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RESEARCHING WITH ABORIGINAL WOMEN AS AN ABORIGINAL WOMAN RESEARCHER

Bronwyn Fredericks

Introduction

Tewa man Gregory Cajete describes the concept of Pathway as it relates to Indigenous learning and education:

The concept of Pathway, revealed in numerous ways in Indigenous education, is associated with mountains, winds, and orientation. Learning involves a transformation that unfolds through time and space. Pathway, a structural metaphor, combines with the process of journeying to form an active context for learning about spirit. Pathway is an appropriate metaphor since, in every learning process, we metaphorically travel an internal, and many times external, landscape. In travelling a Pathway, we make stops, encounter and overcome obstacles, recognise and interpret signs, seek answers, and follow the tracks of those entities that have something to teach us. We create ourselves anew. *Path* denotes a structure; *Way* implies a process. (Cajete 1994, 55)

I drew on the work of Cajete to develop a framework for my PhD research exploring 'how the relationship between health services and Aboriginal women can be more empowering from the viewpoints of Aboriginal women'. The assumption underpinning this thesis was that empowering and re-empowering practices for Aboriginal women can lead to improved health outcomes. The research methodology can be understood as laying out the Path, as a well-developed structure or the plan for the research. It relates as an external landscape not just in terms of the Path itself but also the research process within the landscape of the site of the research, Rockhampton. The Way, being the process, involved enabling a clear, stepped-out process for me to follow and also one for me within my Self. In undertaking my thesis research I travelled an internal landscape in the journey of the Self and came to terms with myself as an Indigenous woman researcher. I came to learn that I needed to make stops, that I would encounter and need to overcome obstacles, recognise and interpret signs, seek answers and follow the tracks of others who had been before me and who had something to teach me. I also understand that, within the Pathway of the research, I have created new ways for others to see Aboriginal women, new ways for Aboriginal women to have voices, share voices and more fully comprehend themselves and each other within a research process that they participated in developing. I know that I have come to understand myself more clearly as an Indigenous woman researcher, and that I have come to view myself in new ways.

This paper will firstly provide a brief overview of issues pertaining to Aboriginal research—issues that I needed to consider when contemplating and undertaking research with Aboriginal women within the community of Rockhampton. This is the broader

landscape in which the research was based and which I believe may be used to inform research with Aboriginal women in other areas. Secondly, I explore issues specific to me as a researcher and, more importantly, as an Indigenous woman researcher. It shows the issues connected with being an Indigenous researcher, that is, as a new traveller within the broader landscape of research. Thirdly, I give a brief overview of how the research process was developed, how supervisors were selected for this research, and some of research methodologies as they relate to this research project with Aboriginal women.

Historical Reflections on the Research Landscape

There has been a long history of research conducted on Aboriginal peoples. Australia's Indigenous peoples have been referred to as 'the most researched group in the world' (Aboriginal Research Institute (ARI) 1993, 2; Smith 1999, 3). Historically, the vast majority of this research has been carried out by non-Indigenous people. Some of this research has been invasive into Aboriginal people's lives and communities, and been undertaken without permission or regard to Aboriginal peoples' rights to participate or not to participate. Some communities have not been aware that non-Indigenous people have undertaken research while within their communities. Sharon Cruse puts it simply when she states 'Many researchers have ridden roughshod over our communities, cultures, practices and beliefs, and we are now in a position to prevent this from continuing' (2001, 27). For many years Aboriginal peoples have raised questions about the research that has been and continues to be undertaken in their communities. For years Aboriginal peoples have been weighed, given blood, urine, faeces and hair samples, given their stories, explained their existence, been interviewed, questioned, observed, followed, interpreted, analysed and written about. From these data, reports, books and theses have been generated. Papers have been delivered at conferences and journal articles published. Throughout the world, Indigenous peoples have criticised research carried out within their own and other Indigenous communities. Linda Tuhiwai Smith states that 'The word itself, "research", is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary' (1999, 1).

Beginning in the 1970s, Australian Aboriginal people voiced strong concerns about these practices. More recently, these concerns have centred on some of the inappropriate and offensive methodological instruments that have been used by researchers, and the way in which reports have been presented in ways that made them useless to the communities about which they were written. In particular, higher education institutions in Australia have become sites where others have assumed ownership of our knowledges, ways of being and doing. Other sites where this has occurred are museums, libraries and art galleries. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, several publications included issues regarding research with and within Aboriginal communities. For example, *Ethics in Aboriginal Research* (ARI 1993); the *Guidelines on Research Ethics Regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural, Social, Intellectual and Spiritual Property Discussion Paper* (Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation, Research and Development, James Cook University, 1995); *Research* (Centre for Koori Studies 1995). These were added to by other universities and were further developed. Over time they were also followed by other documents in specific fields. For example, in 2003 the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) produced the *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research*. This document complimented *The*

