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INDIGENOUS RESEARCH: THREE RESEARCHERS REFLECT on their EXPERIENCES at the INTERFACE

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■ Abstract

Utilising Nakata's (2007) description of the "cultural interface", two Indigenous researchers and one non-Indigenous researcher examine their development of Indigenous research in and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities conducted from within an institution of higher education. The authors reflect on their experiences in developing an Indigenous research project and use Indigenous standpoint theory as a device to explore these experiences. The framing of priorities and research questions, ethics processes, the treatment of project information or data, the managing of competing accountabilities, and the role of non-Indigenous researchers in Indigenous research are all explored in these reflections.

■ Introduction

Conducting research in and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities requires individuals, service providers and communities to engage in the cultural interface between the mainstream non-Indigenous knowledge system and the Indigenous knowledge system. Within this interface all research parties and partners problematise, challenge, adapt, reframe, and negotiate ontologies, epistemologies and relationships. Utilising Nakata's description of the cultural interface, two Indigenous researchers and one non-Indigenous researcher examine their development of Indigenous research in and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities conducted from within an institution of higher education. In the first section, we present the Indigenous standpoint theory (IST) most widely espoused by Martin Nakata. In the second section, we present our individual perspectives as researchers engaged in an Indigenous women's health project. In the final section, we more closely examine our perspectives, positions and reflections within the context of the cultural interface.

■ Indigenous standpoint theory

Standpoint theory is predicated on a questioning of processes of "othering" and objectification that is often silently embedded in much of the research carried out in academic communities. Indigenous standpoint theory has emerged from feminist standpoint theory and its analyses of gendered power relationships and the treatment of women's experiences in the practices of producing and representing knowledge. Martin Nakata (2007) describes Indigenous standpoint theory as an intellectual device:

a method of enquiry, a process for making more intelligible "the corpus of objectified knowledge about us" as it emerges and organises our lived realities. I see this as theorising knowledge from a particular and interested position, not to produce the "truth" of the Indigenous position or the awful "truth" of the "dominant" colonial groups, but to better reveal the workings of knowledge and how understanding of Indigenous people is

caught up and is implicated in its work (Nakata, 2007, p. 11).

Nakata (2007, p.5) describes the contested terrain of competing knowledge systems as the cultural interface, with “histories, politics, economics, multiple and interconnected discourses, social practices and knowledge technologies” at its centre. The cultural interface thus connects Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds and knowledge economies. The authors argue that Indigenous standpoint theory, and Nakata’s description of the cultural interface, is a useful framework with which to examine the differing positionings that occur within higher education research settings, to acknowledge the tensions that exist within the interface, and to assist work towards interfaces that prioritise Indigenous epistemologies and voices. Perhaps the first step in this process is the acknowledgement of the differing values placed on differing forms of knowledge.

Moreton-Robinson (2004, pp. 75-76) argues that “Whiteness as an epistemological *a priori* provides for a way of knowing and being that is predicated on superiority, which becomes normalised and forms part of one’s taken for granted knowledge”. As researchers, it is important to acknowledge the existence of such a knowledge economy and continually reflect and assess ourselves and our work, including how we construct ourselves in relation to others. This is a journey each of us will take to ensure the research we do is “good” research. In the section that follows, the three authors acknowledge the tensions that exist within the cultural interface and reflect on their experiences in working towards interfaces that privilege Indigenous epistemologies and voices.

■ Three perspectives

The project under discussion involves collaboration between the university where the three researchers and authors are employed and an Indigenous women’s community organisation. The State Government-funded project involved a number of communities in a variety of urban locations across Queensland, examining health-related issues associated with young Indigenous women. The funding body determined the nature of the research prior to the tendering process, with project objectives and outcomes set jointly between researchers, and funding body representatives (based on overarching aims determined by the funders) once the tendering process was completed. Two representatives from the funding body were assigned membership to the reference group.

