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Preparing to be Allies: Narratives of Non-Indigenous Researchers Working in Indigenous Contexts

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Insensitive research approaches have resulted in damaged relationships between non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities, prompting scholars and funding agencies to call for more culturally compatible research methods. This paper addresses the qualities, skills and knowledge developed by six non-Indigenous researchers as they built—and continue to maintain—respectful research relationships with Indigenous communities. Also discussed are the important formative experiences that have shaped the six researchers in their ongoing work. Findings presented in this paper are synthesized from a larger research project undertaken using narrative approaches to data collection and analysis.

Des approches de recherche insensibles ont nui aux relations entre les chercheurs non autochtones et les communautés autochtones, ce qui a incité les universitaires et les organismes de financement à exiger des méthodes de recherche plus respectueuses et mieux adaptées aux cultures. Cet article porte sur les qualités, les habiletés et les connaissances qu'ont développées six chercheurs non autochtones en établissant et en maintenant des relations de recherche avec des communautés autochtones. Nous discutons également des expériences formatrices qui ont marqué les six chercheurs et façonné leur travail en cours. Les résultats présentés dans cet article sont synthétisés d'un plus grand projet de recherche reposant sur des approches narratives à la collection et à l'analyse de données.

The negative effects of research on Indigenous communities have been well documented in the scholarly literature (i.e., Bishop, 1998; Kenny, 2004; Smith, 2013; Wilson, 2003). For many years, Indigenous peoples have told stories of researchers taking information and/ or artifacts for their own purposes only and not for the benefit of the communities. As a result of these kinds of experiences many Indigenous people do not trust non-Indigenous researchers and can feel "betrayed by the [research] process" (Menzies, 2004, p. 22). This feeling of betrayal is an example of the damaged relationships that can result from research that does not respect Indigenous ways of knowing and a community's established protocols and procedures.

In recent decades, universities and funding agencies have begun to acknowledge ways of knowing that differ from traditional Western knowledge systems which have—until very recently—dominated the university environment (Bishop, 1998, 2003; Castellano, 2004; Lather, 2006; Menzies, 2001, 2004; Wilson, 2003). Across fields as diverse as anthropology, education, health sciences, linguistics, and social work, researchers have offered suggestions for the creation of protocols, procedures, and ethical standards for engaging collaboratively with

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Indigenous communities (cf. Battiste, 1998; Wilson, 2007). As a result, increasing numbers of non-Indigenous researchers are beginning to contribute to decolonization efforts, defined as the "deconstruction of ideological, legal, legislative, operational, textual and other institutionalized structures sustaining unequal and discursive relations of power between non-first Nations and First Nations citizenries" (Binda & Caillou, 2001, p. 2). What is missing from this literature, however, are the perspectives of non-Indigenous researchers who have sustained respectful, long-term relationships with Indigenous communities.

This paper presents findings from a study that sought to understand the preparation and experiences of a select group of non-Indigenous researchers from Canada's West Coast who have sustained research partnerships with Indigenous communities for at least five years. More specifically, the study addressed four questions. What characterizes non-Indigenous allies who have researched sustainably in partnership with Indigenous communities? What values, knowledge, and skills do non-Indigenous researchers find important in researching with and for Indigenous communities? What experiences (cultural, personal, and educational) do non-Indigenous researchers consider to have shaped their abilities to research sustainably with Indigenous communities?

Theoretical Perspectives

Increasing awareness of the damage to Indigenous communities caused by insensitive researchers has prompted changes in research protocols in recent years. University research ethics boards, journals, and publishing houses are more cautious about ensuring that proper community-centred research protocols have been followed before allowing research to proceed and manuscripts to be published. Donald Fixico (2003) has outlined three phases in the evolution of Indigenous research. Phase one focused on researching and writing about Indigenous peoples while eschewing their perspectives. Phase two witnessed the addition of nominal quotes from both colonized and colonizer in relation to key accounts such as wars or treaties. According to Fixico, the most recent phase has given prominence to the voices of Indigenous peoples, a shift which has helped "to diffuse the power relations inherent in the production and dissemination of knowledge" (McDonald, 2008, p. 82).