NHMRC Road Map: A Strategic Framework for Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health through Research (2002). This document sets out criteria for health and medical research with and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians which all research proposals and funding applications must address. These documents and others have become more responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over time and, more than ever before, we as Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been actively engaged in determining who, what, where, when and how research will take place, as well as the conditions under which it should take place. This is not to say that inappropriate research does not still occur. Research has become very much part of our contemporary lives, we write about it, talk about it, tell jokes about it, and, as Smith indicates, 'indigenous people even write poetry about research' (Smith 1999, 1).

Joining in the Research Landscape

In discussing the difficulties of the researcher, Smith states that 'Indigenous researchers are expected, by their communities and by the institutions which employ them, to have some form of historical and critical analysis of the role of research in the indigenous world' (1999, 5). Here, Smith implies that as an Aboriginal woman who wishes to be called an Indigenous researcher, I need to have more than an understanding of the past research undertaken on and/or with Indigenous peoples and communities. It also implies that in the context of my PhD research work with Aboriginal women I needed to work out within myself the role of research as it relates to Indigenous women and Indigenous peoples and communities today. While this expectation is one that I have encountered, it is not one for which the university sector or the research academy provided training, or prepared me to be able to meet. There is a further expectation that is placed upon me, as I am still expected to know the way the Western academy undertakes scholarship and the protocols of this racialised space.

My survival within the higher education system and the research academy depends on my knowing how the Western academy is structured and operates. That is, I need to know who the relevant scholars are, who controls the processes within the research academy, and ways of 'doing business'. Generally and most often such non-Indigenous peoples are 'white Australians'. Certainly this was the case within the university in which I was enrolled. This 'knowing' is more than 'knowing' your discipline. It is also about knowing your discipline inside and out, how it came to be, how it is used, and then turning it upside down so you can see how it relates back to Indigenous peoples. What I do not think is understood by the research academy is that my survival as an Aboriginal woman in the Aboriginal community, in broader society, and within higher education, also relies on my continuing to develop as an Aboriginal woman. This is not something that holds true in the reverse. 'White people' do not have to work in the same way. They do not have to work on being 'white'. All the processes in place, the knowledge in place, structures, systems, other people, all remind them that they are 'white' (Monture-Angus 1995). They do not have to think consciously that they are 'white'. This is the racialised nature of power and privilege of Australian society and universities. In order to undertake my research program, I needed to dwell within environments where 'white people' and 'whiteness' were normalised, as was intellectual bias, and where this power and privilege was invisible to 'white people'. Further to this, the others within this environment and my immediate space could have total disregard for my reality and could be one of the sources of my

marginalisation within the higher education system (Monture-Angus 1995). I watched some people within the university participate in subtle and blatant racist actions and still the university decision makers would deny the reality of widespread racism or specific acts of discrimination. I listened to others in the university say they were opposed to racial prejudice and discrimination and committed to freedom and equality for all, even though the way they worked and lived helped to maintain and perpetuate the culture of domination.

On top of this, there was and still is the demand for public speaking, papers, articles within the higher education sector, for discipline-based work, for contributions to the Indigenous scholarly network and being part of an Indigenous community and the broader community. I struggled to balance the issues between the PhD research and being in a higher education institution and the issues associated with living in an Indigenous community and being an Aboriginal woman. In specifically undertaking health research, I struggled reading the pages filled with what has happened to those who have gone before, health statistics, health policies, and the lack of real government action, being the Chairperson of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Service and living within community and knowing of yet another death, serious illness, or an arrest or act of injustice. I remember a block of nine weeks in which there was a funeral every week within the Rockhampton Aboriginal community. There were some extremely difficult times for me as an Aboriginal woman, and as an Aboriginal woman who had leadership responsibilities within the community. Two of the most difficult were the passing of one of my closest friends and the passing of my younger brother. At these times I felt deep inner anguish and pain. My brother had called me 'professor' in a teasing but loving way from when I was 21 years of age, and my friend's last words to me were 'finish your PhD'. I used their words as motivation to finish my PhD. In this I am not alone; the struggles and the emotions that I have experienced are also experienced by other Indigenous women and men engaged in research. I know that they too experience the feelings that stir when they read something that mirrors elements in our lives and the lives of family, friends and community members. Past experiences and events are powerfully active factors in our lives, and in the lives of our family members and within the community. Martin Nakata explains that 'Indigenous academics and students are studying texts that have been written about themselves, their ancestors and their experiences that it is not just an intellectual process. It is an emotional journey that often involves outrage, pain, anger, humiliation, guilt, anxiety and depression' (1998, 4). One of the issues in discussions with other Indigenous researchers is how we do our work within our School or Department and speak in public about our research without the fear of emotional collapse and without appearing 'victimised', 'needy' or 'angry' and 'aggressive'. I think that even though university staff and students read about the past injustices and present inequities, the poor health status and much more, they do not necessarily understand the full impact this has on us as individual human beings, and our ability to undertake our studies and our work.