Each of the three researchers and authors come from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences and as a result will narrate their own perspective. We have deliberately chosen to separately use our individual voices in the description of our experiences. We

believe this separation serves to emphasise the non-unitary nature of the cultural interface. The first author identifies both as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and has been involved in Indigenous health research and education over the past seven years. The second author is an Aboriginal woman who has worked in a number of governmental and community agencies and is currently working in an academic institution as a researcher. The third author is a non-Indigenous researcher with experience in the areas of social justice, human service provision and marginalisation. We have included in this section relevant excerpts from prior conversations and exchanges between the three researchers, other project team members, work colleagues and various community members that illuminate the cultural interface. These informal or unstructured conversations were recalled in group discussion between the three researchers and are captured in the present paper to illustrate the tensions that arose as part of the development of this women’s health research project. At this group discussion the three authors reviewed the field notes taken by each member (notes taken following previous reference group meetings) examining the emergent themes and issues present in these notes. A number of comments from community organisation representatives (either at formal reference group meetings or informal exchanges) were recorded in these field notes and have been used in the sections below to illustrate issues experienced by the three authors. Where verbatim comments from community organisation representatives were not completely recorded the authors have adapted statements to reflect the nature of the original communication. There has thus been some interpretation of comments made by community organisation representatives.

■ Perspective I

In the past, non-Indigenous researchers have determined what knowledge is legitimate, resulting in Indigenous knowledge being seen as inferior (Rigney, 2000). Although this is slowly changing with more Indigenous people contributing to research, and more importantly taking the lead, there is still evidence of Indigenous knowledge being seen as inferior. Past and present experience in Indigenous research supports this.

Nakata (2007) suggests that Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems work off different theories of knowledge. As an Indigenous researcher, this becomes apparent when working within a Western academic institution that tends to value and authorise Western knowledge over Indigenous knowledge. In emphasising the importance of Indigenous authority and control, Smith (cited in Jandt & Tanno, 2001) suggests that Indigenous knowledge is unique to them and necessary to produce useful

research. Indigenous control over research allows for questions to be framed differently, priorities to be ranked differently, problems to be defined differently, and people to participate on different terms. By having Indigenous peoples and communities control and leading their own research means that whatever outcome is achieved, a high degree of success has already been accomplished through the initial project design phases.

In most cases Indigenous researchers are required to meet criteria set by standards informed by Western epistemologies, which poses additional challenges for the Indigenous researcher who is placed in a position where it is also a requirement to meet the criteria set by Indigenous communities. Often the integrity and the ultimate success of Indigenous research requires privileging Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. The tensions experienced between the Western and Indigenous systems often result in significant conflicts requiring resolution. This became clear when our research team was required to apply for ethics clearance through the university's ethics committee.

Applying for ethics for this project was challenging for the research team, particularly in terms of trying to ensure Indigenous control. The research team acknowledged earlier on in the project that from the outset difficulties would arise based on the knowledge that the institution's ethics processes are usually developed and applied from Western knowledge and value. In addition, ethics committees are governed predominantly by non-Indigenous people.

Most universities nowadays have policies and processes designed to ensure that researchers working in "diverse" settings work in "culturally sensitive" ways. In particular, research which is specific to and/or involves participants who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples should not proceed without the support and involvement of the community in which the research is to be conducted. While this is encouraging, support and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities often comes after the research proposal has been developed without consultation or input from these communities. Indeed, in the present project, priorities and objectives were established by the funding body prior to any negotiation with relevant communities.

As outlined in the university's own "Code of Conduct for Research", when undertaking research activities researchers must be committed to the highest standards of professional conduct and integrity and should only participate in activities which conform to accepted ethical standards and which they are competent to perform (Queensland University of Technology, 2007). Researchers must also ensure the safety and well-being of those they work with, and that the design of projects takes account of all relevant ethical guidelines. All data collected must be kept confidential ensuring that individual's identities are not made known.

