Reflecting on an Indigenist Methodology in Indigenous Family and Community Engagement Research

Shaneé A. Washington
University of Washington - Seattle Campus, shaneewa@uw.edu

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Abstract

Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers of Indigenous peoples and contexts have argued that any research involving Indigenous communities must align with Indigenous paradigms, follow critical cultural protocols, and promote emancipatory agendas. This ensures ethical and culturally appropriate research practices that prioritize community needs while placing the interests, experiences, and knowledge of Indigenous peoples at the center of research methodologies. Drawing from canonical scholars who have explicated and refined, over time, the meaning of Indigenous methodologies, this article first offers my synthesis of their collective conceptualizations. Next, I reflexively consider my application and, at times, misapplication of Indigenous methodologies with Indigenous and white participants in a study I carried out exploring Indigenous family and community-school engagement. I conclude by offering some implications for researchers who desire and have the responsibility to conduct research in ethical ways that honor Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in research with/in Indigenous communities.

Keywords

Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous methods, Indigenous research, Indigenous communities, family, community engagement

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Acknowledgements

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Shaneé A. Washington
College of Education, University of Washington, USA

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Introduction

Indigenous peoples have always engaged in research…research for Native peoples is certainly not a new concept. Indigenous peoples used, and continue to use, our knowledge of the world, gained through generations of empirical observation and sensuous engagement of the world, toward hunting, farming, fishing, and meeting the day-to-day challenges of being in the world. Indeed, traditionally for indigenous peoples research has been engaged toward a high-stakes goal—survival. (Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 440)

Starting from the knowledge that Indigenous peoples around the globe have been doing research since time immemorial, arguments for the use of Indigenous methodologies in research focused on Indigenous peoples ought not to be seen as an anomaly (Brayboy et al., 2012; Simpson, 2017). Continuing with the awareness that the imposition of Western research methodologies in Indigenous contexts and on Indigenous peoples has perpetuated problematic colonial practices of extraction, exploitation, misrepresentation, and damage-centered portrayals (Kovach, 2021; Smith, 2021; Tuck, 2009), Indigenous ways of knowing (epistemology), being (ontology), and doing (axiology) ought to be the standard in research involving Indigenous communities.

The propensity of researchers to use Western research methodologies to conduct research on Indigenous communities and to interpret and claim ownership over their ways of knowing and being has regularly resulted in damage-centered portrayals of them as broken,

ruined, and in need of saving by ivory tower "experts" (Koster et al., 2012; Tuck, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2014). In response, Indigenous (Unangax̂) scholar Eve Tuck (2009) and collaborator K Wayne Yang (Tuck & Yang, 2014) have called for the adoption of pedagogies of refusal, refusal to sell "sexier," more fetishized stories of pain and humiliation that benefit researchers while shaming communities. Further, Indigenous (Lumbee) scholar Bryan Brayboy and colleagues have proposed a re/turn to critical Indigenous research methodologies (CIRM) as an anticolonial, emancipatory project grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems and led by community-serving and "community-rooted intellectuals" (Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 434). CIRM ensures that Indigenous communities have an integral role and say in all aspects of the research and that the research meets their needs (Brayboy et al., 2012). Since methodological choices influence research outcomes, when research involving Indigenous peoples does not follow critical cultural paradigms, protocols, and methods, Indigenous communities rarely see the research advancing their political and social justice goals and instead become the subjects of harmful policy and practice recommendations (Brayboy et al., 2012; Kovach, 2021).

Drawing from these and other Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers who have explicated and refined, over time, the meaning of Indigenous and, more recently, Indigenist methodologies, this article articulates my understanding of their collective conceptualizations that I synthesize into an Indigenist Methodological Framework. Further, this article contributes to literature on reflexive self-study and the practical application of Indigenous methodologies in research by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers (Ball & Janyst, 2008; Halle-Erby, 2022; Kovach, 2010; Kovach et al., 2013; Parter & Wilson, 2021). Applying the Indigenist Methodological Framework, I reflexively share my application and, at times, misapplication of Indigenous methodologies as a Black woman scholar engaging for the first time with/in an Indigenous community for dissertation research exploring family and community-school engagement. I conclude by describing some implications for researchers who seek and have the responsibility to engage in community-serving and culturally appropriate research that honors and does no harm to Indigenous communities.

Articulating and Indigenist Methodological Framework

According to Indigenous scholars, Margaret Kovach (2010, 2021), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021), and Shawn Wilson (2001, 2008), Indigenous methodologies flow from an Indigenous paradigm and include Indigenous cultural protocols and methods used to conduct research. Indigenous research methodologies frame the questions that researchers ask and the theories, set of instruments, and methods they use while also shaping their analyses (Kovach, 2021; Smith, 2021). In this section, I draw from the writings and expertise of respected scholars (mainly Indigenous) in the field of Indigenous research methodologies to articulate my understanding and synthesis of their collective conceptualizations. Figure 1 is my visual synthesis and depictions of an Indigenist Methodological Framework, showing the interconnectedness of Indigenous paradigms, protocols, and methods (components of an Indigen/nous/ist methodology), and positioning an Indigenous paradigm as the core from which the other two components flow and operate in.