As I have already stated, my formal Western education did not fully prepare me to undertake the PhD research I was engaging in or the life I live. In my undergraduate and postgraduate years of Western formal education (I hold an undergraduate and two masters degrees), I was often told in my previous studies what I had to do, quote from certain texts and to prepare assignments in a prescribed way. When I used an Aboriginal experience, I was told that I was 'not objective' or criticised for my failure to be objective.

What the system of higher education failed (and still fails) to recognise is that it itself reflects a specific culture, even if the system does not name the culture it reflects. The criticism I received is really a reflection of the failure of those within the academy to examine their own biases and the bias of the system within which they work and which they assist in maintaining. It is also an example of my struggle to theorise my subjectivity and the subjectivity of Aboriginal women.

I was never formally prepared within the classrooms or lectures in which I sat to be an 'Indigenous researcher'. I was prepared to be an 'Indigenous person' who would know how to teach and research using Western frameworks that can further colonise and act out imperial measures on Indigenous knowledges. I was additionally prepared by the education system to enact out these frameworks and measures on other Indigenous peoples in a way that could be described as one-way assimilation. I have been well trained in the Western academy and specific disciplinary methodologies and been placed in the position by numerous non-Indigenous Australians, including women in higher education, as an example of a 'successful education outcome for an Aboriginal person'. I have also been told that with my 'education I can help my people' or that 'I am a credit to my people'. I came to understand that if as an Indigenous researcher I did not and do not interrogate what I have learnt, look at how I use what I have learnt and how I act, I can assist in perpetuating bias, colonisation and racism.

Martin Nakata explains that one issue for Indigenous scholars is how to speak back to the knowledges that have been formed around what is perceived as Indigenous positionings within Western worldviews (1998, 4). Nakata essentially asks 'how do we speak to what is known about us, written about us and not owned by us?' We as Aboriginal peoples, and as Indigenous researchers within the research academy, need to challenge what is written about us and what knowledges are controlled about us. If not, we will continue to perpetuate the untruths and the ways in which we are marginalised, minimised, misrepresented, represented and devalued. Lester-Irabinna Rigney states that 'sadly, the legacy of racialisation and its ideology continue to re-shape knowledge construction of Indigenous peoples via colonial research ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies which is so fundamentally subtle and "common sense"' (1997, 6). In order to bring about the required changes within the knowledges bases, there must be a link between research and the political struggle of our communities. This link needs to be in and through those Indigenous Australians who are simultaneously engaged in research and the Indigenous struggle. Rigney asserts that 'Only in this way can research responsibly serve and inform the political liberation struggle' (1997, 2). I know that it is up to us as Indigenous peoples to make the decisions between what is liberatory and what is colonising in orientation for us. For me, it is also about working out when I interrogate and engage and when I do not.

I understand the difficulty of interrogating the system, when the system tries very hard at times not to be interrogated, not to be engaged. There are times when non-Indigenous writers and academics who write about Aboriginal peoples can write without fully interrogating their work to see whether they have perpetuated racism and Eurocentric ideals about us and without interrogating their own 'whiteness'. That is without making any critical ethical judgements about the way in which they maintain the existing social order of racial and class hierarchical inequalities in many aspects of their lives, including within academic environments. In this way, they show their unawareness of their own subjective realities and identities, and how they identify with the existing

stratified social order despite their talk. There are those within the higher education sector who speak about us, of us, write about us and never want to or avoid speaking with us and to us. I have felt what it is like to be silenced. I have seen Aboriginal peoples left as the shadows of the speakers, as the speechless, the voiceless and the voice of absence. In this process we become re-written. We remain in the periphery and once again in the margin. We are again portrayed as 'object', and those who do the talking, the speaking about us, are again given the 'power', 'legitimacy' and further 'authority' to keep doing it, to keep making us 'voiceless objects'. These people are the 'cultural overseers' and the 'privileged interpreters' of Aboriginal peoples, issues and objects. In this, the places and spaces within higher education that are used to speak about us become further sites of appropriation and objectification and not sites of emancipation, liberation, subjectivity, resistance and sites where we can individually and jointly speak. In making us speechless, voiceless and marginal and maintaining cultural overseer positions, possible sites of radical openness and challenge are lost. It is with a blunt honesty and great sadness that I must also state that some educated Aboriginal people additionally support this happening within some higher education institutions.