As an Indigenous researcher, we also need to adhere to the highest standards of cultural conduct and cultural integrity and should only participate in activities which conform to acceptable community standards. In addition to this we must ensure the safety and well-being of those we have obligations and responsibilities to family and community and ensure that the project takes into account relevant cultural protocols and processes. We must also ensure that all data collected does not use Indigenous knowledge to advance our own or others' personal or institutional needs or interests, and that data collected will contribute to the betterment of the whole community.

Human participation in research is governed by the University ethical procedures (Queensland University of Technology, 2007). In order to receive appropriate clearance from the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC), such research must embrace the principles of respect for persons (e.g., obtaining voluntary and informed consent from participants, confidentiality, right to withdraw), beneficence and justice (e.g., access to results by the research participants).

As Indigenous researchers we were also required to obtain appropriate clearance from our community, particularly our elders, and must embrace the principles of respect for not only persons involved in the research but also to the whole community. Importantly, this includes respect for knowledge systems within communities. In order for communities to accept and be involved in research in their own communities it is important that input is sought from the beginning. This should involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people identifying their own priorities and their own research questions and that the communities, particularly the elders in that community, support the research. One Indigenous community organisation representative commented:

We know you university people have to go through your own ethics, but we have to go through our own process too before the project goes ahead you know, we have to go talk to community and the elders first, make sure the community and the elders approve of this project first, otherwise we can't start anything (Anon., personal communication, 2006).

It is becoming apparent to the wider research community that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves have research needs and priorities and that their questions are important (Smith, cited in Foley, 2003). More often than not, it is the larger institutions that fund many Indigenous research projects and, more often than not, assume authority and control, often taking away rights from communities. The challenge for the research team is that funding for this particular project has been provided by a

non-Indigenous institution who determines what the priority (or “problem”) is for Indigenous people, without consulting the communities prior to the distribution of funds. This is also in the context of findings from the literature review suggesting that the funding body had financed similar projects previous to this one. One Indigenous community representative expressed the following frustration with the lack of Indigenous control over research:

Don't you academic mob come in here expecting to do the work so that you can get your name on some research paper and move on, this happens to us all the time, there's more to research than getting your name on some paper, we need to make sure things actually happen, this is about people's lives! (Anon., personal communication, 2006).

Similarly, an Indigenous researcher stated that:

Even though the funding body says that Indigenous people have control over their own research, more often than not this is untrue, particularly when the funding body has strings attached to the funding, i.e. funding outcomes, performance indicators, reporting, etc. the funding body still has authority and control of the research, telling communities what is expected of them from start to finish (Anon., personal communication, 2006).

There is often an assumption by the dominant culture that individuals or groups will interpret information “the same”. This assumption can often lead to misinterpretation or miscommunication of information and in some cases may impact on the outcomes of a project. It is important that service providers consider the language used and the assumptions some individuals may hold about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people if they are committed to contributing towards improving the current status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This could involve a change in direction of the research; for example, rather than “studying” Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the “problem”, service providers and departments could concentrate on identifying their own barriers and gaps in providing appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In particular, by exploring their own assumptions, values and belief systems they could determine the impact they may have on delivering appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. There is also a lack of information regarding the implementation of recommendations from previous studies in the area. Often the findings from these studies have not been publicly released and in addition there is a lack

of strategic or long-term direction associated with initiatives and interventions. This reduces the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to truly have some control over where money is allocated and why; this also serves to reduce confidence when community members are aware of such previous studies. Enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to identify their own priorities for research will not only lead to successful outcomes but is also an important process towards self-determination. The following comments from Indigenous researchers are telling in this regard:

We community people ourselves working with our own communities but we go in as researchers from a Western Institutions, so even though our own communities know us outside of work, the minute we put our “researchers hat” on some Murri mob will immediately disengage (Anon., personal communication, 2006).

You as a non-Indigenous person can go into community do your work and walk away, but us Murri mob we work and live in these communities, there is no disengaging at anytime (Anon., personal communication, 2006).