With the acknowledgment that non-Indigenous researchers from numerous fields of study will continue to work in Indigenous communities, a number of publications have appeared as guides to more respectful research approaches. Shawn Wilson (2007) believes that the key to working successfully with Indigenous communities is to focus not on who undertakes the work, but on how it is undertaken. The main plank of his *Indigenist* paradigm is the establishment of respectful relationships. This includes honouring the role of the Indigenous participants and recognizing that the information researched belongs to the individuals and communities from whom the material was collected (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

Working with the Maori in New Zealand, non-Indigenous researcher Augie Fleras (2004) has developed a *cultural safety model* for non-Maori researchers that stipulates two requirements. Fleras's model stresses the importance of researchers' cultural self-awareness in order that they avoid the "unwitting imposition of their cultural beliefs, values and norms" on the research participants (p. 126). Furthermore, Fleras recommends that researchers inform themselves about the cultural, historical and structural circumstances of the community in which they will undertake the work. It is critical that researchers "suspend values and assumptions in interpreting other people's culture or behavior" and foster mutual respect by

sharing in the production of knowledge (Fleras, 2004, p. 127). Fleras's notion of self-awareness echoes the perspective of Kathleen Absolon who discusses the importance of researchers knowing themselves: who they are, where they are from and from where they receive their learnings/knowledge (Absolon, 2011).

Scholars are increasingly recommending that project participants play an active role in all decision-making right from the start and that either memoranda of understanding or research protocols be drafted and signed before any information or artifacts are collected. Another foundational aspect of working respectfully with First Nations communities is enabling participants to review and correct transcripts and stories — also known as *member checking*—so that both researcher and interviewee co-construct and mutually agree upon the knowledge to be used (Cruikshank, 1990).

Literature Review

The literature reviewed for this study revealed many factors that have ensured success among Indigenous researchers working with and for their communities. The following section focuses on these components: responsibility and trust, humility, worldview, reciprocity, relational accountability, and self-identity.

Responsibility and Trust

Weber-Pillwax (2001) has indicated that two of the fundamental characteristics necessary for working sustainably with Indigenous communities are responsibility and trustworthiness. "The researcher must have a deep sense of responsibility to uphold … trust in every way" (p.170). Trust and responsibility imply that the researcher will keep the information obtained in confidence and be held accountable to the people of the community.

Humility

Related to being respectful and trusting is the notion of being humble (Margaret, 2010). According to Cora Weber-Pillwax (2001) "deconstruction and decolonizing discourses or practices on their own will not lead … Indigenous researchers to where [they] want to be" (p. 170). To research appropriately, all researchers—whether Indigenous or not—must be willing to establish respectful relationships and to undertake research that places the needs of the community over those of the researcher. These actions demonstrate the researcher's willingness to be responsible and trustworthy (Weber-Pillwax, 2001). Another good way to remain humble is to "suspend values and assumptions in interpreting other people's culture or behavior" (Fleras, 2004, p. 127). For example, community members might behave in ways that may be perplexing to the researcher—such as paying for high school graduates to take a trip when the community suffers from extreme poverty (cf. Taylor, 1999). Fleras advises that the researcher should not rush to judge the behavior but rather accept it as fulfilling the needs and values of the community itself.

A Broad Worldview

One's worldview shapes one's behavior and values. Shawn Wilson (2001) argues that those

researchers who believe that there are multiple ways of being in the world think in a manner consistent with Indigenous epistemologies. Researchers who experience success with Indigenous communities are open to entertaining different perspectives on social phenomena.

Reciprocity

Indigenous scholars have argued that the research interests and benefits must be reciprocal (Castellano, 2004). For example, when seeking knowledge from an Elder, one should offer a gift. Gifts may range from something intangible and directly connected to the research—such as good feelings—to something tangible and completely disconnected from the research. For example, a researcher might present an individual participant with a container of tea prior to interviewing. Or, a gift might be left to the community in the form of books produced from the research. What is important is that members of the community consider the offering itself to be a gift—or at least worthwhile.

Relational Accountability

Reciprocity, trust, and respect are values that, along with worldview, are connected to the concept of relational accountability. This is grounded in the notion that individuals do not travel in isolation through the world but rather they are connected to all things—both animate and inanimate (Wilson, 2001). Relational accountability forces researchers to ensure that no harm comes to a community in which they are researching—either among its members or its surrounding environment. In order to uphold this value, researchers must learn to listen deeply in order to know and understand a community.