Figure 1
Indigenist Methodological Framework
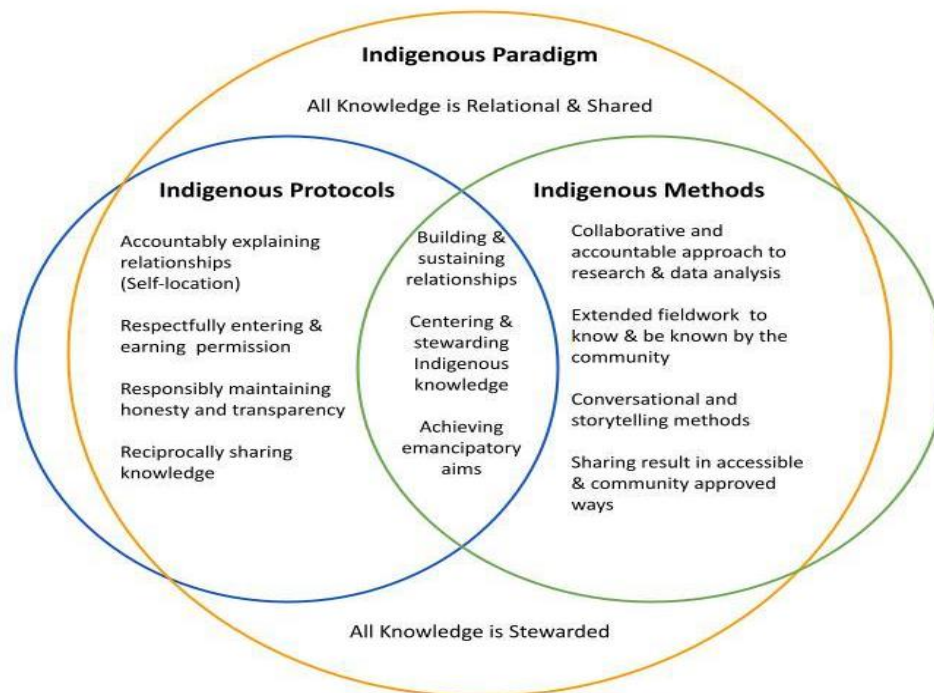
An Indigen/ous/ist Paradigm

Opaskwalyak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2007) conceptualizes an Indigenist paradigm as the source from which Indigenous knowledge is created, and he argues that a person does not need to be Indigenous to use an Indigenist paradigm and follow its tenets: "It is the choice to follow this paradigm, philosophy, or worldview that makes research Indigenist, not the ethnic or racial identity of the researcher" (Wilson, 2007, p. 194). As a Black scholar who felt an immediate affinity to Indigenous paradigms and who continues to work to honor Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in my own practices as a researcher and educator, I use Indigenist alongside Indigenous in the remainder of this paper to account for non-Indigenous scholars, like myself, who have chosen to embrace and follow an Indigenous worldview.

Scholars acknowledge that Indigenous knowledge systems vary and are context-specific; however, they have noted common underlying beliefs and values that shape an Indigen/ous/ist research paradigm. These commonalities include: (1) the belief and understanding that knowledge is relational and shared with all creation; (2) that researchers are stewards and co-interpreters, not owners, of knowledge; (3) that research designs have a clear decolonizing aim; (4) that research should be conducted in respectful and ethical ways; and (5) that Indigenous perspectives, priorities, protocols, and processes should inform and be infused in all aspects of research, including dissemination (Ball & Janyst, 2008; Brayboy et al., 2012; Deloria, 1988; Koster et al., 2012; Patel, 2016; Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2001, 2008).

Knowledge is Relational

Relational knowledge is a prominent feature of an Indigen/ous/ist paradigm, which is grounded in the premise that all knowledge and knowledge systems stem from and build on "the relationships that we have with people, objects, the cosmos, ideas, concepts, everything

around us" (Wilson, 2001, p. 177). This relational knowledge has been shaped through millennia of interactions and relationships with all of creation and through research grounded in an Indigenist paradigm (Wilson, 2007). Thus, researchers who subscribe to an Indigenist paradigm or worldview firmly place themselves and their work in a relational context and begin Indigenist research by "describing and building on these relationships" (Wilson, 2007, p. 194).

Knowledge is Stewarded, Not Owned

The belief that knowledge has been shaped through millennia and is both relational and shared means that knowledge and ideas cannot be discovered or owned by researchers (Brayboy et al., 2012; Patel, 2016; Wilson, 2001). Instead, knowledge obtained through data collection is entrusted to researchers by research participants with the expectation that researchers will engage community members as co-interpreters in data analysis and the identification of key findings, practice stewardship over ideas and learning, and consult with community members before making public (publishing) what was learned from the research (Brayboy et al., 2012; Patel, 2016; Smith, 2021; Walker, 2015; Wilson, 2001). Defining the role of researchers as stewards, South Asian scholar Leigh Patel shares, "We should see ourselves as stewards not of specific pieces of knowledge but rather of the productive and generative spaces that allow for finding knowledge" (2016, p. 79).

Decolonizing Aims

An Indigen/ous/ist paradigm also requires decolonizing aims and/or outcomes in research. Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) conceptualizes decolonizing as centering the concerns and worldviews of Indigenous peoples and understanding theory and research from their perspectives and purposes. Similarly, Plains Cree and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach (2009) describes the purpose of a decolonizing aim as creating "space in everyday life, research, academia, and society for an Indigenous perspective" (p. 85). Critical self-reflection is vital to achieving decolonizing aims and entails the reflexive work of resisting, decentering, and dismantling the hegemony of whiteness and the normalizing of white/Western ways of knowing, being, and doing in the academy and in research (Aveling, 2013; Kovach, 2021; Smith, 2021). Decolonizing aims are also achieved when researchers redirect the research gaze from the study of people as oppressed subjects to the study of oppressive and colonizing institutions, policies, and research practices (Patel, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2014). White, Euro-Canadian researchers, Madden et al. (2013), achieved these critical aspects of decolonizing work in their study of barriers to community engagement in a Canadian school board. They used sharing circles and poetic transcription as decolonizing methods to center the voices and experiences of Indigenous community members and invited readers to "re/member areas of the education system that need to be targeted for decolonization in working towards educational partnerships with Indigenous communities" (p. 215).

Ethical Research Practices & Centering Indigenous Perspectives throughout the Research

Another shared aspect of Indigen/ous/ist paradigms are agreements concerning ethics in research. Ethical considerations include the use of research practices that align with Indigenous values, maintains community accountability, ensures that the research benefits the community in meaningful ways, and commits to do no harm (Kovach, 2009). In line with relational knowledge, Indigenous peoples value relations and trusting relationships over reliability (Kovach, 2021). Trusting relationships are "a foundation for ethical engagement in research…require geographic proximity, time, personal risks, funding, open communication,

flexible programs of activity, and other accommodations" (Ball & Janyst, 2008, p. 39). Community accountability entails having community-based research assistants and negotiating a collaborative research design at the outset of the project (Ball & Janyst, 2008). It also requires getting permission throughout the research process and before sharing sacred knowledge (Kovach, 2021; Smith, 2021). Related, the researcher must consider how to give back the results of the research in ways that are accessible and make sense to the community (Kovach, 2021; Smith, 2021). And as Kovach noted, giving back not only refers to the dissemination of findings but also to "creating relationships throughout the entirety of the research" (2009, p. 149).

