic research by some Indigenous faculty members in university settings (and by some non-Indigenous scholars beyond university settings as well). Wilson (2008) and Kovach (2009) have offered exemplars of these approaches, which have recently featured in a chapter in the influential *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

As a clinically trained, community-engaged research psychologist with faculty appointments in both psychology and Native American Studies, I have found much inspiration from Indigenous knowledges for my academic projects. Beginning with my Master's thesis during graduate school—an analysis of interviews with my grandmother concerning cultural identity among the Gros Ventre people (Gone, 1999; Gone, Miller, & Rappaport, 1999)—I have

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routinely integrated tribal history, cultural knowledge, and spiritual perspectives into my long-standing effort to reimagine community mental health services in American Indian settings (e.g., Gone, 2008, 2010, 2016; Gone & Calf Looking, 2015). Prior to encountering the literature on IRMs, however, I had never considered the potential relevance of Indigenous knowledges beyond content for actual processes of academic inquiry. Indeed, my exposure to Indigenous knowledges suggested to me that epistemological differences between Indigenous and academic ways of knowing might be fundamentally irreconcilable in the context of university-based knowledge production for almost any academic field of inquiry.

In 2014, I accepted an invitation to speak at a meeting of the American Indigenous Research Association (AIRA) at Salish Kootenai College on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana. This intimate conference, hosted at a tribal college in sovereign Indigenous territory with an audience comprised almost entirely of other Indigenous faculty and students, seemed a perfect venue to summarize my understanding of IRMs, to air my misgivings about IRMs, and to invite broad dialogue toward the refinement of IRMs. I stated at the outset for my audience that I would offer critical reflections on IRMs for these purposes, and (importantly) that my remarks were premised on the proposed relevance of IRMs for university-based knowledge production. This presentation generated a range of audience responses, some critical and heated. It did inaugurate dialogue, however, as evidenced by publication of Windchief, Polacek, Munson, Ulrich, and Cummins (2017) in this journal.

In this article, I first include a transcript of my 2014 presentation that sets forth my critical reflections about IRMs. Then, in the spirit of dialogue, I respond to Windchief et al. (2017), particularly with respect to instances in which I believe they have misunderstood some facet of my reflections or in which we appear to be "speaking" past one another. Finally, I will propose a reframing of this dialogue that jettisons an essentializing Indigenous–Western opposition to instead encourage nuanced attention to distinctive knowledge practices associated with *orality* and *literacy*. At the outset, I also wish to convey my gratitude to the many individuals—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—who reviewed draft versions of this article. They have proven that the refinement and communication of ideas follows from the resounding of such ideas through more inclusive and expansive dialogue.

Four Domains for Consideration: A Transcribed Presentation

(This section of the article comprises a transcript of my 2014 presentation. For purposes of illustrating differences in oral and literary practices, I have edited these remarks quite minimally, primarily through condensing material and/or rendering it [in some necessary instances] more comprehensible in written form. Mostly, however, I have sought to preserve its spoken quality, such that resultant shifts in syntax, rhythm, and formality will remain quite noticeable to readers. Note that a video recording is currently available online here. In addition, a complete, unedited transcript is available on request.)

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I'm going to offer several humble reflections, and some anxious misgivings, that I harbor about IRMs, particularly (again) in the context of academic inquiry. How I'm going to do this is in four little parts. The first I'm going to call Ten Postulates *of IRMs. My goal in doing that is to try just to unpack in quick, step-by-step format what I understand IRMs to be about. Then I'm going to offer* Three Sets of Key Questions *for those who are advocating for IRMs. Then I'm going to share* Eight Misgivings *I have about the project of IRMs. And then I'll offer* Two Take-Away Points *that I have in having thought through the things I'm about to share with you . . .*

Ten Postulates About IRMs

So, let's start with the Ten Postulates of IRMs. When I first heard this term, I came to understand IRMs as really just basic academic research wedded to Indigenous community ethics: a concern for Indian well-being, and respecting partnerships and empowerment, and real sensitivity and respect for Indian sensibilities, Indian cultural practices, and so on. And so, you take that, and as long as you have those things and do what would otherwise look like "Western" research, my idea was that that might be what IRMs were about. And I think there are people who talk about it in more-or-less that way. But I think in the way that people like Maggie Kovach (2009) in her book, Shawn Wilson (2008) in his book, and some of these other folks who have written and talked about IRMs, they have something a bit more substantive than just that in mind. And so, what I want to do is just list out for you ten sequenced statements that I think capture what I understand them to be saying when they advocate for IRMs . . . . (Due to limited space, and the straightforward accessibility of the content, much of this section is omitted; the Ten Postulates appear in Table 1).

Three Key Questions About IRMs

First of all, I want to be the one to acknowledge up front that these are very appealing ideas. They're even seductive ideas. It's really, really exciting stuff, okay? All right. They do lead me, though, to raise some questions for the proponents of IRMs. Now, to understand a little bit about this, you have to have some background terms. I'm using this fancy word epistemology *(way of knowing), right? Other terms that Maggie Kovach (2009) and Shawn Wilson (2008) and other*

Table 1. Summary Reflections on IRMs.