■ Perspective II

My experience as an Indigenous researcher within government and non-government sectors has made me acutely aware of the difficulties of conducting research with Indigenous communities from an Indigenous researcher's perspective. Relevant project staff, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, involved in conducting the research I have been involved with have all been aware of the appropriate cultural protocols essential to effective engagement with Indigenous communities. However, it became very apparent that the institution's claim to respect and recognise protocols was not necessarily reflected in the reality of the unintended consequences of the institution's policies and processes. As a consequence, the institutions not only failed to recognise Indigenous knowledge and protocols of Indigenous communities, it in turn placed its own staff, particularly its Indigenous staff, in very difficult positions both in their communities and their place of work.

Institutions involved in the funding and delivery of research projects continually fail to acknowledge the fundamental tension that is present in Indigenous research. Namely, Indigenous researchers are not only answerable to the organisation they are employed by, but also to Indigenous communities. Supplementary to any loyalties that the researcher has to their employer, researchers are also held solely responsible to the Indigenous communities for the type of project

and the types of processes and protocols used in the research. Moreover, the Indigenous researcher's family members and associates residing in the communities are also held accountable for all the actions of that particular researcher. Weber-Pillwax (2001, p. 169) notes that Indigenous researchers have "established relationships" either directly or indirectly through family connections, and if the researcher does not respect that relationship then the researcher's family is held accountable for the researcher's actions. Any outcomes of the research, that the community may find to be "undesirable", has negative consequences not only for that individual researcher but for all future research initiatives in that particular community, as well as in neighboring communities.

The onus of responsibility for, as well as the consequences of, data collection is on the Indigenous researcher as they are often the community's only contact with the funding or academic institution. The community does not necessarily know, or have a clear understanding of the policies or protocols associated with allowing the institution onto their land to collect their data, nor do institutions make these clear to communities. However, this is not due to the fact that the community cannot comprehend the formalities of the institution. Rather, in most situations the community prefers not to be inundated with the "bureaucratic rigmarole" that is often associated with allowing the institutions into their communities in the first instance.

A lack of negotiation often also results in inappropriate timeframes being imposed on the research project. There is a failure to negotiate with communities and then the institution's timeframe is forced onto the Indigenous communities, without consideration of proper cultural protocols and without the understanding of how the communities interact and also how situations that arise within a community always comes first. Before engaging the community the institution usually has already developed a timeframe that they assume will be acceptable in the community. It is to be remembered that often the institution has not had direct contact with the community and the institution has failed to engage with the community in the development of an appropriate timeframe for the communities involved. Often funding institution's timeframes are driven by their own spending cycles. The timeframes that the institutions develop for the Indigenous communities are often culturally inappropriate, culturally unaware, intimidating and intrusive to the communities. The timeframes that are developed by the institution fail to take into consideration matters of serious concern to individual Indigenous communities as well as the Indigenous researchers.

Indigenous communities, especially elders and other community leaders, have become very skeptical of the motives that have driven the institution's community

engagement processes that often fail to highlight the above mentioned issues that are of grave concern to the community. Indigenous communities are also very skeptical about allowing "foreigners" into their communities as they acknowledge that the institution's processes often mean that communities have to cede control over the interpretation of the information once provided by the community. This skepticism has a chain reaction, affecting all involved in the research, especially the Indigenous researchers that engage with the community of research interest.

It is the Indigenous researcher that feels the most pressure to ensure that both cultural protocols and the institution's protocols are followed and fulfilled. It is also the Indigenous researcher that often gets caught in "no man's land"; that is, an Indigenous researcher who is aware of their responsibility to both the Indigenous community and their protocols and the institution's protocols and timeframe is caught in an awkward position. They are caught in the interface due to responsibilities as an employee and responsibilities as an Indigenous person who has ties to Indigenous communities. An Indigenous researcher revealed:

Often it feels like as an Indigenous researcher we go into our communities as both insiders and outsiders, it's difficult to work like this sometimes, particularly when we play the role of researcher it often places us as an outsider within our own communities, sometimes within our own families (Anon., personal communication, 2006).