These ethical considerations and practices, which are not unique to Indigenous paradigms (see Dillard 2000, 2018 on endarkened feminist epistemology; see also Castleden et al., 2010; Fletcher, 2003; and Koster et al., 2012 on community-based participatory research), help to counter exploitative research practices pertaining to ownership, control, access, and possession (Kovach, 2009). To protect against ethical misconduct, Indigenous cultural protocols (discussed in the next section) have been developed as "a set of guidelines for interacting with those holders of knowledge whom a researcher seeks out" (Kovach, 2009, p. 127).

Indigenous Cultural Protocols

Cultural protocols help to "ensure that activities (i.e., methods) are carried out in a manner that reflects community teachings and are done in a good way" (Kovach, 2010, pp. 40-41). Smith (2012) describes cultural protocols as:

> factors to be built into research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood...ensuring that research reaches the people who have helped make it. (p. 16)

Relationality and relational accountability are principal cultural protocols and shared aspects of an Indigen/ous/ist paradigm that (ought to) operate throughout every stage of research.

Relationality

Standing Rock Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr. (1988) defines relationality as acknowledging the interconnectedness and interdependence of all lifeforms on earth. It refers to Indigenous peoples' relational way of being and their relationships with each other (including ancestors and future generations), the land, the cosmos, and ideas (Wilson, 2008). Relationality is community-serving and entails research that meets the needs of communities as defined and determined by community members who know best their context and challenges (Brayboy et al., 2012).

Relationality necessarily requires the establishment of trusting relationships among the researcher(s), commun/ity/ies, and the research topic or focus (Brayboy et al., 2012). "Communities must be approached, permission must be granted, and research must be engaged in with benevolent intent, taking into account generations past, present, and future" (Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 437). A core and consistent practice of relationality and building relational trust is self-location. Researchers Jessica Ball (Euro-Canadian) and Pauline Janyst (First Nation Kwakiutl) conceptualize self-location as a way for "researchers who hope to engage with Indigenous people...to account for themselves...by providing details of their ancestry, family

life, scholarship, and intentions, not only during initial introductions, but throughout a project" (2008, p. 38). Similarly, Kovach (2009) describes the act of locating oneself as "cultural identification" and entails the introductory function of "relational placing" as an act of respect that "allows for community to locate us" (Kovach et al., 2013, p. 491). Self-locating also involves the reflexive praxis of bringing oneself in the research, examining motivations and influences while also questioning "Who am I as a researcher?" to carry out research in a particular community and context (Kovach et al., 2013, p. 491).

Relational Accountability

Wilson (2001) defines relational accountability as being accountable and answering to all of one's relations while engaging in or doing research. When researchers exercise relational accountability, they ask questions such as "How am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? and "What are my obligations in this relationship?" (Wilson, 2001, p. 177). Relational accountability requires a relational approach to research that involves: (1) Respect - asking permission throughout the research process and only proceeding when access has been granted; (2) Reciprocity - conducting research that considers and works to ensure benefits for the community, including asking for and supporting community input and aspirations throughout the entirety of the research; (3) Responsibility - remaining honest about the purpose of the research, how it will be used, and sharing the results in meaningful and community-approved ways; and (4) Answerability – being accountable to research participants, their context (place/location of the research), knowledge circulated within their context, and collective learning by serving as stewards (not owners) over ideas, learning, and context (Louis, 2007; Patel, 2016; Smith, 2021; Walker, 2015; Wilson, 2001, 2008). Answerability involves the work of dismantling research practices that mirror settler colonial practices in which the researcher sees and treats community members (participants), the land (context), and knowledge as property, their intellectual property to use as they wish (Patel, 2016).

In many ways, Indigen/ous/ist conceptualizations of relationality and relational accountability mirrors Black feminist scholar, Cynthia Dillard's endarkened feminist epistemology, which is an extension of Black women's knowledge production and language (Dillard, 2018). Dillard uses the metaphor "research as a responsibility" to describe endarkened feminist epistemology, illuminating the responsibility that researcher have to be "answerable and obligated to the very persons and communities being engaged in inquiry" (2000, p. 663). Research as a responsibility validates "multiple ways of knowing and doing research" for those "serious enough to interrogate the epistemological, political, and ethical level of their work" (Dillard, 2000, p. 663). Reflecting on Dillard's and other Black feminists' work (hooks, 2000; Collins, 2002), which was my first introduction to theory and one which I identify strongly with as a Black woman, may explain my immediate love for and embrace of an Indigen/ous/ist paradigmatic approach to research.

Indigenous Methods

Indigenous methods are a complementary component of an Indigen/ous/ist methodology and include the activities, techniques, and procedures that are used to gather evidence or address the central problem (or focus) of the research (Kovach, 2021; Smith, 2021). Researchers that chose to follow an Indigen/ous/ist methodology must use methods that "make sense from an Indigenous knowledges perspective" because "within a paradigmatic approach to research, the paradigm influences the choice of methods" (Kovach, 2010, p. 41). Some methods that are congruent with an Indigenous paradigm, align with Indigenous cultural protocols, and have been traditional practices in Indigenous communities for millennia are

storytelling, yarning, talking/sharing circles, dreams and intuitive learning, and community-based collaboration and accountability. Notably, these are all conversational methods and ways of gathering knowledge that have an open-ended structure that allows for freer and more flexible participation from participants who are able to share their stories on their own terms (Kovach, 2021).