Ten Postulates About IRMs:

1. IEs existed prior to European contact
2. Europeans brought their epistemologies with them to North America
3. Colonization included suppression, eradication, and displacement of IEs
4. But differentiable and distinctive IEs continue to exist today
5. Universities have been dominated by "Western" epistemologies and associated research practices
6. Indigenous academics are poised to challenge this dominance by incorporating IEs into their research practices
7. Research activities based on IEs require alternative methodologies and methods
8. Such IRMs prescribe distinctive ways of conducting inquiry that will yield novel insights and answers
9. These novel insights and answers are better for improving Indigenous lives than results from "Western" research
10. Academic acceptance and recognition of IEs and IRMs is an important moral, ethical, and political goal

Three Sets of Key Questions About IRMs:

1. What is an IE in specific and concrete terms?
   - How comprehensive, coherent, constructive, and consensual must these knowledge practices be?
   - What are the differences between and among various basic terms within this discussion?
   - How distinctive must IEs be from "Western" approaches?
   - How could precontact IEs survive until today?
2. Who is an Indigenous "knower"?
   - What are attributes of Indigenous knowers?
   - What is the relationship between identities and practices relative to IEs?
   - How can academic knowers access IEs?
   - Can non-Natives become indigenous knowers?
3. How should we study, describe, and represent IEs?
   - What qualifies particular Indigenous scholars to access IEs for academic purposes?
   - What is the methodology by which Indigenous scholars should recover IEs?
   - How could IEs be so ready-made for university-based knowledge production?
   - What are the sociopolitical, ethical, and economic implications of studying and writing about IEs?

Eight Misgivings About IRMs:

1. Participates in untenable ethnoracial and cultural essentialism?
2. Emphasizes form much more than findings?
3. Promises beyond what it delivers in terms of novel insights and answers?
4. Insulates inquiry from skeptical interrogation?
5. Resituates research as identity expression rather than knowledge contribution?
6. Obscures intellectual debts to "Western" critical theories and approaches?
7. Misdirects attention from material decolonization?
8. Marginalizes existing (but nonacademic) Indigenous knowledges?

Two Take-Home Points About IRMs:

1. Unlikely that IEs are very well-suited for university-based knowledge production absent a great deal of repackaging, recasting, or reconstruction of these knowledge traditions
   - Who?
   - How?
2. IRMs adopted by and for Indigenous peoples are best characterized as Métis forms of inquiry
   - Most of what endures as IEs is already mixed
   - Importing IEs into the university further mixes them
   - How would reconceptualizing the IRM project as Métis change this knowledge endeavor?
   - How would relabeling IRMs as Métis change our promotion of them?

Note. IRM = Indigenous Research Methodologies; IE = Indigenous epistemologies.

proponents of this approach will use are the following: axiology, *which has to do with values;* methodology, *which has to do with the logic of inquiry;* methods, *which are actual procedures that follow from logics of inquiry;* a paradigm, *which is kind of like a structure that you can interpret the world through;* worldview; culture. *These are all things that are terms that are used in the characterization of IRMs as helping to explain where they come from, and what they do.*

Now, some of these are kind of fancy terms, but I really think it gets back to fairly simple, straightforward processes. Research, or what we call research, is fundamentally a process of asking a question and going about some procedure to answer it. So, research or inquiry or knowledge production is about asking and answering questions. It's about undertaking a process to get at a solution. So, we want to make one more distinction which is important,

which is that we're talking about ways of knowing, or processes of knowing. How *one knows, not so much* what *one knows. The known follows from knowing. And IRMs strike me as fundamentally about the* process *of knowing more so than about what one ends up with. It's the known that comes out of it. So, knowing itself is a process versus the knowledge or the substance that comes out of it.*

A traditional Indigenous example. *As I think about Indigenous ways of knowing, and trying to get my head around that, I think of a photograph taken by William Wildschut (1960), who collected a lot of things from the Crow Reservation in the 1930s. And this is known as the Braided Tail skull medicine. Anthropologists had never heard of skull medicine bundles prior to William Wildschut finding several of these on the Crow Reservation about that time. This particular skull was said to have belonged to a Crow man, Braided Tail, who was a very famous medicine man, evidently. It was passed down generation after generation, maybe four or five generations in this bundle. And the practice was apparently that sometimes after you bury your dead (and of course it's often in a tree or a scaffold), over time it's just the bones that are left. And sometimes, someone who is really missing the departed would go take the skull. And the skull would ensure that the person would come to visit sometimes. And in a "bundle complex" like this, it meant that you could consult it when you needed to know something. So, you would do a ceremony: open this bundle, and consult Braided Tail.*

This was owned by the wife of Old Alligator, for example, who knew how to use it. If you were going on a war party and you wanted to know where the enemy was, or a war party was coming your way and you wanted to know what the outcome would be, you would open this bundle and do a ceremony and ask, and you would find out the answer. Or if you misplaced something really valuable. There's a story, not about this skull medicine bundle but a different one, in which someone had lost money. You know, they had a purse full of money, and it was gone. And so, they consulted the bundle, and this medicine told them where to find it. And, indeed, they did find it. The Braided Tail skull medicine was said to be infallible. Actually, it was used across multiple generations, and certainly Old Alligator's wife used it throughout her life. In fact, she consulted it when she was dying about whether it was useful to go see a doctor or not. And this medicine told her, "No, there's no hope for you." So, she didn't. And she died. So, here we have what I consider to be an Indigenous way of knowing. You have questions, you want answers, you go through a process to figure out how to get an answer to that question.