Self-identity

Scholars have suggested that working in Indigenous contexts requires a researcher to contemplate their identity and their role in the research relationship. As Kvale (1996) notes, "[w]hat and why have to be answered before how questions of design can be meaningful" (p. 95 in Lather, 2006, p. 47). That is, researchers must pose and answer the question of who they are and why they want to do the work. Are they motivated by their own professional advancement or by a desire to promote the well-being of the community? The manner in which this question is answered has important implications for how the research relationship will unfold. According to Wilson (2001), researchers "fulfill their role in the research relationship through their methodology" (p. 177).

According to the research literature, many factors come into play when working sustainably with Indigenous communities. The values, knowledge and skills of Indigenous researchers who have sustained partnerships in research with Indigenous people include: responsibility and trust, respect, humility, flexible worldviews, reciprocity, relational accountability, and self-identity. To date, no research has determined the factors shaping the success of non-Indigenous researchers—a gap in the literature that this study sought to address.

Methodology

Participants

Participants for the project that this paper draws from were selected from an expertise database of the University of Victoria, a mid-sized university on the West Coast of Canada. The university's database was searched first to determine which faculty members were included under topics and disciplines related to Indigenous contexts such as Aboriginal/Indigenous education, history, linguistics, social work, etc. Next, their faculty websites were read carefully to establish whether they were non-Indigenous[1], to confirm that they had worked directly with Indigenous communities, and to verify the length of time they had engaged in research with Indigenous peoples. A list was created of 11 potential participants. A letter of introduction was emailed to each of the professors on the list. This was followed up—where necessary—with a phone call. Each prospective participant was also given the opportunity to identify other possible participants that may have been overlooked, though none was suggested. In the end, six professors agreed to be interviewed for the study. The six professors were: Dr. Jessica Ball (School of Child and Youth Care); Dr. Leslie Brown (School of Social Work); Dr. Ewa Czaykowska-Higgins (Department of Linguistics); Dr. John Lutz (Department of History); Dr. Alan Pence (School of Child and Youth Care); and Dr. Leslie Saxon (Department of Linguistics).

Data Sources

The study that this paper draws from used narrative inquiry (following Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) to probe the insights of six non-Indigenous researchers who have engaged in research with and/or for Indigenous communities for at least five years. Narrative inquiry is a form of interpretive analysis that seeks to understand the ways people make meaning of their lives through their own stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have defined narrative inquiry as a method that uses stories, autobiography, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos (and other artifacts), and/ or life experience. Researchers who use narrative approaches are interested primarily in the meaning people make of their experiences rather than the establishment of an "ultimate truth" (Kramp, 2004). Furthermore, participants' storytelling is always grounded in specific contexts, of which the teller is a part based on the "social, cultural and institutional setting" (Moen, 2006, p. 4).

Interviews lasting two to three hours were undertaken with each of the six participants with the average being 150 minutes. Although interview questions were prepared in advance, they were treated as a loose guide and not adhered to stringently. Participants were free to digress in directions they themselves found meaningful. That is, they were free to guide their own narratives about researching with Indigenous communities and what resulted were rich, free-flowing co-constructions of knowledge between the interviewer and the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Participants were encouraged to share other data sources with the interviewer, such as images, artifacts, and publications which were to help stimulate recollections.

Data Analysis

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and then presented to the participants for member checking—an approach which seeks feedback from participants to ensure accuracy and validity of the information that has been recorded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is consistent with anti-colonial focus of researching with rather than on participants whereby the

researcher and the participant create new knowledge through the relationship they develop together (Barton, 2003). Each participant also read the first draft of the finished manuscript and then approved the final product.

Data were collected through participant interviews and informal data analysis occurred in part during the interviews. Following the lead of Gillian Weiss (2000), attempts were made "to stay in the background as much as possible, asking questions or making comments only when the respondent stopped speaking on a particular topic" (p. 51). The interviewer also kept a journal of field notes to be cross-checked with the interviews. Formal data analysis took place once interviews were completed and transcripts were approved by the participants.

Following transcript approval, coding was undertaken in two stages—open and axial—to identify salient themes running through each participant's story. A number of themes and sub-themes surfaced through a multi-stage process. First, the transcripts were scoured to seek themes from the literature, to determine how frequently they appeared, and in which ways. A theme was considered significant if it appeared in at least half of the participants' stories. The transcripts were also analyzed for themes that did not appear in the literature. Again, themes were noted if they appeared in the stories of at least half of the participants.