Storytelling

Storytelling is a research method that honors the oral traditions of Indigenous peoples while firmly situating research "within the nest of relationship" (Kovach, 2009, p. 99). Storytelling as a method uses more open-ed and less structured activities or techniques that allows for a holistic, non-fragmented gathering and sharing of knowledge (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2021). Further, storytelling serves to decolonize research by giving voice to the marginalized, centering stories of resistance, and potentially facilitating healing and transformation in the lives of the tellers (Kovach, 2021). Iñupiaq researchers Harcharek and Rexford (2015) held storytelling gatherings with the Iñupiaq community members in their study and also used storytelling to locate or situate themselves within their research by sharing their cultural histories and affiliations in parallel columns at the beginning of their article. Their stories eventually merge into a collective voice where they share, "our individual stories flow together as we describe our separate journeys returning to Iñupiaq consciousness, which shapes our telling of the story of the Iñupiaq Learning Framework" (Harcharek & Rexford, 2015, p. 13). They go on to share how their "stories of healing" show their commitments and connections to their ancestors and current and future community members. In another study, Mixtec research Antonio-Damian (2019) used a form of storytelling called testimonios as a method for Mixtec parent participants to share narratives of their personal and collective experiences navigating hegemonic and unjust school and societal structures and ways that they have enacted agency in their children's schooling. Like Harcharek and Rexford (2015), sharing their stories was a means of healing and empowerment for these parents.

Yarning

Yarning is a Noongar or Aboriginal Australian term that means conversation or talk (Barlo et al., 2021; Bessarab, 2008). Yarning entails an exchange or sharing of information between two or more people in formal and informal settings (Barlo et al., 2021). Within a research context, yarning is a process and an exchange that establishes and supports relationality and relational accountability and may result in deeper reflection and analysis (Barlo et al., 2021; Fredericks et al., 2011). Yarning has also been described as a third spaces for community members to engage freely in informal and unrestricted conversations where they are able to enact agency and feel empowered (Atkinson et al., 2021). Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers have used yarning dialogues or interviews, which are more flexible than semi-structured interviews, to invite participants to share their stories on their own terms while also allowing the researcher(s) to participate in the conversation by sharing their own story or stories (Flückiger et al., 2012; Harwood & Murray, 2020; Kovach, 2010). In a study exploring Aboriginal mothers' participation in a community-led and family-engaged preschool literacy program, non-Indigenous researchers Flückiger et al. (2012) found the preschool provided a "yarning up" space or "third space" for parents to engage in expressing and deciding what they wanted and felt was best for their kids. This contrasts with the typical environment of schools as "yarning down" spaces where power and control reside with teachers and administrators (Flückiger et al., 2012).

Talking Circles

Talking or sharing circles adhere to an Indigenous paradigm's focus on relationships, relationality, and relational knowledge. Talking circles involve community members sitting in a circle as a way of gathering group knowledge and engaging in collective decision-making and are often led by an Elder or cultural healer who may open and/or close the circle by offering prayers, land acknowledgements, and a smudging ceremony of tobacco or sweetgrass to cleanse the mind, body, and spirit (Kovach, 2021; Running Wolf & Rickard, 2003; Wilson, 2008). In the circle, there is often a sacred object that is passed around following the direction of the sun (Running Wolf & Rickard, 2003; Wilson, 2008) and the holder of the object is encouraged to speak "from the heart" (Wilson & Wilson, 2000) uninterrupted, and "everyone has an equal chance to speak and be heard" (Wilson, 2008, p. 41). Diné researcher Kulago (2016) used talking circles with the Diné youth in her study to collaboratively interpret data. She found that talking circles helped youth to share their experiences and opinions more openly and honestly.

Dreams & Intuitions

In Indigenous research methods, what is considered empirical data expands beyond what can be gathered and known using the five senses. For many Indigenous peoples, valued knowledge is more expansive and comes from dreams, visions, advice, and counsel from ancestors, signs from the natural world, and intuition (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Walker, 2015). Spirituality is integral to this expansive view of what is considered knowledge and empirical data. For example, Mississauga Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014), describes Nishnaabeg knowledge as originating in the spiritual realm and "coming to individuals through dreams, visions, ceremony and through the process of gaaizhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang - that which is given lovingly to us by the spirits" (p. 10). She goes on to argue that "spiritual knowledge is tremendous" within a Nishnaabeg epistemology (p. 12). As an example of what this might look like in research, Wilson (2008) offers intuitive logic as a way of making sense of data (data analysis) which entails "looking at an entire system of relationships as a whole" or "looking at the whole thing at once and coming up with your answers through analysis that way" (Wilson, 2008, p. 119). Wilson argues that answers are "mostly innate within us" (2008, p. 119). To provide practical understanding of what this might look like in practice, Wilson shares a story of Elders taking teachers to a physical place to experience a phenomenon (an ecosystem) for themselves so that they might come to the answer (or acquire a holistic understanding of the phenomenon) on their own.

Collaborative Research Design

Kovach (2009), Wilson (2001), and other Indigenous scholars have noted that participatory action research designs align with Indigenous axiological beliefs and fit within an Indigenous paradigm and methodology. Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), in alignment with Indigen/ous/ist paradigms and protocols, is based on the foundational principles of respect, relationships, responsibility, and reciprocation (Castleden et al., 2010; Fletcher, 2003; Koster et al., 2012). Koster et al. (2012) promote CBPR as an ethical alternative to traditional Western methods and advises researchers to:

> continue to move away from traditional methods that perpetuate the
> conventional ways of working on Indigenous communities to methods that
> involve working with and for them, based on an ethic that respects and values

the community as a full partner in the co-creation of the research question and process, and shares in the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. (p. 208)

In summary, an Indigen/ous/ist methodological framework reflects a paradigmatic approach to research that draws from Indigenous paradigms that are operationalized through Indigenous protocols and methods. Methodological consistency in an Indigen/ous/ist research framework requires that methods and protocols align with an Indigenous philosophical orientation or Indigenous knowledge perspective (an Indigenous paradigm; Kovach, 2010).