Now whether this is an Indigenous epistemology, and whether there is an accompanying or implied IRM that can come from this that would help scholars in academia make knowledge, I'm not so sure. So, the questions I have kind of follow a bit from that. And to do that, I need to take one more quick little detour to review some terms. You might know of the Mohawk scholar Marlene Brant Castellano (2000), who has characterized Indigenous traditional knowledges as emanating from three different sources, and being characterized by five different attributes. So, the three sources she talks about were that: They come from traditional teachings *that are handed down generation to generation. Or they come from* empirical knowledge *whereby you just observe the world and try to figure out patterns and regularities in a predictable way. Or* revealed knowledge. *You consult other-than-human beings, we could say. Not spirits. Not spirituality, right, for the reasons that another speaker explained very nicely this morning. But revealed knowledge of a kind that could be very useful.*

In addition, Brant Castellano (2000) talked about five characteristics here. That these are personal, *that it's not abstract and distant and about someone else, that it's how things come in contact with your life and experience. That they're* oral, *that is, they're talked about and shared through narrative or other kinds of discourse, rather than through writing, say. That they are* experiential *in a way, I guess, that I just said. That they're* holistic. *And that they're* narratively conveyed. *So, keeping all this in mind just as a background about how some of our leading scholars have talked about Indigenous traditional knowledges, here are some questions that I have* (see Table 1) *that I think would be good to think about, and to try to come up with the answers, as we move this project forward.*

What is an Indigenous epistemology? *First of all, what is an Indigenous epistemology, in a very specific, concrete, on-the-ground sense? It's one thing to have a bit of knowledge here, a bit of knowledge there, but epistemology strikes me as an entire system of knowledge.*

So, to answer this question, it seems like we would need to discuss: how comprehensive, *that is all-encompassing and wide-spanning? How* coherent, *that is integrated and coming into a single reasonable model? How* constructive, *that is how useful is it to producing the answers to questions? And how* consensual, *that is, how many people would have to believe it, endorse it, or say "Yeah that's it" to know that we have a set of knowledge practices that qualify as an Indigenous epistemology? One thing that strikes me is that so much of our traditional practices and knowledge (that I've encountered anyway) is so fragmented. This was left, and that part was left, and sometimes it's hard to know how it all fit together back in the day. And so, part of it is figuring out, is that an epistemology? If it's fragmented, can it be epistemology, or does it have to be comprehensive, coherent, constructive, consensual? Is it parallel to language, in a sense for which having a little bit of it may not get you very far? Or is having a little bit of it okay?*

Then, we need to differentiate between and among various terms that are used to talk about knowledge. For example, we want to know the difference between a conjecture *and a* claim. *If I say, "It looks like rain today," is that something to be taken super-seriously, like I'm claiming to know that it's going to rain, and I'm predicting rain? Or is that just an opinion or a conjecture of some kind? And how do we distinguish between a conjecture and something that's meant to be a claim, like this is true? Or reasons or rationales, styles and sensibilities, practices and procedures, paradigms and systems? All these things have to do with the nature of whether we're talking about opinions or truths . . . .*

Beyond this, I think we need to clarify how distinctive Indigenous epistemologies need to be from so-called "Western" epistemologies to be called Indigenous epistemologies. So, a striking fact about Indian life even in Montana (where this is a place that was settled quite late in the country's history by European or American settlers) is the degree of mixing. We've been interacting with people for so very long that you want to begin to wonder, well, how pure does it need to be? And if it's not pure, if it's mixed, is it fair to call it an Indigenous epistemology? Or no? And that's mixing with Europeans. What about mixing across different tribes, which has been happening from time immemorial? Etc., etc. So, questions about how intact, I guess, does an epistemology have to be? How distinctive to be called that?

And finally, we need to account, I think, for how precontact Indigenous epistemologies could survive today, given that we've endured so much culture loss. Every community you go to, you've got this funny paradox. On one hand, "We've lost everything. The White man took it all." On the other hand, "Oh, but we have our own traditional ways of knowing. We have indigenous epistemologies. We can do our own thing our own way." Those two things don't really go together very well. So, I think we need to spend some thought thinking about which is it, and in what way, and how do we make sense of it? So, that was one set of questions: what is an Indigenous epistemology?

Who is an Indigenous knower? *A second set of questions pertains to who is an Indigenous knower? Now, in my title, I said "critical reflections of an Indigenous knower." And that was a little bit tongue-in-cheek because I don't typically identify as "Indigenous." I say I'm Gros Ventre, or I say I'm Indian, but in any case, I could identify as Indigenous, I suppose. And I'm engaged in knowledge production. That's what I do for my living, I think and I research and I write and I trade ideas. So, I guess that makes me a knower. At least I can claim to be a knower, and make a good case for it. But does that make me an Indigenous knower? Would you call what I do Indigenous knowledge?*

So, I want to know who is an Indigenous knower? And to answer that question, well, I think we need to know several things. I think we need to, first of all, characterize in clear terms the attributes or qualifications of community members who we think carry and express these Indigenous epistemologies. Is it everybody? Every person in our community, whether they know traditional culture or not? Whether they talk their language or not? Whether they're old or not? Whether they've been through 20 years of school or 2 years of school? They all know Indigenous epistemologies? Or is it like in philosophy in the "West"? It's a very select, small number of people who make it their business. In fact, they often are odd people who make it their business to search through these things and come up with answers. And it's arcane, and esoteric, and hidden, and maybe off-limits. So, we need to characterize what those attributes or qualifications are of who we think actually carries it.

And then we need to distinguish between identities of people and the knowledge practices they engage in. So, my youngest brother is at [one of the small state universities] *where he's learning biological science. So, if he does a scientific experiment as a Gros Ventre student, is he an Indigenous knower? How do we differentiate between the identities that people hold, and the knowledge practices that they engage in, to make sense of what we even mean by these terms? I think we also need to detail how an academic can himself or herself come to learn all about these Indigenous epistemologies, and how they're expressed. Do you have to have some kind of cultural positioning as an academic to be able to do that well? Do you need to be in a particular relational context with people to get at that? Does it not matter that you've been through 20 years of "Western" higher education through graduate school and into your doctoral work?*

And finally, then, do we need to remain open to the possibility that non-Natives have or can become Indigenous knowers? Do we think the practices themselves can be disarticulated from the identities of the people who do them? Most practices can. There are White people in our history who came and learned our language, lived in our communities, and took up our ways, and so they were culturally fluent, so to speak. Is it the same with Indigenous epistemologies? Is it possible that White anthropologists at some point, or in some communities, became familiar and fluid with Indigenous knowledge ways? So, that's a set of second questions: who is an Indigenous knower?