It is in reading works about what it means to be an Indigenous researcher by Indigenous researchers such as Battiste (1995), Brady (1992), Cajete (1994), Martin (2003), Moreton-Robinson (2000), Nakata (1998), Rigney (1999, 2001) and Smith (2005) that I can begin to view my own situation, the situation of Aboriginal peoples, and come to an understanding of what it means to be an Indigenous researcher. I know that calling myself an 'Indigenous researcher' brings about a range of labels from other researchers. It is assumed that I work with Indigenous people as the objects of my research. It is assumed I am Indigenous. Both of these assumptions are correct. However, there are other aspects that also need to be considered. It could be considered that I am both subject and object. One of the challenges for Indigenous scholars is how we do this in ways that are congruent with Indigenous values and traditions and accountable to the communities in which we live and work. I have attempted to do this and additionally to work in ways that are responsive to Aboriginal peoples, that encompass empowering strategies, education approaches, skills development, broadening ownership and in returning the outcomes of this research in ways that Aboriginal peoples can use and incorporate for Aboriginal peoples. Additionally, I have attempted to work in ways that highlight racialised and biased knowledges and exclusionary practices within the research domain.

Talkin' Up Research with Aboriginal Women

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000, 187) explains the term 'talkin' up' as speaking back and the term 'talkin' the talk' as 'tell[ing] people about what you are going to do'. For me I was given the talkin' up words to describe the research development process by a number of Aboriginal women. When I first started thinking about doing a PhD and research around Aboriginal women's issues, I would be asked to talk up: throw my ideas out, let the women in the community hear what I was thinking and let them question me about what I was thinking about doing. This context is why the words talkin' up the research are used.

The important ethical principles as defined in numerous pieces of literature, such as Henry et al. (2002), the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (2002, 2003) and others, were incorporated within the research. The document that the NHMRC issued in 2003 is mostly commonly referred to as the 'Road Map': *The NHMRC Road Map: A*

Strategic Framework for Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health through Research. This document sets out criteria for health and medical research with and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders which all research proposals and funding applications must address. These include: that research be based on identified need; be action oriented; contain a skills and knowledge transfer strategy; provide proper acknowledgement of and ownership to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; include consultation; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of working; and community control of research.

My goal for my research was to involve Aboriginal women from the Rockhampton area in the development of the topic, in the process and in the analysis of the findings. Numerous topics were discussed over several years prior to the commencement of the research. I encouraged Aboriginal women to ask questions, to put forward ideas and suggestions, and to ask about the long-term benefits of the study: 'What action would result?', 'Who would be involved?' Questions were asked such as 'What was a PhD anyway?', 'Why did I wish to do a PhD?', 'What did I see the purpose of a PhD?', 'What were my motivations?', 'What was my purpose?', 'Who will own it?', 'Whose interests did it serve?', 'Where would this get us [as Aboriginal women/people]?', 'Where did I see it fitting within what I was doing within the community?', and 'How would it fit with other work being done by other Aboriginal people?' Also articulated were concerns and worries about my possibly moving away when the thesis was near to completion, as others had moved away when their masters or PhD theses were being finalised. These questions and many more, along with consequent discussions, took some time to work through and posed some internal questions and dilemmas for me. I had to ask myself: 'Why did I want to undertake a PhD?', 'Where did this drive for education that I had come from?', 'Was I going to move away when I finished?', and 'What job would I have when I finished?' Considering that three academics in the Faculty in which I was studying and one senior Aboriginal person working in the university had suggested that I might like to apply for a position as a full-time student support officer within the Indigenous Unit, this was an issue. I will also add that the suggestion of applying for a position as a student support officer is not something that is made to non-Indigenous PhD students nearing completion.

The dialogue with the local community and the questions I asked myself are not just about 'political correctness', nor are they just about ensuring 'everything' would be worked out before we began the research. By 'everything' I am referring to who would do what within the research project, my responsibilities to the project and the community members, ownership of data and the outcomes, and who had the authority to speak within and about the project. A few of the questions would also be asked by Aboriginal people to both non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers. There are, as Smith describes, 'many researchers who handle such questions with integrity and there are many who cannot' (1999, 10). She asserts that some of the questions are part of larger criteria that a researcher cannot prepare for such as 'Is her spirit clear?', 'Does he have a good heart?', 'What other baggage are they carrying?', 'Are they useful to us?', 'Can they fix up the generator?' and 'Can they actually do anything?' (1999, 10).