In the remainder of this article, I reflect on an Indigenous family and community-school engagement study that I conducted for my dissertation, illuminating and reflecting on my mis/steps in honoring Indigenous cultural protocols and methods with the Indigenous parents and community members and white educators who participated in the research. I conclude by sharing implications for researchers who desire (and have the responsibility) to carry out research in Indigenous communities in culturally appropriate and accountable ways.

Reflecting on an Indigenist Methodology in Indigenous Family and Community-School Engagement Research

How do Indigenous family and community members and district teachers and administrators conceptualize and practice family-school-community engagement or partnerships, and are their practices culturally sustaining/revitalizing? In what ways, if at all, are district teachers' and administrators' priorities and practices aligned with and accountable to the priorities and practices of Indigenous families and community members? These were the research questions that I posed for an exploratory case study (Creswell, 2002; Hartley, 2004; Yin, 1981) that I carried out for dissertation research in a New England town and school district that is home to a Wampanoag Tribe that has inhabited the area for over 12,000 years. From the onset of the research, I worked to foreground, normalize, and utilize the Indigenous cultural protocols of relationality and relational accountability, spending 11 months in the town and district as a participant observer and building relationships. Further, I used Indigenous conversational methods that included roughly 45 60–90-minute semi-structured conversations and interviews with 30 Indigenous parents, community leaders, and district educators (teachers and administrators) and two talking circles with a group of teachers and a group of Indigenous parents and community leaders.

In her book, *Decolonizing Educational Research: From Ownership to Answerability*, Leigh Patel (2016) asks researchers to consider where research questions come from by answering the questions: Why me? Why this? Why here? And why now? Reflecting on and answering these questions helped me to account for myself and to be accountable to the community that I hoped to serve through my research. Answering these questions also helped me to grapple with the decision of whether to pursue and continue in this research. I now use these questions as a starting place for locating myself in this research - explaining who I am, what brought me to this work, and why I have persisted in it.

Locating Myself in the Research

Why This?

As I reflect on the origins of my interest in family and community engagement, I think of my upbringing in Rockaway Queens, New York as an African American girl with Native roots, nurtured by my parents and siblings (I am a middle child of four) and our large extended family of relatives and community members. My childhood home was the gathering place for

all family celebrations on my mother's side and was also a place of residence, respite, and hospitality for various extended family members, including church and neighborhood youth. On the other side of my family, my paternal grandmother, a Black Native woman and matriarch of our family, cared not that our home was larger and made her small, modest Brooklyn apartment, and later Columbia, South Carolina house, the place of family get-togethers for holidays and feasts. Along with my parents, extended family served as my first caregivers, homework helpers, and shapers of my experiences and identity as a Black girl. Urban living and losing her Native mother at an early age stripped my paternal grandmother, who lived 102 years, of her Native heritage and prevented her from passing this part of her/our identity down to her children and grandchildren.

Neighbors also played an instrumental role in my upbringing and identity development. I grew up on a block where we knew and interacted with all our neighbors who would reprimand us and tell on us if we deviated from the values our family and community instilled in us. I grew up understanding and living the concept of "It takes a village to raise a child."

My convictions about family and community expertise in the nurturing and development of their children was further developed during my tenure as a public-school teacher of Black and Brown dis/abled and bi/multilingual students and my ongoing role as a mother of Black daughters. Teaching in a school system that was failing to adequately serve and meet the needs of their Black and Brown students and families helped me see our shortcomings as a district. I thus worked to build stronger relationships with families and established a professional learning community of caregivers to share their knowledge and experiences of how best to support our children's academic and social flourishing within and outside of schools. Further, teaching in this district where my own children also attended schools, made me a more attentive parent and advocate in their schooling, determined to see them thrive and not just survive as students in systems that were not designed with them in mind. These formative experiences contributed to my desire to explore family and community-school engagement as a doctoral student.

Doctoral coursework and pre-dissertation research fostered an awareness of and interest in learning more about the struggles and triumphs of Indigenous families and communities in educational systems and Indigenous methodologies in research. As a doctoral student, I was part of a research team that explored professional learning communities and student well-being in a school district in Northwestern Ontario where First Nation, Metís, and Inuit (FNMI) students and families comprise more than 50% of the school population. During field research in this district, I was deeply bothered by damage-centered narratives that I heard from educators about FNMI families which compelled me to later connect with and interview FNMI parents in the district, a perspective that was left out of our initial research (see findings from this study in Washington, 2021a). This experience inspired my initial interest in focusing my dissertation research on Indigenous families and communities. My desire to pursue this focus was strengthened while taking "Participatory Action Research" and "Critical Race Theory," two courses that introduced me to Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies which felt like a homecoming for me. I earnestly embraced this methodological approach and began the process of disassociating myself from western "colonial logics" and methods in educational research broadly and specifically involving Indigenous peoples (Patel, 2016).

Why Me?

"Why me?" is a question that I grapple with continuously as an African American researcher and outsider who studies Indigenous family and community engagement within, against, and beyond educational institutions. It is a question that I asked before pursuing my dissertation research and a question that I continue to pose in my dissemination of this work

and as I consider future studies. I know that I will always feel uneasy about my positionality in this important work, yet I have persisted for the following reasons. I have experienced repeated proclamations, encouragement, and reminders that I have been called to this work and must persist. These have come from unexpected places and people that I can best describe as chance encounters that were divine and direction-clarifying. For example, during the proposal stage of this research, I met an Indigenous healer and artist on the streets of Toronto, and later, at the study's culmination, another Indigenous artist in an art gallery in Maine, both of whom affirmed and confirmed, without knowing me, my purpose and place in this work. Another sign that encouraged me to persist in this work was the overwhelming acceptance I experienced from the Wampanoag community. Every parent and community member that I asked consented to participating in this study and generously welcomed me into their homes, offices, and sacred community spaces. My tribe, which has included a respected mentor and my best friend and sister scholar, have also been influential in my decision to keep going. In my greatest moments of doubt, they are my beloved community that remind/ed me that I have been called to this work.