During the data coding phase, it soon became apparent that the participants were telling similar stories. Much of what was said by one was echoed by the other. This similarity was intriguing given that each of the researchers had worked with diverse Indigenous communities with differing experiences, traditions, and values. Though some Indigenous scholars caution researchers from assuming a sameness in worldview across settings, others note that there are "[s]trands of connectedness" in Indigenous thought "from the polar regions of North America to the tip of South America" (Cajete, 1986, pp. 17-18, cited in Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 40). Given these strands of connectedness, as well as similarities across the research participants' stories, the vastness of the data, and space limitations imposed by journal article formats, for the purposes of this article findings have been summarized thematically across participants rather than by individual participant. What follows is a discussion of the themes that emerged across the participants' stories and how these relate to the existing published literature on working respectfully with Indigenous communities.

Findings

Findings That Align with the Research Literature

According to the research literature, many factors come into play when working sustainably with Indigenous communities. As outlined above, the values, knowledge, and skills of Indigenous researchers who have sustained partnerships in research with Indigenous communities include: responsibility and trust, respect, humility, flexible worldviews, reciprocity, relational accountability, and self-identity. We found that the participants in our research study manifested these elements as they discussed their work with Indigenous communities. This section of this paper discusses the overlap between our findings and those of the research literature, reviewed above. Following that, we discuss the findings that are absent from and add to the existing research literature.

Responsibility and trust. As outlined in the research literature (Weber-Pillwax, 2001), participants in this study felt that upholding trust in any research relationship is critical. In the words of one researcher: "with colonization, and my particular responsibility as a settler …

responsibility comes with that in my relationship with Indigenous peoples" (Brown, p. 12). For some non-Indigenous people, a feeling of responsibility can result in feelings of guilt that can transform into "awareness and then through the guilt to the responsibility part" (Brown, p. 12). Once guilt has been overcome, researchers have a responsibility to demonstrate that they are trustworthy. Researchers do this in many ways. For example, initial relationships are often developed when someone who is already trusted within the community introduces and vouches for a researcher who is new to the community. One participant in this study describes this form of trust as "trust by association" (Lutz, p. 3). Another participant furthered this by saying that, "it's critical that I've got a tie in, I can't just be a faceless person, someone nobody vouches for, someone you never heard of" (Pence, p. 16).

Humility and a broad worldview. Like Weber-Pillwax (2001) and Fleras (2004), each of the participants in this study felt that humility was a characteristic they possessed: "I think you need to be humble about what you don't know ... so I think I know a lot about the other culture but of course there's just so much that I don't have any grasp of at all" (Saxon, p. 22). Indeed, "being humble opens you up to new possibilities" (Ball, p.19). "There's things that people will say to me that I never, ever saw that way, and never thought of ... that way. There's so many 'ah ha' moments that are truly humbling" (Ball, p. 19). One participant referred to this as "withholding judgment" (Ball, p. 28):

> There were some things I saw in a country I was working in that I was just horrified by and I thought oh, my ... I had to pull myself up short and say, you have no idea ... you don't know. Just don't judge it ... there's got to be a reason so just a little bit of holding back ... just be slow to judge and slow to come to conclusions. (Ball, p. 28)

Another participant referred to different worldviews and being mindful that

> there's different knowledges, there's different ways of understanding the world ... so it's not a question of looking for the right way, it's a question of looking for a way that makes sense in whatever context you're in. (Pence, p. 4)

Overall, participants did not think it was appropriate to judge what they saw in a community and they did not feel that it was their role to change the community. Humility can also be achieved through repressing one's ego. "It's not insisting on what is mine in this as the researcher but being open to sharing, to negotiation, to listening, especially to listening, and to suppress [one's] self-interest" (Czaykowska-Higgins, p. 8). By suppressing one's ego, the researcher shows that the relationship with the community is valued as much or more than one's own personal or professional interests.