As an Aboriginal woman wishing to undertake research, other factors come into play. As a woman regarded as an 'insider', there are other aspects that need to be considered by women and community members. These include my background, linkages, age, gender, status, political connections, political base, organisational connections, my work (both paid and unpaid) background, whether I could actually do the work, whether I

respected and followed the protocol and process, my place within the Rockhampton Aboriginal community at that time, and many more issues. These issues pertaining to me as an Aboriginal woman researcher are not the same as those that pertain to the non-Indigenous researcher.

As the research program developed, there continued to be an ongoing dialogue and questioning about the research. It became, in some ways, very much part of community process, similar to other projects and programs in which I have been involved. There were formal discussions and countless informal ones held in the community, like at functions, the football, and at Woolworths and Shopping Fair (a large shopping centre). There were multiple levels of education occurring as to 'What was research?', 'What questions have I got the right to ask?' and about the process of research. I was conscious of the heightened sensitivity required by me and became very aware of what it is to be an 'insider' researcher and the dynamics associated with what is termed 'insider' research. Smith proposes that 'indigenous researchers work within a set of "insider" dynamics and it takes considerable sensitivity, skills, maturity, experience and knowledge to work these issues through' (1999, 10). Furthermore, she notes that 'Non-indigenous researchers and supervisors are often ill prepared to assist indigenous researchers in these areas and there are so few indigenous teachers that many indigenous researchers simply "learn by doing"' (1999, 10). My experience supports Smith's argument.

The earlier process of talkin' up gave Aboriginal women the opportunity to start sharing their thoughts and talking about some of their life experiences. It allowed issues to surface and a space to engage in dialogue about those issues. In this talkin' up phase of the process, realisation of possible topics surfaced, and the area of investigation was born. At this time I then presented the initial ideas for the research project and that it was to be for my PhD work to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inter-agency meeting in Rockhampton and to other forums as invited from the inter-agency meeting. The research process was able to be responsive to the flow of the community rather than my trying to make the community fit the structure of the research.

Considering the Path: Methodologies

Indigenous researchers such as Rigney (1997, 1999) and Warrior (1995, 1999) give varied suggestions how best to research Indigenous peoples and to determine what is Indigenous research. They both discuss ways of decolonising, repositioning and supporting Indigenous knowledges and research methods within higher education institutions. Rigney suggests the principles for an Indigenist methodology as a 'step toward assisting Indigenous theorists and practitioners to determine what might be an appropriate response to de-legitimise racist oppression in research and shift to a more empowering and self-determining outcome' (1997, 2). Wheaton (2000) argues for the need for Indigenous peoples to develop research processes that are about us as Indigenous peoples in order to represent us best. Martin (2003) provides a dialogue on the ways of being and knowing from an Aboriginal woman researcher's perspective researching with Indigenous peoples and knowledge and place.

Without doubt, there is a need for Aboriginal research processes that reflect who we are, what we do, how we think, and our protocols and processes, in order to represent us best. There have been numerous research studies on Aboriginal people over the years from all sectors, including the health arena (whether it be the sector, discipline or health

departments). There is quite an abundance of recent literature written by health researchers on servicing Aboriginal women and Aboriginal people. There have been few studies that have explored the way in which Aboriginal women experience their encounters with healthcare providers and other aspects of the healthcare system. My research project has explored in-depth with a group of Aboriginal women their encounters with healthcare providers and other aspects of the healthcare system. One of the outcomes was to generate ideas for improving healthcare delivery and policy for Aboriginal women in ways that are empowering for Aboriginal women. In this way the process, the Pathway, needed to be self-determining and empowering for Aboriginal women within the project. In being mindful of the commitment to understand Aboriginal women's accounts of their healthcare experiences from their own perspective, I began to frame a process for the research.

I chose to undertake a qualitative research process. Using the education arena as an example, Burns outlines that 'the qualitative researcher attempts to gather evidence that will reveal qualities of life, reflecting the "multiple realities" of specific educational settings from participants' perceptions' and they use a range of approaches in an 'attempt to capture and understand individual definitions, descriptions and meanings of events' (2000, 388). I knew from talking with Aboriginal women that I needed to build in a process of interactive dialogue, an empowering element within the process and skills development or learning for participants. Aboriginal women identified these aspects as elements required for this research. The women did not want me just to identify a problem or highlight the disadvantage experienced by being an Aboriginal woman in Rockhampton and Australian society within the research but to identify ways to change the current status quo and strategies for action. We all agreed that we did not want to become trapped within a process that would prevent us from looking for ways to change the situation or from Aboriginal women believing in themselves.

