


Bridging Indigenous and Western Methods in Social Science Research

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Abstract

This paper presents a method for how grounded theory can be used to bridge Western and Indigenous approaches to research, and how these epistemologies may complement each other. The objective in presenting this method is to contribute to the ongoing conversation on how best to integrate these two frameworks. As historically in social science research western methodologies have been preferred over Indigenous methodologies, this integration serves both to further reconciliation and to enhance methodological rigour.

Keywords

social justice, methods in qualitative inquiry, community based research, participatory action research, constructivist GT

Introduction

We begin with an overview of Indigenous research principles, and go on to demonstrate how they may be congruent with Western qualitative research frameworks. The method is illustrated through its application to a specific study. This study used the blended methods presented herein to understand how Indigenous former permanent wards build resilience and make meaning of their lives, and what role the reclamation of identity and culture play in this process. This was done through a series of conversations with participants, using a combination of Indigenous and grounded theory methods. The methodology itself was restorative in the spirit of reconciliation, and sought to empower former youth in care to reclaim elements of their culture that they were denied. The methods best reflected the worldview of the participants and community, as well as my own worldview as the researcher.

Throughout this article, the term Indigenous is used to reference First Peoples within Canada, including Status and non-Status First Nation, Métis, and Inuit. The use of this term is not intended to diminish the distinctiveness of specific identities, nor is it supporting a pan-Indigenous approach; it is important to recognize the rich diversity of culture that exists within and across Indigenous communities. Whilst the specific research for which the methods described here focused on understanding the experiences of Indigenous youth in care, it is argued that these methods have relevance beyond this one application.

Indigenous Research Principles and Ethics

In Canada, Indigenous Peoples have distinct perspectives and understandings embodied in their lands, cultures, and histories (Ballard, 2012; McLeod, 2007; RCAP, 1996; Ross, 2006). It is crucial to acknowledge that ceremonies and protocols are culturally specific, and that those presented herein represent only my own worldview as the researcher. The specific knowledge and protocols included in this article have been given to me by my Anishinaabe Elders. Through my own healing journey, I have created a sacred bundle that facilitates this healing and was used in the research methods. My sacred bundle contains healing medicines, my drum, grandparent stones, eagle feathers and rattles. This knowledge is specific to my experience, Elders and community; it does not capture the diversity of Indigenous knowledge in Canada and does not aim to. Readers should seek parallel understandings from within their own cultures when engaging with these methods.

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This research is committed to ensuring accurate and informed research concerning heritage, customs and community. The grounding of this study in Indigenous research methodologies created a sacred space from which knowledge was shared and received through ceremony, respect, authentic engagement, critical reflexivity, reciprocity, relationality and responsibility (Castellano, 2004; Kovach, 2005; Lavallée, 2009; Meyer, 2008; Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002; Rice, 2005; S. Wilson, 2008; D. D. Wilson & Restoule, 2010). The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR; 2013) used the concept of sacred space:

To refer to the relationships between the individual and a recognized spiritual entity, the Land, Kinship networks (including all plant and animal life) and Ancestors. This relationship is both spatial (where the individual is inclusive of the family and the community) and temporal (where the present generation is inclusive of past and future generations). In this sacred space, there is an interconnectedness founded in purity, clarity, peace, generosity and responsibility between the recognized spiritual entity, the Land and the Ancestors (p. 16).

As ethics are socially and culturally specific to the values of the people involved in research, there is not one definitive code of research ethics concerning Indigenous Peoples in Canada:

Ethical codes developed by Aboriginal Peoples recognize the diversity of Aboriginal communities and the primacy of community authority in deciding what matters are appropriate for research, the protocols to be respected, and how resulting knowledge should be distributed (Castellano, 2004, p. 110).

Fortunately, there are several examples of ethical research guidelines aimed at protecting the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and communities. Some of these guidelines address the ownership, control, access and possession of health data by Indigenous communities (CIHR, 2013; First Nations Centre, 2007; National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003; Schnarch, 2004), some focus on the use of traditional tobacco in research (Struthers & Hodge, 2004; D. D. Wilson & Restoule, 2010), and some provide best practices and protocols when researching with Indigenous Peoples (Meadows et al., 2003; Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002; Weijer et al., 1999).

Castellano (2004) has asserted that: '...fundamental to the exercise of self-determination is the right of peoples to construct knowledge in accordance with self-determined definitions of what is real and what is valuable' (p. 102). In Canada, 'guidelines emphasize participation of Indigenous groups and communities as full partners in the research enterprise' (p. 108). Throughout each stage of the research project, including the design and identification of potential participants, it is crucial to work collaboratively with community stakeholders. Research participants must be fully advised of the

research process through an informed agreement process. First Nation Peoples have been studied extensively and not always to their advantage or with their informed consent. Reconciliation means that, going forward, consent must be freely given at every stage of the research.