Reciprocity. Like Castellano (2004), participants in this study considered it important to "gift" communities and individuals with useful objects or information. In one case, the community believed that they could benefit solely from the findings of the research that was being proposed because they

> were really concerned about the loss of their language. So they felt that if the relationship [with the researcher] worked out, then it would contribute to their efforts on behalf of languages, or their language, and so, they were willing to take a chance on [working with] us because we might be ... useful to them. (Czaykowska-Higgins, p. 5)

In this case, the research itself was considered a gift. Nevertheless, research findings alone are not always adequate gifts. Another participant was involved in medical research with a community. Since there was no immediate benefit to the community for participating in the research, she asked members what they wanted or needed. They replied they wanted a bathtub that people with arthritis could access so she went to the lead researcher and told him that they had to put money in the budget for a bathtub. Reciprocity means acknowledging that the information (or data) provided by the community to the researcher is a type of gift, and—in return—the researcher must provide a gift to the community. Here's how one participant explained it:

> These people are giving their gifts [of knowledge]. What are we going to leave behind? How are we going to be making a difference? We've got to leave participants better off … it's not just [do no] harm, it's leaving participants better off. (Brown, p. 5)

Relational Accountability. Shawn Wilson (2001) has argued that relational accountability forces researchers to view everyone and everything in a community as integrally linked. It requires that researchers listen carefully and learn about the rhythms and values inherent in the community setting. Here's how one researcher put it:

> I'm very relational in how I proceed with research so even [during the early stages] for interviews or data collection … we are now in a relationship with each other for the rest of our lives … [Knowing that we are accountable to each other will] change how we talk to each other … and share with each other and it's the accountability of what you do with what I tell you, what I say to you, what I do with what you tell me. (Brown, p. 4)

As one participant suggests, "put yourself in positions where you can just listen and not talk. That's the skill we don't teach researchers. We do teach them how to ask questions but we don't teach them how to hear the answers. It's the hardest part" (Brown, p. 25). Listening and hearing are important skills in relationship-building.

Self-identity. According to Kvale (cited in Lather, 2006) and Wilson (2001) researchers who maintain sustainable relationships in Indigenous communities regularly question who they are and what motivates them. One of our participants put it this way: a researcher needs to "be really clear as to why [they] want to do it and be prepared to talk about that and defend it or change it or whatever. So that's part of defining the purpose of the research question" (Brown, p. 24). Participants gave examples of how they "check" themselves so that they are holding themselves accountable and don't become complacent. One participant says that a researcher should:

> develop strategies for holding a mirror up to yourself so that your assumptions around working with Indigenous peoples in communities as a non-Indigenous woman are visible, that you're never comfortable. How do you keep yourself unsettled as a settler? That's the strategy to always try to keep yourself uncomfortable. And if you can deal with always being uncomfortable and still want to move forward, then … that's a great start. (Brown, p. 24)

Findings that Add to the Scholarly Literature

This section highlights the knowledge, skills and values that emerged from the participants'

stories and add to the existing scholarly literature about how to maintain sustainable research relations with Indigenous communities. Key knowledge, skills and values include: flexibility, self care, the creation and maintenance of space, subject area competency, deep listening, ego suppression, competency in research processes and data stewardship. We also describe the prior life experiences that participants believed have contributed to their researcher identities.

Flexibility. Demonstrating flexibility was a characteristic that was not well documented in the literature but it was mentioned numerous times during the interviews undertaken for this project. Participants gave several examples of ways that they demonstrate flexibility. Some researchers focused on answering questions posed by the community and addressing community needs rather than furthering their own research agendas. Others, like Alan Pence, took on research projects focused on Indigenous contexts or issues only when Indigenous communities showed interest in the topic. Undertaking research with Indigenous communities is not "about bringing in the experts to tell them what to do" (Pence, p. 2). Researchers must remain open to the view that community members

> have a vision and [they] want somebody to work with [them] to support that .... I had done enough work before with First Nations communities that [I know the direction] has to come from the community; it has to be community-driven, community-owned, community-thought through. (Pence, p. 2)

What was consistent among all participants was an awareness of and ability to put one's own needs aside to adhere to the needs of the community.

> If you're working in partnership you have to make a decision about [whether] you're going to insist—as this outsider researcher—on your research questions or whether you're going to acknowledge to yourself that they're really important but now's not the time to ask them. (Czaykowska-Higgins, p. 11)

By being sensitive to issues of timing and knowing how to adapt one's project, a researcher can demonstrate an awareness of their secondary role and respect for their relationships in the community.