How should we study Indigenous epistemologies? *Finally, my third set of questions pertains to how Indigenous scholars—those of us who are Native by identity and who also work and labor in university and academic spaces—should study, describe, and represent Indigenous epistemologies? I think we need to do several things here to try to make sense of that question as well. It would be useful, of course, to characterize the attributes or qualifications of Indigenous scholars who we think are best poised to access this Indigenous*

epistemology. Again, maybe having a Ph.D. in a social science or a health science would automatically disqualify you from even being able to understand this stuff. Someone could argue that, anyway. I don't know if that's true, I'm just putting it out for our consideration today. In addition, I think we need to set forth a methodology—a logic of inquiry, that is—by which Indigenous academics might go about discovering and/or recovering an Indigenous epistemology. And would that methodology that describes how to go about recovering it itself be "Western" or Indigenous? And how would that differ from inquiry that happens already in anthropology or in linguistics? How is it different than the kind of knowledge practices we already know?

I think we need to elucidate also how remnant Indigenous epistemologies—whatever we think they look like and however long they've been able to survive—could be so ready-made for use in university-based knowledge production? I think of the Braided Tail skull medicine. I can accept that as an Indigenous way of knowing. There's questions, you go through a process, and you get answers. I have no idea how this is useful in academic settings: How you would take this bundle and teach a class about it? How you would open the bundle and consult the ghost of Braided Tail to write a paper or give a conference lecture? I have no idea how these things could be made relevant to university-based knowledge production of the kind that Indigenous scholars, who are up for tenure and are trying the usual things in academic life, are engaged in. Finally, I think we need to assess the sociopolitical, ethical, and economic implications of writing and publishing about and publicly promoting Indigenous epistemologies. "Western" academia is fundamentally about writing. Most things don't count until they're written and published through peer review. So, is this the project: that we want to get this stuff packaged, written, and out there? Because if it is, I think that has a whole set of ethical considerations and political ones, and other kinds of things to be thinking about.

Eight Misgivings About IRMs

I see we're closing in on time here. So, let me share quickly some of my own anxious misgivings about IRMs, of the way that I've been exposed to them thus far (see Table 1). *And a great example of this was last summer's Society of Indian Psychologists' conference. We had a guest speaker from Canada. A young academic who did a wonderful presentation that was characteristic of everything I think of as IRMs. She herself characterized it that way: It was a medicine wheel, and it had a lot of stuff that was probably the best I've ever seen of that kind of presentation. In some ways, the anxieties I have here are expressive of my own kind of reaction at the time to what I was hearing there.*

So, some misgivings. I worry that the way we are conceiving or conceptualizing of IRMs, first of all, participates in untenable ethnoracial and cultural essentialism. An essentialist would say that Indians are Indians by virtue of, you could say, genes, their spirits, whatever. And they're fundamentally different than White people, who are their way because of their genes or their spirits or whatever. I think that, in most Native American Studies and Humanities circles, this form of essentialism is not considered viable at all. Rather, the concern becomes that these partake of ideologies surrounding race and genetics, that are not really used properly or not really warranted intellectually for those purposes. So, I worry that it participates in a clear divide between the "Western" and the Indigenous in a stable way that over-emphasizes whatever differences there are, and attributes them to something stable that doesn't really exist.

Second of all, I kind of worry that some of these efforts emphasize the form of the research and its presentation much more than their findings. So, whereas I might list a bunch of things, instead I put it around a medicine wheel. Or in a circle. Or four quadrants. Or something like that. So, that's the form, right? It's not a list anymore. It's not a "linear" list, we could say, or an arrow moving across with a list. It's now in a circle. But the four things are still the four things that would have been on the list. And so, that's what I mean by emphasizing form rather than the findings. But, of course, research and knowledge production is fundamentally about answering questions. We have questions that we need sometimes urgent answers to, and so form over findings would not be the way we would want to go if we think those findings matter a lot.

Sometimes, I think it promises beyond what it delivers in terms of novel insights and answers. One problem with emphasizing the form is that usually the prefatory remarks—which can take up most of the presentations I've seen that draw from this—are so extensive that you get this huge build up. Like, "Oh my God, here we are, a totally different way of seeing the world, and a totally different way of doing inquiry. And, by God, what we get out at the end is going to be life changing, earth shattering. It's going to be like something I could never have conceived of before." And then you get to the end, and it's something that actually I could have guessed, maybe. Or you could have used focus groups instead of a talking circle. Or you could have found out in any other of the established ways of doing research without any particular novelty to what is found.

I worry that the way we practice IRMs insulates inquiry in the name of Indigeneity from skeptical interrogation. The hallmark of academic knowledge production is that it gets critiqued by your peers, people who know your field, who are experts in your specialization. They get a chance to take a swing at everything you've done. And until you can answer them, or rebut what they have to say, you're not going to go forward in being able to publish what you say, for example, or what you think. And so, one concern I have

is by saying that "this is IRMs," what we're really saying is "and you White people don't know this. This is ours. And so, you White people aren't allowed to critique it because you wouldn't know anyway. It's for us to decide and critique and say what's right." And what that can translate into is actually no one critiques it because we have a stake in celebrating these things. And I'd say in traditional communication styles, especially around knowledge translation and transmission, you don't critique people. That's the heart of rudeness, right? You're not going to sit there and tell an elder, "Well, I think . . .," if you're getting the usual monologue, right? That's not how it works. So, the danger here is that we're withdrawing all the things that we most care about and are invested in from the usual processes of critique. And that deprives us of the opportunity to refine what we're doing in ways that can be really important. And, of course, beyond that it completely excludes us from academia. Almost everyone in academia says, "If you're not willing to play this game, fine, go do your own thing. See ya." And you become [that which] happens to many Native American Studies programs is you're really, really marginal in the academy.