I see this work as purposeful and a way of honoring and being in just relationships with my Black and Native relatives, past, present, and future. Our entwined (though different) histories of violence and violation in the ongoing project of settler colonialism fuels my affinity towards decolonizing praxis. Relatedly, as a Black researcher, I have zero allegiance to white Western ways of knowing and conducting research and refuse to contribute to past and present harms against and damaging portrayals of Indigenous peoples and other peoples of color. My identity as a Black person who has an intertwined history with Indigenous peoples in the harms done to us by settler colonizers and ivory tower researchers, drives my resolve to engage in restorative research and relationships with Indigenous communities.

Why Here and Why Now?

The site of this study was selected because of its proximity to my place of residence at the time and the enduring presence and survivance of the federally recognized Wampanoag Tribe in the town and local schools. I was introduced to this community, both tribal members and district administrators, by a Wampanoag community educator who is one of the tribe's master speakers and teachers of Wôpanâak (the tribe's language) and a former Director of Education for the tribe. This community leader received her Ph.D. from the same program and institution where I later received mine, and I will forever be grateful to her for negotiating my entry into the community of educators and tribal members. Her relationships and credibility paved the wave for me to be welcomed into the tribal community and district to do my study. Also, through an initial meeting with district and school administrators and several tribal community leaders for approval and permission to conduct this research, it became evident to me that I was entering this district and town at a pivotal and mutually beneficial time to study family and community-school engagement, particularly as it pertained to Indigenous community members. I learned that the district and the tribe were in the process of forming a partnership to improve community-school relations and to infuse more Wampanoag and pan-Indigenous history, language, and culture into curricula and programming as a way of expanding all educators' and students' cultural knowledge and awareness.

Locating and explaining myself is an Indigenous protocol that allow/ed/s me to be accountable to and in my relationships with research participants, the research itself, and those who will read this and other publications that come out of this work. I now resume with a deeper dive into the study itself, reflecting on my decisions regarding the study design and methodology. I detail my use (and misuse) of Indigenous cultural protocols and methods with Indigenous and white participants throughout every stage of the research.

Choosing a Culturally Appropriate Research Design and Theoretical Framework

It was of utmost importance to me to choose a research design that felt right and would honor and be approved by the Wampanoag community that served as the participants and site of the research. What felt most right was a community-based participatory research design, but I ultimately decided on an exploratory case study, a less ideal design but one that would allow me to complete my dissertation sooner, a financial necessity at the time. This was a compromise that I diligently sought to bring in harmony and alignment with an Indigenist paradigm and the focus and goals of the study by infusing Indigenous protocols and methods in the methodology. A case study design felt like a good alternative because it demands an in-depth exploration of a topic with the goal of acquiring a deep understanding of the phenomenon and context (Creswell, 2002; Hartley, 2004; Yin, 1981). A case study required me to invest time and deep attention in the context and with participants, thereby helping me to conduct a thorough exploration of the topic while also helping me to build relational trust with the people, communities (tribal and district), and with ideas shared in these spaces.

Next, in my determination to center and normalize Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in my explorations of this research topic, it was necessary for me to identify and adopt a theoretical framework that would help me achieve these aims. I thus chose to explore this topic using a decolonizing lens and culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSRP). CSRP is well aligned with decolonizing aims in that it centers Indigenous communities and foregrounds their knowledge, heritages, and priorities as those with tribal and educational sovereignty (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Moreover, I found it to be an ideal framework for my study's focus because it is designed specifically for Indigenous peoples "to address the sociohistorical and contemporary contexts of Native American schooling" (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 103). CSRP challenges asymmetrical power relations, transforms legacies of colonization, and reclaims and revitalizes all that has been disrupted and displaced by colonization, including language and culture (Lee & McCarty, 2017; McCarty & Lee, 2014).

Methodological Moves: Mis/Using Indigenous Cultural Protocols and Methods

Relationality and relational accountability were integral Indigenous protocols that I followed prior to, throughout, and after data gathering and analysis. Pausing to consider my positionality in the research by responding to the questions "Why this?, Why me?, Why here?, and Why now?" was an initial and ongoing exercise in my work to build and sustain trusting relationships with the research focus, site, and participants. Locating myself was also part of my consent-seeking interactions with community members (educators and tribal members) throughout my 11 months as a participant-observer in the town and school district and during the over 45 individual semi-structured conversations and interviews that I conducted with 15 Indigenous parents and community leaders and 15 white teachers and administrators.

Obtaining Approval and Consent: Asking and Gaining Permission to Start and Proceed

Since the Wampanoag Tribe did not have its own protocol or process for obtaining permission to carry out research in their community, the Wampanoag community leader who was the first to approve my research and who negotiated my entry into the tribe and school communities directed me to reach out to specific tribal Elders and community leaders for additional approval. A former Chief of the Wampanoag Tribe and a Clan Mother who had served as the Director of Indian Education in the school district for over 25 years both welcomed me into their homes to discuss and provide feedback on my proposed study and sent me away with a full belly, gifts, and their approval. I also met with a Lakota community leader

who was serving as Director of the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project, Director of the Wôpanâak immersion pre-school, and Director of Education for the tribe at the time of this research. We met in her office at the tribal government building where she both affirmed and consented to my study. These community Elders and leaders confirmed the benefits of this study for their community, viewing it as another way to ensure that their perspectives are heard by educators in the district. Further, the Lakota community leader welcomed my study for its potential to promote the self-determining work that community leaders, like herself, were/are doing to revitalize language and culture in the schools and community.

I also sought and gained approval from school district administrators to conduct this study. The superintendent invited me to share my research proposal at a monthly leadership meeting with the administrators from the three schools in the district. During the meeting, administrators eagerly shared the timeliness of my research with a new partnership between the tribe and school district that was at the beginning stages of development. Shortly after this meeting, I received a letter approving my study from the superintendent.