Self care. Another important element of working with Indigenous communities that was not discussed in the research literature but was revealed through the interviews is self care. Some participants talked about a fear of getting "burnt out" (Saxon, p. 18) and that some aspects of working in Indigenous contexts can be "very draining and emotionally exhausting" (Czaykowska-Higgins, p. 18). Because the researchers interviewed for this study are sensitive to the unique contexts of researching with Indigenous peoples, they focus on conducting their research in ways that honour different ways of knowing. Being ever vigilant of community members' needs and sensitive to different ways of knowing can be challenging on a personal level, as one participant described.

> It was just so culturally different... I had no idea and at that time, the Dene language was the main language of the community ... I mean the difficulty wasn't that I didn't understand what people are saying around me. I don't care if I don't understand what people are saying around me—but it was loneliness. (Saxon, p. 8)

Social challenges in some communities—such as poverty and unemployment—can be emotionally difficult. Therefore, it is important to consider ways to take care of oneself as a

researcher. One participant suggested making a plan to care for one's spirit.

> One of the things that I hadn't quite realized we do in all of our projects, and I do with every student that I supervise, as part of their preparation, is to talk about how you're going to take care of your spirit through your project. So there's the plan for how you're going to collect your data but how are you going to take care of your spirit and yourself? (Brown, p. 21)

Taking care of oneself on a spiritual level can make the challenging work of engaging in different ways of knowing less difficult. It can take the form of debriefing with team members or undertaking exercises—such as yoga—to rest the body and soul.

Space. Several participants mentioned the concept of space: specifically, making space for others to take a lead. One participant talked about making space by creating a position within the research team that would "help to create space for the Elders" to contribute to the research (Czaykowska-Higgins, p. 16). Another participant questioned her role with respect to making and taking space. "[I had to] learn to get out of the way. That's part of the job" (Brown, p. 8). Making space for others is an important consideration for engaging community members and building research capacity in the communities where we research. It is aligned with the notion of reciprocity and ensures that communities gain something from the research project that is conducted.

Subject area and research competencies. Participants felt that both subject area and research competencies were critical to their success as researchers in Indigenous communities. As one participant put it, what the community "was coming to me for was [my subject knowledge—they were saying] we need a program and it needs to be credible—it needs to be seen as being good in the eyes of authorities as well as good in our eyes" (Pence p. 17). The community knew that the researcher had a reputation for being competent and he had knowledge that they needed.

Data stewardship was something that the participants referred to as being an important component of research competency. According to one participant "research is about data so having data stewardship and [what's important is] knowing before you even agree to get into a study, what will be the data stewardship agreements that are expected" (Ball, p. 23). Another echoed this sentiment: "I never start collecting data until the rez [reserve] dogs know me. So it's a litmus test of how long have you been in the community? And are you ready now to even collect data" (Brown, p. 4)?

One way to establish understandings about data stewardship is to create a memorandum of understanding or a memorandum of agreement. These agreements can be tools for establishing and maintaining relationships. In one case, the community agreed that the researcher had "… negotiated a very clear memorandum of understanding and memorandum of agreement that [they] discussed for [a] year and worked out together" (Ball, p. 23). These were crucial documents for the community to refer back to when they needed to verify that the research project was progressing as had been agreed.

Life experiences. The researchers interviewed for this study partially attributed their abilities to work sustainably with Indigenous communities to some of their formative experiences that heightened their consciousness of different worldviews. These formative experiences could be categorized as personal, cultural, and educational. Participants' stories ranged from experiences they had as children, with influences from family and community, to experiences that have shaped them as adults. All stories offer insights into how participants'

experiences have influenced who they are as people and as researchers who have worked sustainably with Indigenous peoples.

Participants' life experiences were diverse. One grew up with "small 'l' liberal parents … where one weekend you go to the Jewish synagogue, the next weekend you go to the United Church, the next weekend we're taking you out to the rez [reserve] for the weekend" (Brown, p. 1). Another participant "was brought up in [an] … immigrant community and there are very clear protocols about how you interact with people … I inherited those cultural norms from my parents" (Brown, p. 4). Still another had a strong religious upbringing that influenced her openness to other forms of spirituality. Although none identified having strong connections to Indigenous people or communities while they were growing up, one participant who was raised near a reserve noted that, "I actually started to become sensitive to Indigenous issues when I was a child" (Ball, p.1). To some extent, participants saw their work with Indigenous communities as part of a normal life trajectory.