I worry that the way we practice IRMs really resituates research as identity expression more than knowledge contribution. That is, it's not really about the answers. The answers we get aren't so, as I said before, novel or insightful. That, really, what it's doing is saying, "This is Indian knowledge, and I'm an Indian, and you can see it from my circles and my feathers and my colors," right? But again, part of what the purpose of research is in the real world is to get answers. That's because we have pressing things we need to know. And so, if it's about identity expression more than contributing to knowledge, that can be a concern.

I worry that the way you practice it obscures our intellectual debts to "Western" critical theories and approaches. So, sometimes I have felt like what people have talked about in the name of Indigenous knowledge is just "Western" critical theory trotted out in beads and feathers. It's Marx. It's feminism. It's postcolonial studies. All the stuff that "Westerners" have been up to for 40 years now, and in Marx's case, over a century. So, we seize on the parts of that that are useful, and then talk about it as if we invented it. And most of us in graduate school who are interested in or versatile with these things, fluid with these things, are exposed to those ideas. But we're not really giving credit to them if we're calling them Indigenous knowledge, and not really paying our dues of grappling with Marx, who is hard to grapple with. Or grappling with postcolonial theory. So, I think there are ways in which I do worry that maybe we owe more to the "West" than we are acknowledging. And I think maybe it would be worth thinking about acknowledging that more.

I worry that the way we promote IRMs often misdirects attention away from what we might call material decolonization. I've used the term decolonization *to talk about my knowledge production. It's something I've come to rethink in recent years, in part because, as a speaker talked about this morning, decolonization came from experiences in India, in Africa, where the Indigenous people sent Europeans packing, okay? And took over their own lands, and their own territories, and their own governments, and did their own thing in their own way within the constraints of the life they had left to lead. But if we talk about decolonizing our minds, or decolonizing our scholarship, and especially if we're not talking about decolonizing our lands, then I worry that we might be doing a disservice to the broader vision of what decolonization could or maybe even should be.*

Finally, I worry that the way we promote IRMs can actually actively marginalize existing but nonacademic Indigenous forms of knowledge. I think about the Braided Tail skull medicine, or I think about the ceremonial knowledge that people have, or the ways in which people in our communities have some things left that they are able to engage in for knowing things. And when those are not what's called or refer to as Indigenous epistemologies or Indigenous traditional knowledges or IRMs, then instead what the world starts to think is that Indigenous knowledges are academic things. And not the kind of visionary, religious, sacred-power experiences that many of our people continue to have to this day. So, in that sense, we could be shooting ourselves in the foot if we're emphasizing this kind of academically grounded knowledge instead of the knowledge that exists in everyday life that might not be useful academically, really, but that is really important for the survival of some of what we do.

Two Take-Away Points About IRMs

In closing, I just have two take-away ideas about IRMs (see Table 1). *If I had to boil this all down, which of course is mostly questions and mostly misgivings, I think there are two things I would rather emphasize here. First, it seems very unlikely to me that whatever remains of precontact Indigenous epistemologies in our communities today is going to be well suited for university-based knowledge production by Indigenous or any other scholars, absent a good deal of repackaging, recasting, and reconstructing. Academic knowledge production is a funny beast. And it's got its own kinds of long traditions, going a long way back. And to change that, as opposed to figuring out how to accommodate it, is a really big challenge. I just think there are lots of plausible obvious dimensions of difference between Indigenous epistemologies or Indigenous knowledges and academic or university-based knowledge: the sacred versus the secular, the oral versus the literate, the concrete versus the abstract, the experiential versus the ideational, the useful versus the theoretical, and so forth. And*

so, to be able to accommodate whatever we think are remnant Indigenous epistemologies to academic-based knowledge means it has to be changed in all kinds of ways to be useful in an environment that's so fundamentally different. We want to know, then, who is best positioned to undertake these necessary reconstructions, if we think that's the goal, if we really do want to reconstruct. And, of course, we want to know how can these individuals go about systematically reconstructing all of these traditions while protecting their integrity? Because to go about changing them, of course, is to possibly endanger them in a different way. So, I think there are landmines or dilemmas or pitfalls here that we need to take very serious consideration of.

Second, and finally, it strikes me that emancipatory methodology or decolonial methodology or Indigenous methodologies (however you think of these) adopted by and for Indigenous people in the context of academic inquiry is thus probably best considered as a mixed form of knowledge, what I'll call a Métis knowledge. It's not Indigenous versus "Western." It's mixed up. And it's been mixed for a very long time by the time it gets to the "Western" academy. So, first of all, much of what endures today as Indigenous knowledge in our communities is already mixed. It's had long interactions with Christianity, for example, and things get exchanged and traded and altered and tailored in ways that are even hard to unpack looking back historically. And of course, reconstructing whatever these already mixed, remnant Indigenous epistemologies are for academic knowledge production will mix them even further. How, then, does the IRM project change in terms of its epistemology, methodology, ethics, or politics if we conceptualize these approaches as Métis? As mixed? What if we called them Métis knowledges instead of Indigenous knowledges? How would what we're up to change just as a result of the label being different? And finally, in what ways would the successful and effective promotion of IRMs be altered by explicitly relabeling these as Métis? And I'll suggest to you what I'm getting at here is the idea that "Indigenous" can trigger (even in the "Western" academy) a whole host of sympathy and sympathizers that "Métis" won't. So, I can see there's kind of a press or a pull for wanting it to be Indigenous, and not mixed, and not Métis. People want it to be pure and authentic and precontact or precolonial, but that stuff rarely, if ever, exists. And if we call it and acknowledge that it's mixed or Métis, what does that do for what we're up to, and people's willingness to sign off on it? (Transcript ends)

Advancing the Dialogue: Engaging With Windchief et al.