Recognizing that consent seeking should be ongoing, I continued to ask tribal and school district leaders for permission to proceed through each new stage of the research process. For me, consent also required consultation with tribal Elders and community leaders about the protocols that I would later use for the semi-structured conversations and interviews. So, I shared and asked the same Elders and community leaders for feedback on the protocols I created and integrated some of their suggestions for changes and what should be added. Not being willing to deviate too far from what I imagined and wanted the research focus to be, I chose not to integrate some critical feedback, including requests to center community healing and community-based and community-led efforts to educate and revive language and culture. Fortunately, despite my unwillingness to shift and see how perfectly aligned this process, feedback and guidance was to Indigenous cultural protocols and the theoretical framework that I selected (CSRP), tribal and educational sovereignty and self-determination was still able to emerge as a major focus and findings of the research (see Washington, 2019, 2021b).

Reflecting on this process and remembering my thoughts at the time of these consultations, I recognize/d the dissonance (with an Indigenist methodology) of coming to community members with a fully formed (and near finalized) study and questions instead of a rough draft that allowed space for community members to be the designers and drivers of the study, like in CBPR. This approach contributed to my sense of ownership over the research and impacted my ability to be fully accountable and answerable to the Indigenous community members that I sought to serve and honor through the research. Further, my decision to leave Indigenous parents out of my permission seeking and consultation processes was a failure on my part to see and engage in accountable relationships with this important group of participants. These are two methodological choices that I would change if I had the opportunity to go back and redo.

Building (on) Trusting Relationships through Relationality and Time in the Field

In addition to gaining trust and permission to conduct the study from those with the titles and power to grant it, I desired to establish trusting relationships with parents and teachers in the tribal and school communities before asking them to participate in my study. I recognized that this would require me to invest time in the schools and community to get to know folks and for them to get to know me. So, I served as a participant-observer in the schools and town, visiting and spending full days two to three times a week for a period of eight months. This helped me to be known in the community and to be a familiar presence whom community members acted naturally around and spoke freely with, including later during semi-structured conversations and talking circles. While participant observation is not known to be an

Indigenous method, it aligns with traditional Indigenous research's emphasis on "learning by watching and doing" (Wilson, 2008, p. 40). According to Wilson (2008) "participant observation is a term used for this watching and doing in a scientific manner" (p. 40). Most of my participant observations took place in during and after school events and activities that served to engage Indigenous families, including a back-to-school picnic, quarterly Tribe-District partnership meetings, and weekly Wampanoag language- and culture-focused classes and lunch bunches led by Wampanoag Tribal members in the Indian Education Program. My observations in the community included multiple visits to the Wampanoag Tribal Government Center and community members' homes to meet with and engage in both informal and more formal conversations. I also participated in several ride-along conversations with tribal members who drove me to and gave me a history of several places of significance for tribal members. During this time, I took field notes on what I was observing and learning while noting individuals who identified themselves or named others as information rich people who might serve as participants for this study.

Eight months into my time as a participant-observer in the town and district, I asked for permission to proceed with the next phase of the research: individual semi-structured conversations and interviews with Indigenous parents and community members and school district teachers and administrators. I viewed this next phase of the research as an opportunity to build on and hopefully sustain the relationships I had already established (during my time as a participant observer) with participants. My desire to know participants and for them to know me on a deeper and more intimate level compelled me to launch our conversations by sharing stories about who we are and where we are from using an artifact and then continuing with stories about our upbringing and educational experiences. I fondly recall one conversation with a Black Wampanoag parent who pulled out and shared a Northern Quahog clam shell as his artifact after I shared an Atlantic surf clam to represent where and how I grew up (on Rockaway beach in New York) and in recognition of my unknown ancestors (and ancestry) who were brought across the Atlantic in shackles. This parent shared the sacredness of Wampum and the Quahog shell, from which it is made, for Wampanoag people. Often made into beads and jewelry, Wampum symbolizes Wampanoag peoples' connection to water and life. Launching our conversations in this way strengthened trust and resulted in participants being more open in their sharing and reflections on later topics like present day perceptions and practices of Indigenous family and community dis/engagement from/in schools and educators dis/regard of Indigenous parents and community members.

Maintaining Relationship through Relational Accountability and Answerability

I continued in my efforts to maintain trust with participants and to practice relational accountability through several cycles and iterations of sharing and receiving feedback on findings. First, I shared participants' transcripts with them for them to review and offer any corrections. Next, I facilitated a talking circle with teachers and another with Indigenous parents and community leaders to share key findings and quotes from the research. These talking circles, which included land acknowledgements, a talking object provided by one of the Wampanoag parents, and food that I provided from a local restaurant, served as a way for me to share findings, hear participants' feedback and responses, and collect additional data. For participants who could not make the talking circles, I shared a handout of key findings and quotes with them via email and in-person, to be accountable to all participants in the study and to give everyone the opportunity to offer their reflections, corrections, and feedback. Additionally, I conducted member checking and reflecting with district and school administrators during one of their monthly leadership meetings, sharing some critical feedback, findings, and recommendations in an eight-page report that I created for them, which they

seemed to humbly accept. On the same day, I visited the home of the Clan Mother who participated in this study and shared with her what I presented to district and school administrators, receiving her approval. Lastly, after emailing all participants and visiting teachers and administrators at the three schools to share my writing progress and to inquire if any were interested in reading and providing feedback on a complete and near-final draft of my dissertation before I submitted it to my committee, about a third responded affirmatively. So, I emailed these participants my dissertation for their feedback, reflections, and corrections before making final revisions. By maintaining transparency with participants about what I was uncovering in the research and by offering them multiple opportunities to review and offer feedback on key findings and recommendations that I identified, I aimed to be answerable to all participants and the serve as a good steward over all that they entrusted me with, and this included honest critique of ways that educators and leaders from both communities (district and tribal) were falling short and could improve.