This means that stakeholders will not just be kept apprised as the research unfolds but will be called upon for their specific expertise where emergent findings necessitate accommodation and amendment. As ongoing advisors, stakeholders oversee the research and assist in its development to ensure the community's best interests are reflected and respected. In the case of university-based or government research, there will be external protocols to follow as well and researchers are well-advised to allow for extra time that may be required to meet as many as three sets of protocols (Indigenous, academic and government). This approach is crucial to reconciliation, and protocols that may seem contradictory initially can actually help deepen understanding among stakeholders.

True consent is contingent, and reviewing it periodically in relation to the commitments made at the outset of the project can enrich mutual understanding and sustain meaningful consent. To this end, participants must be advised that they may end their participation at any time, and that their decision would not have any negative impacts on the services they receive or be held against them in any way. In the example that informs this paper, participants completed their conversations, confirmed their transcripts and confirmed the thematic arrangements. Participant names and other identifying information were removed from all field notes, memos, transcripts of the conversations and the written results. Participants were given an electronic copy of their conversation's transcript and did not have access to information belonging to other participants in this study.

Indigenous research methodology can sometimes be at odds with Western research principles. For example in a recent study, a university Research Ethics Board had concerns about the use of one of our traditional sacred medicines, tobacco, in the project. It noted the health consequences of smoking tobacco; viewed tobacco as an unhealthy, addictive narcotic; and suggested that something else be used. Although tobacco is not a narcotic, the researcher, in consultation with Indigenous stakeholders, submitted a revised ethics protocol that included the following explanation:

Although it is acknowledged in the medical community that smoking tobacco is associated with negative health effects, the ceremonial tobacco used to exchange with others, in this case Elders and participants, is not used for smoking. Sacred tobacco is used to carry our prayers in offering to the Creator by laying the tobacco outside somewhere or under a tree. Sometimes the tobacco is placed into a sacred fire and the smoke carries the prayers to the Creator. When a tobacco tie (a pinch of raw tobacco in a cloth that is tied shut) is given, the receiver may carry the tobacco tie with them as a reminder of the oral contract made. Some people may offer the tobacco by placing it somewhere special. Other

people may carry a tobacco tie that was given to them for strength or protection for a specific journey or task. Multiple tobacco ties can be strung together and hung either inside or outside for different purposes. It is important that members of the Ethics Review Board understand the difference between sacred ceremonial and tobacco (naturally grown and not to be smoked as cigarettes) and North American smoking tobacco. There is a sacred ceremony, the Pipe Ceremony, which involves the smoking of tobacco in a Sacred Pipe; however, this Ceremony will not be conducted in this research.

The revised submission was accepted and more importantly, differing perspectives and understandings were reconciled. Again, it is important to recognize that Indigenous ceremonies, protocols and medicines, such as tobacco, are specific to particular Nations, communities and geographical regions.

Complementary Indigenous Methods and Protocols

Whilst research design and the selection of methods must be guided by the nature of research questions and that of the available data to answer those questions, as well as by engagement with Indigenous communities, a number of Indigenous research methods and protocols are available in the social sciences. These include

- Indigenous epistemologies (Castellano, 2000; Cross, 1997; 2002; Debassige, 2010; Iseke, 2010; Kovach, 2021; Lavallée, 2009; Margot & McKenzie, 2006; Meuse-Dallien, 2003; Nabigon & Mawhiney, 1996; Warner, 2006);
- Traditional cultural ceremonies (Benton-Banai, 2010; Johnston, 2003; Meuse-Dallien, 2003);
- Authenticity and reciprocity (Drawson, Toombs, & Mushquash, 2017; Kovach, 2005; Lavallée, 2009; Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002; Rice, 2005; S. Wilson, 2008; D. D. Wilson & Restoule, 2010);
- Spiritual Guides (Hill, 2009);
- Ancestral knowledge (Benton-Banai, 2010; Hill, 2009; Johnston, 2003; Lawrence, 2004);
- Tobacco ties (Drawson et al., 2017; Lavallée, 2009; Struthers & Hodge, 2004; D. D. Wilson & Restoule, 2010);
- Sacred medicines (Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000a; Meuse-Dallien, 2003; Peltier, 2018);
- Oral traditional teachings and transmission of knowledge (Barton, 2004; Bryant & Clark, 2006; Castellano, 2000; Cruikshank, 1994, 1998, 2005; Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008; Turpel, 1989);
- Storytelling (Baker & Baker, 2010; Bird, Wiles, Okalik, Kilabuk, & Egeland, 2008; Datta, 2018; Froman, 2007; Kovach, 2005; 2010; Little Bear, 2004; McCall, 2011; Verwood et al., 2011; A. Wilson, 1998);