In this 2014 AIRA presentation, I aspired to seriously consider the commitments and claims of my Indigenous academic colleagues who embrace IRMs. To be clear, the substance of these methodologies appears to extend well beyond the now commonplace assertion that Indigenous research ought to be *pro-Indigenous*. Indeed, although it is possible to debate the manner of application of a pro-Indigenous ethos in specific cases or for particular projects, I know of no Indigenous academics who would dispute the idea that Indigenous research should emerge from and depend on an ethos that aims to respect, value, engage, and serve Indigenous people. The proponents of IRMs go beyond this, however, by positing that the harnessing of Indigenous epistemologies for distinctive and unique processes of inquiry will yield more relevant and useful academic knowledge than is possible by adopting "Western" research strategies. As should be clear from my 2014 remarks, I am intrigued by this claim, and also seek further explication and justification of this endeavor across several domains (as summarized in Table 1). In short, I invited scholarly dialogue on these issues through public critique, on the assumption that such exchanges can yield clarification, refinement, illustration, and (perhaps) application.

Thus, I am appreciative of the responses to these reflections by Windchief et al. (2017), who have so graciously chosen to enter this dialogue with me. It may be beneficial here to briefly acknowledge several background experiences and assumptions that we likely share as we enter this dialogue. I believe that all of us are committed to a pro-Indigenous ethos, although we may diverge in our formulations of this ethos in some ways. I believe that we all admire, respect, and value persistent Indigenous knowledge practices based on their symbolic attestation to the survival of our peoples, their ongoing pragmatic significance for everyday Indigenous community life, and their potential for contributing broadly to human society. I believe that we all recognize and react against the long-standing dismissal and denigration of Indigenous knowledges by a settler society that sought to eradicate these practices through colonization. I believe that we all have encountered academic arrogance and contempt expressed by non-Native scholars in university settings who promote intellectual critique as a sign of respect even when they wield such critique disrespectfully. I believe that we all imagine promising roles for Indigenous knowledges in academic inquiry more generally. Finally, I believe that we all realize that academic knowledge production itself can be fragmented, insular, chauvinistic, and exploitative.

Moreover, with specific reference to their article, I appreciate Windchief et al.'s (2017) definition of Indigenous methodologies as "unique ways researchers use Indigenous positionality and perspective to perform research *with* and *within* Indigenous communities . . . [that] center and privilege the Indigenous community's voice(s) in an effort to contribute to the community" (p. 533). By this definition, it seems that much of my own research qualifies as Indigenous methodology (although I typically attribute my own research methods to familiar university-based research

strategies that have been cataloged and described—usually by non-Indigenous academics—in works such as Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). I also value Windchief et al.'s recognition of the diversity of perspectives and voices within Indigenous communities, as there is intellectual hazard associated with any sweeping generalizations across so many persons and communities. I also laud their commitment to "critiquing the academic work and delivery as opposed to critiquing the scholars" who offer these contributions (p. 540), which is a hallmark of fair academic exchange. Finally, I am especially honored to have my ideas engaged by graduate students in this response (and I am pleased that they have since earned their doctorates).

In the spirit of advancing this dialogue, I will now briefly attend to some specific responses offered by Windchief et al. (2017). In my view, many of these reflect the fact that some of my critical reflections were misunderstood, or that we appear to have talked past one another. One chief source of these misalignments is the degree to which we focus on or conceive of methodology per se. In an academic context, I conceive of methodology in fairly narrow terms as *some specific logic of inquiry* from which follows *particular analytical procedures* (that can often be described in step-by-step fashion) that transform more *basic particulars* (e.g., textual material, systematic observations) into some *more general and abstract* form of understanding that we label as knowledge. (In some academic disciplines, pursuit of this more general and abstract form of understanding is discovery-like in that it seeks to find answers to questions; and in others, it is interpretive in that it seeks to offer fresh readings of enduring texts.) In contrast, Windchief et al.'s definition of Indigenous methodology seems less like a logic of inquiry (with attending analytical procedures) and more like a *research approach* that is grounded in a pro-Indigenous ethos. That is, as a research approach, their endeavor could incorporate any variety of methodologies and methods. Thus, we appear to draw on differing definitions of methodology, which may be a source of confusion in this dialogue.

So, for example, in Windchief et al. (2017), Polacek ("Author 1") disputes my concern that IRMs emphasize form much more than findings. Specifically, my concern centered on the practice of, for example, arranging summary statements of otherwise prosaic research findings into a circle or medicine wheel depiction rather than in a "linear" table format. In response, she explains that "the form is integral to the findings," that "an emphasis on form is an emphasis on findings" (p. 534). From what I can tell, she equates form with method, and (reasonably enough, by this equation) asserts that "form and method in Indigenous research determine the findings" (p. 534). So far as I know, this is true for all research—whether Indigenous or not—namely, that method determines the findings to a substantial degree. Beyond this, though, I understand Polacek to be advocating for research that is situated, meaningful, and contextualized ("what better way to answer real-life questions with real-life answers from people with real lives?" p. 534). Although I do not believe that all research with Indigenous communities must necessarily be situated, meaningful, and contextualized in this manner (e.g., when the National Congress of American Indians commissions a broad academic report that is highly statistical), I concur that in my own discipline of psychology we have too often lost track of meaning and context, a critique that I have routinely offered in my publications (see especially Gone, 2011, 2014).