The women I had close contact with stated that they did not want me to be what they called an 'absent person' or 'non-person', or just to talk about my research in the contexts of the interviews or formal meetings. They did not want someone who would write about them and who did not share and write about themselves, or who was going to compartmentalise off the research from the personal. There are two parts to this. One is that I am an Aboriginal woman and live within the community. The other part is that as a community member and Aboriginal woman I had participated in community and organisational life. It was pointed out to me that if I did not incorporate myself in my research I would be discounting those things I had the capacity to bring to it: my years as the Chairperson on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health service board and membership on other committees; my time in government departments; and the times I had spent advocating and being within the Aboriginal women's domain. I had attended Aboriginal women's conferences in Australia and represented Aboriginal people at International Indigenous gatherings. I had participated as other community members in community events, attended funerals, helped out at times of crisis and been around to listen, socialise and to have fun. The women encouraged me to value the experiences I had within the Aboriginal community, the women's domain and within health and to put myself within the research. Thus it was agreed there would be no editing 'I' from the research process or the text. Autoethnography was suggested by one of my supervisors as a way for me to come to an understanding of myself, within the research process.

I read about the process of autoethnography. Glesne asserts that 'Autoethnography begins with the self, the personal biography' and then moves to the scholarly discourse and the cultural group that is the site of the research (1999, 181). I included the process of autoethnography and came to understand the process as one of freedom from—as Holt describes it—the 'constraints of the dominant realist representation of empirical ethnography' (2003, 2). I used narratives of the self, and drew on experiences and events I have participated in or witnessed over time while living within the community or as part of the Indigenous movement. Remember that my narratives of self also relate to the narratives of the community. In one sense it is individual and in another it is community: they intertwine. It is the narratives that offered further information, assisted me to understand the dynamics of the research process and that added much greater depth to this research. It complemented what Rigney describes as Indigenist methodology (1997) and allowed me to centre myself within the field of this research. Moreover, the work of Rigney, linking research to politics and advocacy for and with Indigenous peoples, provided the research with a platform for Aboriginal women.

Other forms of qualitative research approaches undertaken in research with women, such as symbolic interactionism, case studies and phenomenology, were also considered and rejected. I looked at action-based research, community participatory action-based research models, and began to look at feminist approaches. Additionally, I reviewed research processes undertaken with Aboriginal women. I reflected on what I wished to do with the Aboriginal women and what they wished me to do. After careful consideration of a range of methods, I came to accept that feminist participatory action research needed to be one of the key research methods. It enabled me to adapt it to fit within an Indigenous context and encompass processes that would allow knowledge to be developed and reflected upon, and for people to take action if they wanted to change something in their lives. It allowed me to break away from some of the pre-existing conceptualisations and to be researcher and community member and satisfy the components of what it means to undertake rigorous research.

Although at times having an issue with the concept of feminism per se, I was able to borrow from the area known as feminist research for the purposes of this research (Lather 1991a,b; Reinharz 1992). The feminist methodology literature provided numerous strategies for me to use, with women speaking being the core strategy and utilising women's narratives within the research document. Reinharz presents the practice of women 'telling' and the ways in which the 'telling' occurs and can occur (1992). This form of 'telling' is not just a 'feminist'-owned practice. It is also regarded as an Indigenous practice—a practice not only about what is said but also how we speak, and how we listen. Implicitly, often explicitly, it is a more egalitarian concept of power. It can be linked to the writings of Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr (1988) and her descriptive work entitled 'Dadirri' (1988). Within this process of telling and listening, I was able to use alternative vocabularies, as were the women who participated in interviews. Some of the women who participated in the interviews had several roles in the community. Similarly, I had a number of roles in the community along with being a researcher. The shifting of vocabularies encompassed our many roles and helped us stay within the context of the community. This is described in the work of Phillips (2003, 3). For me, changing vocabularies was vital and helped to maintain my connection to my sense of Aboriginality and to my placement within the community.

Other research that has involved Aboriginal women as researchers and subject and has drawn on Aboriginal women's narratives include Daylight and Johnstone (1986), Huggins and Jackie (1996), and Kirk and her collaborators (1998, 2000a, b). These works provide legitimation to Aboriginal women's voices within the texts and reports generated from the research. Some Aboriginal women researchers have utilised storytelling techniques that are also described by Reinhartz (1992). The telling of the stories is one way for Aboriginal women to explore the way in which Aboriginal women think about their history and to identify the effects of events on their lives. Brady states that 'storytelling is an ageless tradition, considered by most cultures to be vital to the health of each individual, the community and their environment' (1998). She adds that

the knowledge our stories contain can be shared but its sources and ownership belongs forever to those who have the door to critical reflection, and can assist in moving us to another level of understanding given the gift of the story. The listener's responsibility is to learn from it. (1998)

Stories open the self, family and community. Jackson states that through the narratives told in stories we are able to 'Reinvent ourselves and authorise individual and collective notions of who we are' (2002, 16). Thus the narrative helps us as individuals and as a collective to make sense of our lives.