- Sacred bundle (Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000b; Peltier, 2018);
- Elders (Chiblow, 2020; Hanohano, 1999; Lavallée, 2009; Simpson, 2000; Stiegelbauer, 1996; D. D. Wilson & Restoule, 2010);
- Two-eyed seeing (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012; Iwama et al., 2009; Martin, 2012; Reid, Eckert, Lane, Young, Hinch, Darimont et al., 2021);
- Cultural Safety (Cameron et al., 2010; Koptie, 2009; Maar, Beaudin, Yeates, Boesch, Liu, Madjedi et al., 2019; McClelland, 2011);
- Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (Farnel, 2018; Mashford-Pringle & Pavagadhi, 2020; Schnarch, 2004); and
- Yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Byrne, McLellan, Willis, Curnow, Harvey, Brown et al., 2021; Fredericks, Adams, Finlay, Fletcher, Andy, Briggs et al., 2011; Kovach, 2021; Walker et al., 2014).

Oral Transmission of Cultural Knowledge

Many Indigenous groups in Canada including Mi'kmaw/Mi'kmaq, Yukon First Nations, Cree, Inuit, Tunliit, Métis, Ojibwe/Ojibway and Mohawk, rely upon the oral transmission of cultural knowledge by Elders, as in creation stories, history and traditional teachings (Aporta, 2009; Auger, 2001; Augustine, 2008; Bennett & Rowley, 2004; Chamberlin, 1997; Cruikshank, 1994; 1998; Little Bear, 2004; McLeod, 2007; Monture-Angus, 2002; Paul, 2006; RCAP, 1996; Stewart, Friesen, Keith & Henderson, 2000). Ojibwe oral tradition encompasses two types: (a) narratives that are used to describe everyday events; and (b) those that describe the philosophic underpinnings of the culture (Auger, 2001). The second type of oral narratives is commonly referred to as sacred stories (Hallowell, 1976). Oral traditions are described as 'the means by which knowledge is reproduced, preserved, and conveyed from generation to generation. Oral traditions form the foundation of Indigenous societies, connecting speaker and listener in communal experience and uniting past and present in memory' (Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008, p. 7).

Western discourse has historically prioritized written knowledge over the traditional oral transmission of knowledge, especially within academia and law (Alfred, 1999; Chamberlin, 1997). Castellano (2000) wrote

Aboriginal knowledge has been under assault for many years. In residential schools and other educational institutions, in the workplace, in social relations, and in political forums, Aboriginal people have been bombarded with the message that what they know from their culture is of no value. Intergenerational transmission of ancient knowledge has been disrupted, and the damage has not been limited to the loss of what once was known: the process of knowledge creation – that is, the use of cultural resources to refine knowledge in the laboratory of daily living – has also been disrupted. As Aboriginal people reassert their right to

practice their cultures in a somewhat more hospitable social environment, they will have to decide how to adapt their traditions into a contemporary environment (p. 25).

Hanson (2009) argued that, 'writing and orality do not exclude each other; rather they are complementary. Each method has strengths that depend largely on the situations in which it is used' (Hanson, 2009, p. 1). Increasingly, oral traditions are being acknowledged and recognized as valid methods of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation in the fields of health and medicine, education and law, including land claim settlements in Canadian Courts of Justice (Alfred, 1999; Bird et al., 2008; Bryant & Clark, 2006; Burrows, 2001; Chamberlin, 1997; Christie, 2005; Gingell, 2010; Goddard, 2002; Hanohano, 1999; Iseke, 2010; Johnston & Johnson, 2002; Neegan, 2005; Riecken, Tanaka & Scott, 2006; Stewart et al., 2000; Whitridge, 2004; S. Wilson & Wilson, 2002).

Individual conversations can elicit stories and personal narratives that illuminate the experience of the speaker in relation to the research questions. In the application that informs this paper, individual conversations were undertaken to understand the ways in which some Indigenous former permanent wards have re-claimed their identities and what role cultural traditions and knowledge played in the way they make meaning of their lives and identities.

Two-Eyed Seeing

The bridging or weaving together of Indigenous and Western methodologies to improve both education and research has been explored by Indigenous Elders such as Murdena and Albert Marshall, who developed the idea of Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett et al., 2012; Iwama et al., 2009). Elder Albert Marshall describes Two-Eyed Seeing, or *Etuaptmumk* in the Mi'kmaw language, as 'learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all' (Reid et al., 2021, p. 244). In recent years, this approach has been applied in a variety of contexts, from undergraduate science courses to community-based research projects (Bartlett et al., 2012; Iwama et al., 2009).