Munson's ("Author 2") contribution to the Windchief et al. (2017) article addresses my third set of key questions (see Table 1) centered on the study, description, and representation of Indigenous epistemologies. She grounds her specific responses in four commitments: to celebrate Indigenous scholars "for the work they do within their fields, centered on the needs of their communities"; to reduce oppression of Indigenous people in academia, which she ties to reverence and respect for Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous scholarship; to eliminate the need for Indigenous scholars to disavow their Indigenous epistemologies in their scholarship (or "to walk within two worlds"); and to improve "the success and leadership of Indigenous youth and scholars" (p. 535). I do not know of any Indigenous academics who would dispute these general ambitions, but what is debatable is whether it is reasonable in academic settings to simply demand reverence and respect for unfamiliar methodologies or scholarship without explaining, justifying, and (especially) illustrating the kinds of new knowledge that these will enable scholars to produce. In other words, I am unclear about the intellectual justification for framing the inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies in academic knowledge production as a "right" for which to fight (p. 535), although it certainly might be a cause to champion through dogged dialogue and debate. Beyond these points, I concur with Munson that the "melding" of epistemologies is the only way forward in this endeavor; indeed, I think they began to meld long ago, which is why I propose relabeling these as mixed or blended forms of inquiry (I aimed for a particular rhetorical effect with a Montana audience by adopting the "Métis" label, but this may not generalize well to other places). I also concur with the community commitments that Munson espouses, which is why I promote participatory research that is accountable to Indigenous community partners (Gone & Calf Looking, 2015; but for complications, see Gone, 2017).

Ulrich's ("Author 3") contribution to Windchief et al. (2017) is the most disparaging of these responses, even while being the most removed from questions of (my conception of) research methodology as such. She perceives me as "excluding other sources of knowledge production or ways of knowing" from "the dominant paradigm of Western, progressive,

and rational knowledge production." In actuality, I strive to avoid the Indigenous–Western binary because all of the Indigenous people and communities I know have been deeply entangled in "Western" institutions and practices for a very long time, and, indeed, what is described as "Western" has been forged through long histories of Indigenous contact, exchange, and appropriation (see Weatherford, 2010). Ulrich also surmises that I embrace a "positivist or perhaps postpositivist worldview" (p. 537). In my own discipline, I have consistently advocated for both constructivist and scientific realist perspectives, depending on the research questions (Gone, 2011). Moreover, Ulrich asserts that, "unlike Gone" (p. 537), her commitment to relevant and beneficial research that advances social justice somehow lies beyond my interests. This is all just too dismissive and misreads my skepticism about several postulated aspects of IRMs as either haughty indifference or prejudicial exclusion instead of as an appeal to clarify, justify, and illustrate. After all, even from the perspective of an engaged community member, pursuing the best interests of our peoples would seem to require asking sometimes-challenging questions. Beyond this, Ulrich primarily discusses "the Western model of education" (p. 537), emphasizing the failures of schooling to produce literacy and numeracy for African villagers. I was uncertain whether Ulrich considers the development of literacy and numeracy as too "Western" to justify their promotion in such schools, but what did seem clear was her interest and emphasis on critical pedagogy more so than on research methodology as such.

Cummins' ("Author 4") contribution to the Windchief et al. (2017) article similarly expressed reservations about the consequences of my critical reflections, especially for Indigenous students, who he fears will be further harmed by perspectives anchored in "dominant and sometimes oppressive Western thought" that threaten to dismiss them and "their worldviews and knowledge" as untrue (p. 539). I do not hold that any group's "worldviews and knowledge" are categorically untrue, but rather believe that some (although, importantly, not all) claims merit skeptical scrutiny irrespective of who champions such claims. Cummins supposes my belief that "empirical evidence is more sound than cultural knowledge," but I do not oppose empiricism and Indigenous traditional culture. Rather, I approvingly cited Brant Castellano (2000) in identifying empirical knowledge as a form of Indigenous traditional knowledge. Cummins questions my presentation as "inappropriate decorum regarding the Indigenous sharing of ideas" because "critiquing the work of others does not fit within an Indigenous framework" (p. 539). Herein lies the most interesting insight in the article, namely, a recognition that standard academic discourse (in which students "are expected to question, argue, challenge, critique," and "find fault" in ways that "could be considered disrespectful and uncouth" [p. 539]) might run afoul of certain Indigenous communicative norms. I acknowledged as much in my presentation, but then suggested that the consequence of refusal to engage in disputatious discourse in an academic context will be marginality or exclusion. Despite engaging in his own critique through this published dialogue, Cummins is perhaps correct that some Indigenous faculty and students—especially those with academic appointments outside of research-intensive universities—can instead "continue to set the terms of [their] own discourse as Indigenous researchers" (p. 537).

Future Directions

For the hundreds of Indigenous academics who do "publish or perish" at research-intensive universities throughout the nation, what additional orientations might afford further insights into the potential promise of IRMs for academic knowledge production? I will briefly sketch one illuminating possibility here. In 1982, Walter Ong published his influential analysis of orality and literacy. In this work, Ong characterized writing as a technology that has transformed human consciousness. His sweeping claim is that communities that knew no writing (but that instead exhibited "primary orality") organized their thought and knowledge in certain ways, but that the deep interiorization of alphabetic literacy in modern life has restructured thinking and knowing in transformative fashion. Ong identified many distinctions between these two modes of thought, attributing these differences to the evanescence of sound (through the spoken word) in orality versus the stability of text (through the visualized word) in literacy. Importantly, Ong did not assert that either modality is superior, observing instead that each facilitates and constrains human potential in distinctive ways.