It also needs to be noted that often the institution does not take the time to build a close relationship with the Indigenous communities where they are planning on collecting data. Instead the institution relies on the already developed relationship that the Indigenous researcher has within that community. This again places more pressure on Indigenous researchers to satisfy the requirements of both the institution and the Indigenous community. For example, government department officers are well-renowned in isolated Indigenous communities such as the Palm Island Aboriginal community for "flying in and out". This has disastrous consequences for the community as it leads the community members to believe that such persons have no regard for community protocols, hence no genuine attempt to experience what life is really like in the community. This leads to a serious distrust of government officers, and of Indigenous researchers. A community organisation representative commented:

The government has people who come and work in the community. What they don't tell you is that they fly them in for the day and then fly them out again at the end of the day. How is that supposed to help Indigenous communities and trust the government when the workers are not

taking the time to develop a relationship with the community? (Anon., personal communication, 2006).

At the conclusion of the data collection the community is often left out from further negotiations regarding the collected data. This then becomes part of a tug-of-war for intellectual property rights between the government and the Indigenous community. This becomes more of an issue when the institution has no further contact with the communities after data has been collected. The issue then becomes extremely serious for the Indigenous researcher as it raises ethical issues as they have both a duty of care to their employer and their Indigenous community. The institutions frequently fail to recognise or coherently respond to the impacts this has on the Indigenous researcher but also on their family and associates within the community. It is no wonder then that this feeds back into a perpetual cycle of distrust between communities and institutions.

With the institution's failure to take into account the essential cultural protocols that are required when entering into research in Indigenous communities they then often view the Indigenous communities as being difficult when problems occur. The institution is assuming that the Indigenous community is the problem and is also assuming that Indigenous knowledge, priorities and experiences are of lesser value than that of the dominant group. This illustrates the deprioritisation of Indigenous issues as a whole, and Indigenous communities are aware of such occurrences. If Indigenous communities become deeply offended they are more inclined to actively work against, or at least not engage in, any current or future consultation, engagement or research processes.

■ Perspective III

Merton draws attention to the role of the non-Indigenous researcher in Indigenous research and, specifically, the researcher's role as "outsider": "The outsider has neither been socialised in the group nor has engaged in the run of experience that makes up life and therefore cannot have the direct, intuitive sensibility that alone makes empathetic understandings possible" (Merton, cited in Foley, 2003, p. 46). Nakata (2007, p. 11) similarly describes this situation as: "they are the outsiders in this world of experience and they must fathom our accounts of it and feel what it is like not to be a "knower" of this world". As a non-Indigenous researcher, engagement in an Indigenous health project raises a myriad of personal and institutional dilemmas, not the least of which are embodied in Merton's and Nakata's statements. I found (and still find) the question of my involvement in a project regarding Indigenous women's health troublesome. My personal and political beliefs surrounding the treatment of

Indigenous peoples results in a commitment to the challenging of dominant power relations that seek to oppress, exploit, marginalise and perpetuate violence (in all its forms) against Indigenous people, as "Other". As a non-Indigenous researcher, what is the nature and extent of my involvement, and how do "I do it"? And, as an "outsider", is empathetic understanding ever possible?

Although this in itself is an important question, in the present paper it is not my intention to debate the issue of whether it is possible for a non-Indigenous researcher to engage in empathetic understandings, but rather to suggest that by positioning research as a political act the non-Indigenous researcher can come to the research relationship with a practice guided by an understanding of the need to find new, culturally appropriate research "spaces". Thus, in taking this view, the focus changes from empathetic understanding to the flexible engagement in an interface that attempts to both challenge dominant discourses and allow Indigenous researchers to act within Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies.

For the non-Indigenous researcher this suggests that there is a burden of responsibility to "politicise" or problematise, to challenge power imbalances, to prioritise or privilege Indigenous voices and to challenge the positioning of Indigenous knowledge within academic discourses. In practice, the process of addressing these responsibilities is multilayered, embedded within the institutions from which we work, and embedded in a history and present which gives authority to Western ways of being and knowing. As this is the first project I have engaged in with Indigenous research colleagues it continues to be an important learning ground regarding the creation of a research space that attempts to question the taken-for-granted paradigms that underpin our academic practice and a space that embraces epistemological flexibility. There have been deliberate structural factors put in place, there have been many conversations to determine "what page are each of us on?", and perhaps most importantly there have been flexibilities required to engage in an interface that acknowledges the terrain of contested knowledge systems and ways of being.