> Somehow my history of working with Indigenous peoples and the fact that I was married to an Indigenous man and had Indigenous kids and was connected in community, all of a sudden, I was seen as knowing something about Indigenous people. At first I was very resentful of that because I thought I'm not the expert, talk to them, not me, right? But somewhere along the line, I decided to take up what was being thrust upon me which was to be a bridge kind of position, the boundary person. (Brown, p. 1)

As Margaret (2010) has noted, "some people are positioned as bridge-builders working between indigenous and non-indigenous communities" (p. 13). Often people who work in this bridging position advocate for those who are marginalized. One participant referenced a childhood connection to marginalization which she viewed as essential to understanding communities that operate outside of the mainstream either due to poverty, cultural or linguistic diversity.

> Social institutions didn't work very well for me while I was growing up … and I think that in many ways I see myself as having grown up on the margins psychologically. So people who are marginalized or for whom social institutions aren't working are usually people I'm interested in and somehow engaging with … these just come naturally to me 'cause I experienced that growing up. (Ball, p. 30)

Another participant noted the idea of marginalization. Having travelled to a non-Western country as a youth, he realized, at a young age, what it feels like to be the Other.

> So by the time I got to the experience as a 22-year-old, on the Umatilla reservation, I could identify with being the Other and I guess I was primarily wrestling with my role as a professional, what is my role here? (Pence, p. 11)

Early on in their careers, many participants found themselves in situations that aligned them with Indigenous contexts. Thus, when they became researchers, they knew that it was important to reflect on their situations and on how they could support the work of Indigenous peoples.

Cultural experiences shaped why and how participants in this study work as researchers in Indigenous contexts. For some participants, travelling and living in other parts of the world provided some participants with an understanding of what it's like not to be a member of the dominant culture. For other participants, the importance of being able to work comfortably across cultures was learned while working in Indigenous communities. As one participant said,

"I definitely feel bi-cultural myself. I became very aware of these issues of [multiple identities] on a certain occasion [when] I was invited to a traditional fish camp" with an Indigenous community where the researcher was involved in research (Saxon, p. 22).

> That [experience] was very important to me and important to my understanding of identity issues. The ... community has a motto which is strong like two people .... [For them] strong like two people means knowing your ... culture and also attending school and learning the White man's ways ... participating in both cultures. Therefore, you are doubly strong. So I recognized finally that it applied to me ... (Saxon, p. 22)

Having different cultural experiences has set the foundation for participants to be open to different perspectives about living and being in the world. Their experiences have helped them to understand that people need not hold just one cultural identity. Rather, all individuals are capable of adapting to and manifesting multiple identities.

Along with personal and cultural experiences, prior learning included the educational experiences that have influenced the work of the non-Indigenous researchers who participated in this study. Participants spoke of educational experiences as both formal and informal. Most formal learning occurred before they began their work as researchers including completing undergraduate and graduate degrees in disciplines such as History, Psychology, Linguistics, and Social Work. Some participants studied in programs with an Indigenous focus, for example, First Nations history, a northwest Native American language and, in one case, a particular language spoken in northern Canada.

Some participants also worked as research assistants during their undergraduate and/or graduate years and other participants had professional experiences prior to becoming researchers; "most of us have worked in the field" (Pence, p. 6). Those experiences contributed to their choice and ability to work as researchers in Indigenous contexts. For example, one participant began her career as a social worker and ran an Aboriginal friendship centre's youth department in Regina before becoming a professor.

Some participants told stories of how they've learned to research with Indigenous peoples through informal learning opportunities such as learning "on the go" from the community in which they found themselves working. For instance, one participant shared a story of a very hard lesson she learned when she was hired by a particular government-funded program. She did the work with the Indigenous community including "all the things that one should be doing when working with community—[with the focus on] their [own] questions—[it was a] great piece of research" (Brown, p. 15). However, in the beginning she had told the community

> you own the data, this is your data, you can withdraw at any time. So at the end, [when] reports [were] all done and everything, [participants] said, remember you said this was ours? We've decided we're not going to let you give it to the [funder]. (Brown, p. 15)

The researcher had nothing to give the sponsor,

> not one piece of data, not one interview. I [could] give [them] nothing, not a sentence on a piece of paper. That was a big decision point because I could have tried to mediate something and convince the community to let me take this piece and write it. I could have done that but in the end I was confronted with my own promise .... Now in the end, I stood my ground and no one ever knows what community I was in and the sponsor got not a word and it's just a time [that is] blank in my life but I

> was tested on do I really believe what I tell people because it's one thing to be able to talk this open relationship…it's another one to actually…. stand up for what I had personally promised [to the community]. (Brown, p. 15)

This story exemplifies an important, value-based way of engaging in research in Indigenous communities.