Most of my efforts to maintain relationality and relational accountability were the same for tribal and school district community members. A major difference is that I have maintained ongoing relationships with some of the Indigenous parents and community leaders. Whether by text messages, phone calls, or emails, I have remained in touch with a handful of participants from the Wampanoag community, though some more frequently than others. My ongoing communication has included checking in to see how various community members are doing, sharing working and final drafts of publications from my research in the community, inquiring about the progress and outcomes of projects and initiatives that launched during and after my time in the community, and, at one time, inviting some to publish and present at conferences with me. In comparison, I have not remained in touch with any of the teachers or leaders in the school district except for the one Wampanoag administrator who was hired the year of my arrival in the district and whose contract was questionably terminated two years later. Outside of my ongoing relationship with and many visits to the home of the Clan Mother, this Wampanoag administrator in one of the participants that I spent the most time with (as a participant observer) and who I got to know and respect as a leader. From what I personally witnessed, this administrator diligently and successfully worked to build trusting relationships with students, teachers, and families while also organizing school events led by Wampanoag community members to celebrate Wampanoag culture in a school named after a former Wampanoag principal. The district's failure to retain this administrator along with tribal members' accusations of a long history of systemic racism by the school system against Indigenous students and families and its failure to hire and retain educators of color were significant factors in my decision to discontinue relationships with educators in the district. In hindsight, I regret not remaining in touch with some of the educators that I developed strong connections with and who seemed genuinely supportive of the research and sought ways to improve their practice. At the same time, I recognize the difficulty of remaining in contact with all 30 participants, and I chose to prioritize maintaining relationships with members of the tribal community.

A last reflection that I have is my failure to persist in inviting Indigenous participants to publish and present at conferences with me. The summer after completing my dissertation, I invited tribal community members to serve as co-authors and co-presenters on a conference proposal that we submitted (and that was accepted) with plans to later co-author a publication. I secured funding for three community members (a parent and two leaders) to attend and present with me but these plans were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the conference being canceled. Since that time, I have not invited participants to be co-authors on conference proposals or publications. I could say that my actions are due to the ongoing pandemics, new research projects that have followed my dissertation work, challenges of time and navigating

being an Assistant Professor, etc., but answerability calls me to do better and to honor those who made this research possible.

Final Reflections and Implications

As I conclude this article, I offer some final reflections that I believe will help me and other researchers be better practitioners and stewards of research in Indigenous communities. First, I believe that adhering to Indigenous protocols must be non-negotiable in research involving Indigenous peoples. Following cultural protocols are essential to ensuring that we engage in ethical and nonharmful research practices and that we conduct research in culturally appropriate and accountable ways. At the same time, I ponder the appropriateness of using an Indigenist methodology with non-Indigenous, specifically white, participants, and if there should be equity in how and the extent to which Indigenous protocols and methods are used with these participants. Indigenist methodologies differ in fundamental ways from Western methodologies, and it could be argued that it is thus inappropriate to use Indigenous cultural protocols and methods with non-Indigenous participants. However, I persisted in its use with the white participants as an act of resistance to the stronghold that Western methodologies has had on research in all contexts and with all peoples, irrespective of place, ethnicity, and culture, and out of refusal of the belief that for research to be legitimate and rigorous, it must be conducted using Western, Eurocentric paradigms and methodologies. I also did so out of love and reverence for Indigenous protocols and methods and a firm belief that it not only ensures that research is conducted in ethical and accountable ways with and for Indigenous peoples, but all peoples, including white participants. I argue this with the caveat that accountability and the ways that Indigenous protocols and methods are implemented will (and must) look different with white participants. Since research that adheres to Indigenist methodologies has clear, decolonizing aims and centers the concerns, worldviews, and well-being of Indigenous peoples, it necessarily requires the decentering and deconstructing of whiteness and the privileging of Western ways of knowing, being and doing. It necessitates that researchers be more concerned about how they are being accountable and answerable in their relations with Indigenous participants. Moreover, it requires researchers to recognize that they are fulfilling their relational accountability obligations when they are honest with all participants about the purpose and findings of the research and help white participants see and take responsibility (or be accountable) for their own complicity or role in perpetuating harm in and towards Indigenous communities. This might be achieved through explicit acknowledgement and honesty about the focus and purpose of the research; intentionality in the types of questions posed to participants during data collection; through the theoretical lens and methods in which data is gathered and analyzed; through the sharing and presentation of finding, feedback, and recommendation supported by data; through cycles of member checking and reflecting that allow participants multiple opportunities to engage with and respond to data supported findings; and in final products that truly achieve the goals of decolonization and reciprocity.

As I reflect on my own mis/applications of an Indigenist methodology in the research presented in this paper, I recognize that I fell tremendously short in the practice of reciprocity, particularly in my unilateral decision to publish (or publicize this work) solely in academic journals and without community members as co-authors. Apart from the eight-page unpublished report that I shared with district and school leaders and the Clan Mother, I did not consider or consult with community members about other modes of sharing the research that would be more accessible and responsive to community needs and wishes.

A final thing that I ponder is what it means and says about us as researchers when our relationships with participants and the place of the research ends at the conclusion of data gathering and analysis. Is it possible to undo or invalidate all that we worked so hard to achieve

(relationality, relational accountability, answerability, etc.) in our decision to abruptly end our relationship with participants and the place of the research at the conclusion of the research (which is so often the case in academic or scientific research)? Relatedly, does our credibility as researchers wane when we decide to disseminate (publish) the research without the knowledge, input, and/or involvement of participants and/or when we fail to ensure that the research achieves participants' purposes and reaches the audiences that they deem important? I believe that the answer to these questions is a resounding "yes," and that researchers must consider how and actively work to remain in good relations with the people and place who/that have made their work possible while ensuring reciprocity and maintaining good stewardship over the knowledge gifted to them by communities.

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Author Note

Shaneé A. Washington (she/her) is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at the University of Washington. Her research explores Indigenous and Black families' and communities' self-determination and advocacy efforts towards more equitable, humanizing, and culturally sustaining/revitalizing educational experiences for their children. Her commitments to amplifying the self-determining educational justice work of communities who have experienced schools as sites of erasure and dehumanization stems from her own experiences as a Black woman, mother, and former middle school teacher of Black, Brown, disabled, immigrant, and bi/multilingual students. Please direct correspondence to shaneewa@uw.edu.

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