Maureen Kirk and her colleagues, who undertook research work with Aboriginal women and cancer in Queensland, undertook a process of semi-structured interviews, case history interviews and group discussions (Kirk et al. 2000b, 4). I use their work as it is one of the best examples I can find of involvement of Aboriginal women at all levels of the project. Their research explored women's personal experiences, their understanding of breast cancer, and their views of care and health services. In essence, they undertook a process of Aboriginal women 'telling' their stories. These researchers and others were able to undertake shifts and changes within the process of the research. Further to this, they have all been linked to other developments either in policy and/or programs for Aboriginal women. The findings from these works have been useful in examining the findings from this research. The research additionally offered a way for women to affirm themselves as Aboriginal in a way that Jackson (2002) describes in discussing the use of narrative in research. These were the qualities that I was looking for within my research work.

There are other strategies that were utilised from the fields of qualitative methodology and feminist methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that the qualitative researcher utilises a variety of strategies and methods to collect and analyse a range of empirical materials and evidence. The data gained by the qualitative researcher may be from field notes, interview transcripts, documents, reports, pictures, recordings, graphic representations, newspaper articles and other literature. Tesch (1990) identified 26 analytic strategies that could be applied to qualitative data. I believed that it would be possible to engage a number of strategies and several approaches from methodologies known as community-based action research, feminist participatory research and Indigenist methodology, as outlined by Rigney (1997, 1999), as well as elements of reflexivity and/or introspection. These can all be worked together to bring an approach that could be regarded as Indigenous participatory community-based action research. I discussed a range of these strategies and approaches with my supervisors, my guides in the

journeying. I drew on their experience and advice to assist me in my decision making along the path of this research journey.

Supervision within the Pathway

Normally acting as guides, supervisors are not mentioned in a thesis aside from the acknowledgements page. In regards to supervising Indigenous postgraduate research, they play an important role and can have major impacts on Indigenous students and communities. This will become evident in the following paragraphs. For me, a number of people assisted in my PhD journey. There were, however, several people who were specifically appointed by the university at which I was enrolled to be the official supervisors (these are named later in this section). I agreed to the specific people being appointed after much thinking and working through some dilemmas. There were numerous issues that I needed to explore, behaviours that needed to be watched, and language that needed to be deeply listened to within the course of my supervision selection. My observation capacities were drawn upon, as was my spirit for confirmation of my thoughts.

As an Aboriginal woman who has varying levels of responsibilities, who works in ways where I am perceived to be a community activist and who believes that I have certain rights as an Indigenous woman, I very much needed to think through issues. I was not prepared to be supervised by people who were not familiar with working with an Aboriginal woman who was working on her own empowerment, identity issues and sovereign rights. I was not prepared to be subject to Objectification through the relationship of student/supervisor. I was not prepared to have a 'non-Indigenous Indigenous expert' supervise my work as an Aboriginal woman, with Aboriginal women within the greater Aboriginal community, if that meant substantiating their 'privileged positioning, cultural overseer, cultural interpreter status and giving them further authority to speak'. I was not prepared to be used to give anyone a stamp of legitimacy or be seen to offer a privileged position to talk on Aboriginal business. I have been used by non-Indigenous people within higher education many times for purposes of legitimising, accessing information or to get their work done, and then discarded because I was of no further use.

I knew what I did not want and I knew what I did want. I knew that I would accept university-based supervisors who would be respectful of me, of my positioning; supervisors who were respectful of difference, who accepted my difference and who did not make me hide my difference, who would not make me 'fit' but who would encourage me and show where I could find a place for myself. I knew that I wanted open and heartfelt communication in my relationships with all my supervisors. I knew that I was prepared to gift the university-based supervisors with knowledge and wisdom that I can give, in reciprocity for their wisdom and increased knowledge of the research academy. In this way, we would be learning from one another in the true sense of teaching and learning, engaging one another in open critical dialogue where we could hear and come to know one another. It could be, I thought, an intersection of possibilities for us. I also thought that, for some people, it would be an intersection that they would fear and by which they would feel threatened. I knew that I was prepared to gift them the status of being the supervisors of an Aboriginal woman who gains a PhD from the university just as they were gifting me their skills, time and status of their supervision.