In the project under discussion, a key decision included having an Indigenous researcher in the lead organisational role as Principal Investigator. Without formal acknowledgement of the position of Indigenous researchers in Indigenous projects, the research space can be potentially over-run with the agendas of non-Indigenous researchers who have not engaged in Merton's "run of experience". Non-Indigenous academics can easily and unconsciously move to a process of "othering" and to a process that ensures personal outcomes outweigh larger political outcomes.

The role of non-Indigenous researchers in the field, and in the data analysis phase, are also important research considerations. Having tight constraints

around non-Indigenous researchers' involvement with Indigenous communities can minimise the impact of "outsiders" in the research process. For example, in the present health project, only Indigenous researchers will travel to case study sites and only Indigenous researchers will talk to young women participants. A quantitative component was a requirement of the tender, thus information will be subjected to statistical analyses. Inevitably, funding requirements necessitate the meeting of certain scientific "standards" such as reliability, validity and generalisability. The larger academic world gives value "to the mythical possibility of objectivity and the weight of credibility given to the distanced, 'scientific' 'unbiased' nature of knowledge" (Lampert, 2003, p. 24). Importantly, the data will sit in a cultural interface whereby such standards are negotiated by Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members and where there is acknowledgement that the interpretations we assign to young women's information will potentially direct the course of governmental strategies (and funding) to address the health issue under investigation. Community members are essential partners in the interpretation of information and the strategies that are developed from that interpretation. A non-Indigenous researcher discussed these issues in the following way:

As a non-Indigenous researcher how do I interpret, write and present the data to ensure I represent what Indigenous people out there are really saying, I have to position myself carefully and make sure that I work closely with Indigenous people and we work together in "saying what it all means" (Anon., personal communication, 2006).

There have been a number of organisational tensions faced in the development of the project. For example, we have had many difficulties in finalising a contract with our community-based partner, mainly due to issues regarding intellectual property and the exact nature and role of the university in the project and service-level difficulties for the community partner (including finding new premises and changes to board structure). Negotiations with the funding body were based on the submission of a consortium tender involving the community and the university, whilst the final contract was between the funder and the community-based organisation only. In practice this has resulted in project members having to negotiate legal and contractual domains alongside the development of the research project. An integral part of this negotiation is coming to shared understandings regarding intellectual property and "ownership of data" as the following researcher notes:

I can see why [Community Organisation Name] has difficulty with the intellectual property clause

and why they want it to be clear about the project being community driven ... It's important to work this out as a group and value their concerns, not just override people for the sake of paperwork (Anon., personal communication, 2006).

Although the process of attempting to create new research spaces is laden with organisational and personal tensions, it is also inextricably linked with the power of relationships with Indigenous colleagues and community members that can provide the basis for the "politicalisation" or problematisation of research and the longer term commitment to addressing issues of social justice and the positioning of Indigenous knowledge. In addition, the cultural interface, for the non-Indigenous researcher, is potentially a powerful learning ground that can enlighten us to our own whiteness and ways of being in the world. And, finally, as I am taking part in a project with a group of Indigenous researchers and community members, I know that perhaps the most important thing for me to do is to "listen deeply". This involves listening deeply to the experiences and wisdom of Indigenous women; the echoes of a colonised history; and the echoes of my own cultural heritage.