For example, Ong (1986) explained, "one of the most generalizable effects of writing is separation . . . . It divides and distances all sorts of things in all sorts of ways" (p. 36). Writing distances the knower from the known, thereby promoting "objectivity." It affords a distinction between data and interpretation. It separates sources and receivers (speakers and listeners) across time and space. It distances words from experiences in decontextualist fashion, leading to an enforcement of verbal precision (giving rise to definitional tasks that explain the meanings of words using other words). It distances past from present. It separates the thought structure of discourse (logic) from the embedded social functions of discourse (rhetoric). It separates abstract academic knowledge (book learning) from situated practical knowledge (wisdom). It separates being from time. Because of these attributes, the advent of literacy attenuates the narrativizing of experience in favor of fixed abstractions, literally initiating a reduction in the proportion of verbs in a language relative to the proliferation of nouns such that "becoming becomes being" (p. 44). In doing so, the "quiescent text" displaces the action-related "mobility" of the oral world.

For these reasons, Ong identified alphabetic literacy as the source of a kind of amplified abstraction that undergirds modern philosophy, science, and (presumably) university-based knowledge production more generally. What has any of this to do with IRMs? I propose here that Indigenous scholars who champion Indigenous epistemologies and IRMs may, in fact, be promoting conventions of orality over literacy, which is to say that the qualities of Indigenous traditional knowledge that seem most apparent to us are enduring qualities of oral tradition. In my presentation, I favorably cited Brant Castellano's (2000) five characteristics of Indigenous traditional knowledge: personal, oral, experiential, holistic, and narratively conveyed. Compare this list with an excerpt from a single paragraph by Ong (1986):

> Primary oral culture also keeps its thinking *close to the human life world, personalizing* things and issues, and storing knowledge in *stories*. Categories are unstable mnemonically. Stories you can remember. In its typical mindset, the oral sensibility is out to *hold things together*, to *make and retain agglomerates*, not to analyze (which means to take things apart). (p. 25, italics added for emphasis)

Decades of subsequent research have illuminated many weaknesses in Ong's (1982/2002) sweeping assertions, particularly as he imagined a "great divide" between oral and literate societies with respect to abstraction, analysis, and thought. Rather, as Sterponi (2012) has summarized, both orality and literacy can persist in the same community in complex fashion, affording individuals with repertoires of situated and strategic practices that can be deployed in circumscribed domains of activity that draw on their respective logics. This research demonstrates that accurate characterization of oral and literate practices in any given community depends on situated empirical inquiry rather than generalized theoretical convictions. Nevertheless, if I am correct in my contention that proponents of IRMs seek to preserve aspects of oral tradition in otherwise highly literate academic knowledge production, then several implications follow.

First, the terms of the discussion shift away from the difficult-to-defend ethnoracial and cultural essentialism that typically drives the Indigenous–Western binary to ones based on accurate distinctions between actual practices associated with orality and literacy in Indigenous communities. Second, the truly vast body of scholarship associated with language and literacy socialization with respect to thinking and knowing becomes an extant resource for Indigenous scholars who seek to explicate and preserve key facets of oral tradition relative to academic literacy. Third, the opportunity arises to formulate and research intriguing intersections between oral and literate practices for Indigenous communities with respect to enduring knowledge traditions. Fourth, this "middle ground" will benefit from further, nuanced elucidation relative to a host of institutions that shape life in Indigenous communities, including education, law, governance, and policy.

Above all, proponents of IRMs will need to delineate more clearly how to effectively bridge community orality with academic literacy. The dilemmas in doing so seem readily apparent. For example, in preparing this article, I sought to preserve some facets of my conference presentation as an oral–aural event by foregoing much editing. But transcription itself is radically reductive, and despite the academic structure of my presentation (centering on concepts, "postulates," enumerated statements, and related abstractions) it remains challenging to read in transcribed form. For example, with respect to academic discourse, my spoken presentation was unnecessarily repetitive and verbose, which Ong (1982/2002) linked to the undesirability of hesitation in oral performance. It includes so many "ands" and "sos" that it becomes arbitrary in transcription as to where to divide sentences (which Ong attributed to the additive style associated with orality rather than the subordinative style associated with literacy, which displaces "and" with "then," "thus," and "while"). It contains indexical references to the event itself that are not understandable without additional contextualizing information.

Most significantly, this transcript excludes the visual component of my presentation that was expressed by an accompanying PowerPoint slide set. These slides were word-heavy (in literate fashion), but they also included a photograph. This image occasioned controversy (as discussed in Gone, 2017), engendering strong emotional reactions that a reader would never know from simply perusing this published dialogue. In sum, as an Indigenous scholar steeped in literacy (as all Indigenous scholars who earn doctoral degrees must be), it was unsettling for me in producing this article to actively refrain from one benefit of literacy, namely, "backlooping." Backlooping enables the editing, revising, and streamlining of discourse to render it more clear, precise, distilled, and abstracted from its context of origin for "distanced" publication as a "timeless" text (complete, in this instance, with an "Abstract," which Ong traced to an original word meaning "distanced" or "drawn away"). In conclusion, for those of us with a stake in understanding and preserving Indigenous traditional knowledges, we may, in fact, need to explore creative alternatives for conveying spoken knowledge beyond written words if we are to remain faithful to such knowledges as they are expressed today in Indigenous communities.

In closing, I again echo the sentiment that I expressed at the outset of this article, namely, that I remain thankful to those who have already engaged and critiqued the ideas shared in this article. Furthermore, I welcome additional and ongoing discussion about these matters as we together envision better futures for Indigenous communities. Let the dialogue continue.

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