There were issues of power to consider, and issues of deep importance to my well-being as Aboriginal woman. I knew that I was trusted to make the decisions regarding who should be and would be my supervisors, my guides to undertake the research. If I was not wise in my decisions, if I did not stop any one of the supervisors in a process that could cause harm to me, Aboriginal women in the community or the Aboriginal community at large, I would have also contributed to the harm. This is something that I was not prepared to carry. A number of other PhD candidates and academics within the Faculty did not understand my positioning and asked 'what harm?' They seemed to find it difficult to understand my positioning and the link between me, my research supervisors and the harm that could be done. In addition, they were not aware of actions of past researchers and the harm that had occurred. When I was in need of a new university-based supervisor (my previous one having left), I undertook a process of interviewing possible supervisors. As I began to interview potential new supervisors, it was difficult at times to see beyond their masks, to know whether they would be the right people to be part of my research pathway. Some quickly showed that they held tight to the bastions of white interests, power and privilege, while others demonstrated that they had an understanding of the conflicts that might present within a white-centred space. There were some people I knew and had talked to who would not be suitable for the reasons outlined in previous paragraphs.

A community-based supervisor was also discussed early in the process. It was identified in my earlier discussions with Indigenous leaders in the community that it could be difficult to maintain a reference committee, group or circle for the purpose of the research, when some women had so many priorities. I was asked 'Do I want community people being there for what may be perceived as just for me, my work in the university?' I came to understand in the discussion that some women may feel obliged to come to meetings for 'my research', yet know that they have other commitments. Some women may feel they needed to forfeit being involved in this project in order to attend to their business. In considering the size of the community, these points and numerous others needed to be considered. I did not want to set up a system where Aboriginal women felt it was a university thing, something they could not come to all the time so dropped out, or something that was just for me. Instead, this project was to be primarily about Aboriginal women and a structure was developed that respected the constraints that Aboriginal women lived with every day.

As a result, it was agreed that one Aboriginal woman would become a formal supervisor and draw women together if and when needed, along with providing me with cultural balance, guidelines and an Aboriginal woman to whom I could disclose specific personal cultural information. In addition, there would be a loose circle of Aboriginal women I could meet as a group or, occasionally, sit with either one or two at a time. These women came together when there was the opportunity, for 15 minutes of quiet time at a function or a community social, in the same way we discuss other issues of importance in our lives, such as family, kids, men, or to catch up on the 'Murri Grapevine'. A couple would call me over at a function and say 'how ya goin'; or 'how's your studies?' A couple of women would ask that I specifically tell them how it's going (meaning the PhD) and what I'm up to, what I know and ask about my work (meaning community work and my study work).

Priscilla Iles was suggested by several community leaders and from the Community Interagency meeting as the Aboriginal woman who could possibly be my community-

based supervisor. Priscilla has done a lot of work in the community over many years. I sent a letter to her on recommendation asking her to be one of my PhD supervisors. The agency that was mentioned over and over again to seek support from in terms of linking with the project was the Aboriginal and Islander Community Resource Agency (Inc) (AICRA). This organisation had repeatedly undertaken the task of organising women's conferences over the years with Aboriginal women, Torres Strait Islander women and Australian South Sea Islander women. Priscilla was the Chairperson of this organisation and at the time additionally a member of the Central Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Regional Council. I received a letter supporting my research from AICRA. It took some time for Priscilla Iles, Danielle Stehlik and Ron Labonte to become my supervisors, to be guides within the landscape of my research. I am thankful for their support and for being with me until the end.

Conclusion

Research by Indigenous researchers must be first and foremost accountable to the Indigenous community. Based on this premise, as an Aboriginal woman researcher wanting to undertake research with Aboriginal women for the benefit of Aboriginal women and with help from Aboriginal women, I needed to be accountable to the Aboriginal women in the community of Rockhampton. When I first commenced my research I did not know how I was going to validate it within a Western university and rigorously modify Western methodologies and align them with Aboriginal perspectives, be accountable to the Aboriginal community and survive with my dignity and integrity intact as an Aboriginal woman. It was in the early part of my research that I met Gregory Cajete and read his book *Look to the Mountain* (1994). It was Gregory Cajete's explanation of Pathway (*Path* denoting structure, *Way* implying a process) that allowed me to develop a research framework that I could employ as an overarching model of my research journey (1994, 55). The multiple methodologies that I employed within my research, and how I saw myself as a researcher, fitted very easily within the Pathway concept. The journey itself has not been easy and the glimpse of that journey that I have shared in this article is testament to that. There were in fact times of great hurt. At the same time, I hope that my research journey inspires other Indigenous people to take on the journey for themselves and challenges non-Indigenous people as to how they may assist us in the quest for quality research for the benefit of our communities.

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