■ Discussion

A framework such as Indigenous standpoint theory can contribute to an understanding of "the silence, normativity and invisibility of whiteness and its power within the production of knowledge and representation" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004, p. 75) and the varied social positions from which we speak. As we are attempting to do in the current project, by systematically questioning and problematising taken-for-granted knowledge-power relationships we can begin to create new research spaces within higher education settings. By treating standpoint theory as a device to engage in processes of problematising, challenging, adapting, reframing and negotiating, it is not an "end-point", but rather an ongoing, evolving tool of academic practice. The politics of research and the questioning of taken-for-granted positions cannot be separated from the practice of research. As suggested by Sandra Harding: "We need not – indeed, must not – choose between 'good politics' and 'good science' ... for the former can at least sometimes produce the latter, and the latter, at least in some cases, requires the former" (Harding, 2004, p. 30).

Understanding and valuing Indigenous ways of knowing and doing can contribute to Indigenous communities having some control and authority over the research process. This can occur in a number of ways, such as by determining what issues are important to study; who will participate in the research and the role communities will play throughout the study; how

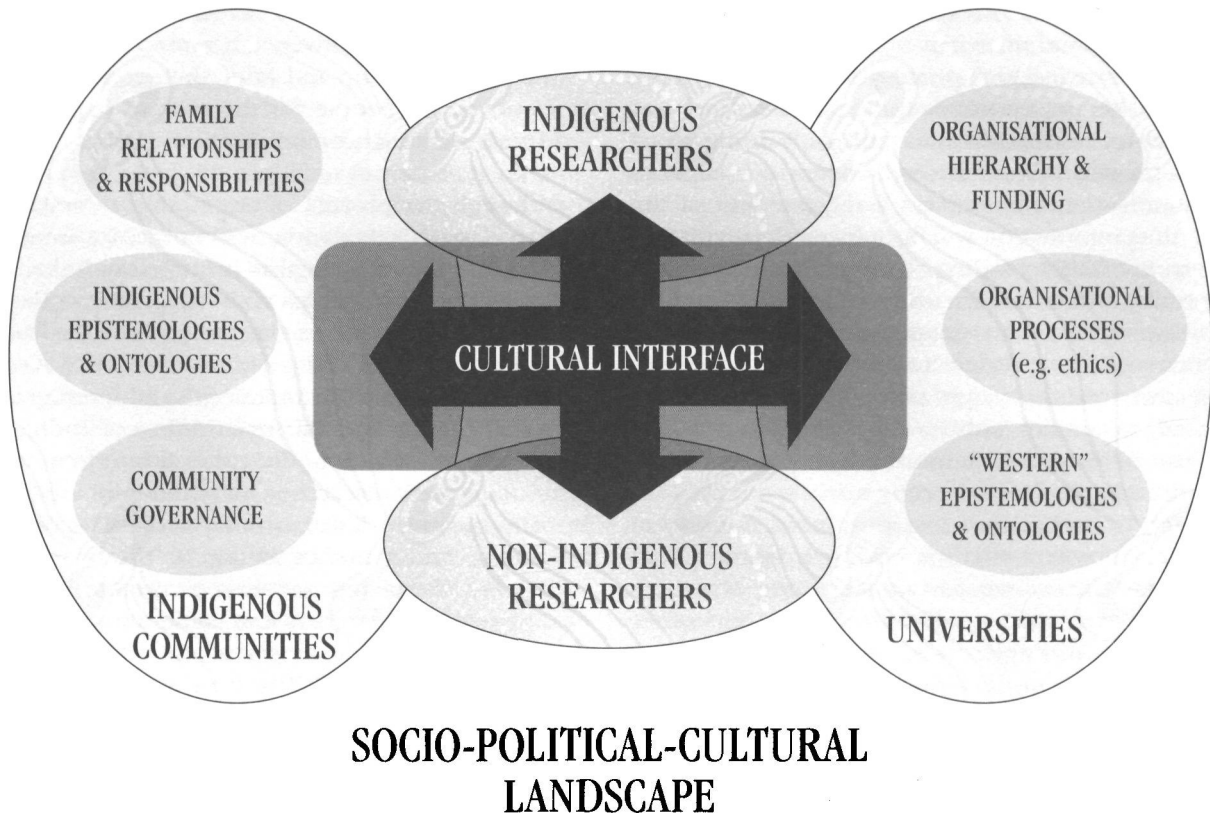


Figure 1. The Indigenous research cultural interface.

knowledge is shared; respecting that communities need to keep knowledge that is their own; and, finally, how the research is written and reported.