Conclusions

This article reports on the characteristics and experiences of non-Indigenous researchers at the University of Victoria who have worked sustainably in Indigenous contexts for a minimum of five years. Some of the values, knowledge, and skills that this study's participants expressed supported earlier findings in the current research literature. That is, participants shared examples of developing and practicing responsibility and trust (cf. Weber-Pillwax, 2001), humility (cf. Margaret, 2010), and reciprocity (cf. Castellano, 2004). They shared stories that highlight the importance of relational accountability (cf. Wilson, 2001) and their own awareness and ability to monitor their identities (cf. Kvale, 1996).

In addition, findings from this study highlighted the importance of researchers' abilities to be flexible or willing to change one's research plans to accommodate shifting priorities within the community. They also discussed the importance of developing strategies for self-care in order to mitigate the emotional hardships imposed by exposure to privations such as poverty and unemployment. Making space to help community members to own the research was also considered important and strongly facilitated by researchers' abilities to make connections with individuals as well as communities. Researchers also indicated the importance of demonstrating subject-area expertise and competency in research processes, including data stewardship.

The study from which this article was drawn also examined the formative experiences that six non-Indigenous researchers consider to have shaped their abilities to research sustainably with Indigenous communities. Participants shared stories and examples of how they lived out their values through the decisions they made and they reflected on the ways that their life experiences have influenced their choices and abilities to engage in research with Indigenous communities. It was clear that no single path was followed; participants grew up in different contexts and had different experiences in youth and adulthood. What is common among them is an orientation towards respecting different ways of being in the world and a desire to understand and support people in the communities to follow their own paths.

Participants and the Indigenous peoples that they have worked with are seeking to decolonize themselves. Although decolonization is important for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Battiste, 1998, Smith, 1999), there is an additional role that non-Indigenous people can play: the role of an ally (Bishop, 1994; Margaret, 2010). Being an ally is an on-going practice that is learned and developed through experience. The participants' stories indicate engagement in practices and processes that are consistent with the work of allies, including bridge-building, listening deeply as people speak from different world views and enabling Indigenous voices to be heard. All of these practices supported participants in their roles as allies who in turn supported Indigenous peoples in their efforts to develop towards decolonization and self-determination.

The outcomes of this study provide insights into both the personal and professional lives of non-Indigenous researchers working in Indigenous contexts. At the time of submission, we were

unable to find any other study investigating the experiences of non-Indigenous researchers working sustainably in Indigenous communities. Therefore, the findings from this study may provide a baseline for further research and support the work of current and future research with Indigenous peoples. Because this study was completed with a limited number of researchers (six), subsequent research studies could provide important comparative data. By shedding more light on the formative experiences and perspectives that have helped participants research respectfully with Indigenous peoples, other non-Indigenous researchers who are interested in research in Indigenous contexts may be able to better gauge their own readiness for this kind of work. The findings also provide examples of the types of personal, cultural and educational experiences that one may consider in order to prepare to engage in research with Indigenous peoples.

The present findings support a role for non-Indigenous researchers that is consistent with Shawn Wilson's concept of an Indigenist research paradigm where it is the choice of how to be that makes the work Indigenist, "not the ethnic or racial identity of the researcher" (2007, p. 194). What makes the research Indigenist is that the researcher engages in a good way, respecting relationships throughout the research and beyond. The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate such ways through the excerpts from the research participants' stories. The participants highlighted in this paper have been able to sustain working relationships with Indigenous peoples using approaches that differ significantly from early researcher-directed approaches that so often caused damage to Indigenous communities (Bishop, 1998; Kenny, 2004, Menzies, 2004; Smith, 2013; Wilson, 2003). Their work provides us with a way forward from the disappointing legacy of earlier research approaches that played out in Indigenous communities around the world.

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Note

1 We assumed that the participants were not Indigenous if they did not mention Indigenous identity in the text of their websites. This was later confirmed during the interviews.

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