Figure 1 depicts the authors' adaptations of Nakata's IST concepts to our experiences as Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers in a higher education environment. This diagram attempts to represent the "forces" at work in the ongoing production of an Indigenous research space from the perspectives of the three authors. It depicts the meeting of two histories within the cultural interface and the tensions that flow from this meeting.

Understanding that the "work of research" occurs in the context of tensions created by the meeting of different histories (in the context of the broader socio-political-cultural landscape) can provide a basis from which to explore new ways of engaging with, and challenging, ways of knowing. Indigenous standpoint theory requires us to examine and question our position, our ways of knowing, and encourages us to embed theory and practice within the fabric of the cultural interface. Indigenous researchers are simultaneously embedded in our families, in the theoretical traditions and historical practices of the academic landscape and the epistemologies and ontologies of our culture. Non-Indigenous researchers come to the interface both as outsiders to Indigenous worlds of experience and embedded in an academic environment with organisational and academic traditions and procedures rooted in the privileging of

certain forms of knowledge.

In the process of reflecting on our experiences in the context of Indigenous standpoint theory a number of key issues emerged. Firstly, the tensions that exist between Indigenous and Western ontologies and epistemologies permeate all aspects of the practice of research, starting with informing the framing of the "problem" or question. Who determines what the problem or priority is? The reality of funding environments often results in the research objective being established prior to any community involvement in the development of priorities. These objectives and funding priorities are also situated in the context of larger policy frameworks that may have little to do with the lived experience of Indigenous communities. Secondly, a number of organisational processes, such as ethics procedures, make it difficult to ensure control sits with Indigenous communities. The prioritisation of academic institutionalised ethical procedures (which are firmly situated in non-Indigenous knowledge systems) over community-based systems inevitably challenges the ability to maintain Indigenous authority and control. Institutionalised ethics procedures can end up as a disembodied exercise with little practical connection to the "worlds" we research and their own inherently logical systems of governance and priority-setting. Issues of data ownership and intellectual property are crucial questions which require the negotiation of complex political and ethical terrains. Often these issues are simply treated as clauses in a

funding contract that have little connection to the ethics and protocols associated with gathering and interpreting information from real people and real communities.

Thirdly, familial and community obligations and responsibilities are an integral part of the cultural interface that Indigenous researchers engage in. There exist dual responsibilities, often competing, to both employer and families and communities. The very act of research often relies on an expectation of the "exploitation" or, at the least, a leveraging of Indigenous family and community relationships to gain access to certain communities or areas. There is a failure on the part of academic and funding institutions to acknowledge the tensions that exist in terms of this expectation and the accountability that flows from it. The impact of conducting research will be felt not only by the researchers themselves but also by family and community members. For example, expectations of the research by community to produce "real" outcomes may impact on the researcher's family or community if those outcomes are not met. There may be implications for some of the research team in terms of future work if there are no perceived benefits to communities.

Finally, traditional "fly-in and fly-out" approaches to engagement and research have rightly resulted in scepticism of the motives behind such processes. The broader socio-political-cultural landscape is littered with the sacrificing of longer-term possibilities for the sake of short-term political "wins", outcomes and initiatives. Short project timeframes often reflect the rhetorical nature of engagement and consultation processes. A lack of understanding of cultural protocols, governance and the workings of Indigenous communities results in inflexible timeframes that can impinge on the ability of team members to develop relationships and appropriate processes. In conclusion, as researchers we need to seriously consider how we position ourselves, how we relate to each other (and the tensions that inevitably exist) and how we position Indigenous people and communities within the practice of research and knowledge production. In addition we need to consider, what is the purpose of the research? Who benefits from it, and how? Is the research valued by Indigenous communities? Does the research respect and value Indigenous peoples and their culture? Are protocols being met and communities own ethics process being considered?

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