Grounded Theory

Building on the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing, grounded theory can serve as a bridge between Indigenous and Western methodologies insofar as it has parallels in both epistemologies. As with Indigenous narrative approaches, grounded theory begins with the informant whose response to questions shapes the theoretical formulation of the research. Traditional grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998) and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; 2005; 2006) have both been utilized in the data analysis

for narrative methodologies. Grounded theory inquires into the meaning that is negotiated and understood through social interactions as well as the influence of social structures and processes (Dey, 1999; Jeon, 2004; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Utilizing grounded theory involves conducting data analysis concurrently with data collection and using subsequent data to inform emerging findings and enrich subsequent sampling and data collection (Anastas, 2004). Careful and extensive analysis is required to ensure that the theory emerging from the data is credible and meaningful as well as contextually relevant (Drisko, 1997).

Constructivist grounded theory has roots in both traditional postpositivist and interpretive research paradigms, marrying ontological critical realism with epistemological subjectivism (Levers, 2013). It recognizes the role of participants in co-constructing a theory derived from the research data (Charmaz, 2000; 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Placing this value on the co-construction of knowledge is congruent with Indigenous methodologies of reciprocity and authentic relationship building. Constructivist grounded theory is also consistent with the research values underpinning Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies and is acknowledged as a method suited to the pursuit of social justice (Charmaz, 2000).

There are still meaningful incongruencies between grounded theory and Indigenous methodologies (N. K. Denzin, 2010). For instance grounded theory relies on the saturation of theoretical categories to determine when a researcher should stop gathering data (Charmaz, 2006). This concept has no parallel in Indigenous methodologies, where ongoing relationships between researchers and participants are expected, and form the foundation for research (Drawson et al., 2017; D. D. Wilson & Restoule, 2010).

However, the differences between these two methodologies do not necessarily prevent them from being integrated in a meaningful and effective manner. Two-Eyed Seeing suggests that researchers can draw upon the strengths of both to create a methodology that is preferable to either Western or Indigenous methodology used in isolation.

In the author's study of Indigenous permanent wards, a combination of Indigenous research methodologies, in concert with a modified constructivist grounded theory, were employed in order to understand the potential contribution of an integrated multi-cultural theoretical model. The combination of methodologies utilized in this instance supported the exploration of the role of cultural identity in the resilient processes and outcomes among Indigenous youth involved in the Ontario child welfare system, and allowed for the development of a culturally relevant, preliminary theory of resilience for these youth. Indigenous epistemology and cultural practices were also embedded within the data collection process, as described in the following sections. In this way, the weaving together of Western and Indigenous knowledges occurred across both the methodologies and methods employed in the study.

Implementing Informed Consent

In the same study, in order to accommodate participants' anxiety in reflecting on a system upon which they had been dependent, oral informed consent was gained by audio-taping participants reading the informed consent and research agreement at the beginning of each individual conversation. Oral consent was practiced in this study to avoid creating a paper trail containing the identifying information of the participants. A copy of the informed consent and research agreement was provided to each participant. All participants were voluntary adults who were willing to share their stories of resilience from the perspective of being a state-raised permanent ward of the child welfare system.

There was the possibility that some participants might have felt uncomfortable during their conversations with the researcher. Participants were not pressured to share or discuss any private details of their experiences in child welfare care. They were reminded multiple times throughout the conversation that there was not a correct answer and that they could decide to not answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. Participants were told of the possible risks and benefits of participating and were not coerced to participate. It was stressed that their decision whether to participate in this study was completely voluntary.

Support services were offered to all participants in the event they felt distressed after the conversation; however, no participants reported distress post-conversation. In fact, all participants openly discussed the positive emotions elicited during their conversations and as a result of their participation in meaningful research. I also carried my sacred bundle to all conversations to share and offer my cultural ceremony to those who desired that traditional cultural component. All of the participants, with the exception of one, engaged with traditional cultural ceremony. This approach illustrates the congruence and compatibility of Indigenous and Western approaches to ethics as one component of the research process.

Participant Recruitment and Sampling

In the study that informs this paper, open sampling was used to recruit participants who were Indigenous adults raised as permanent wards in Ontario. Specifically, inclusion criteria required that participants were

- Adults (defined for the purposes of this research project as 25 years of age and older);
- Successful (defined for the purposes of this research project as enrolled in school, employed, community volunteer work or leadership, and/or parenting);
- Former permanent wards in Ontario; and
- Self-identified as Indigenous (Status First Nation, non-Status First Nation, Inuit and/or Métis).

Permanent ward placements included customary care, kinship care, foster care, group homes, outside placement resources, youth criminal justice facilities and/or Indian Residential Schools. Due to the unique nature of their experiences (Adams, 2002; Carrière, 2005; 2007; 2008; 2010; Richard, 2007; Sinclair, 2004; 2007), state-raised wards who were adopted were excluded and adults who fit the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study.

An effort was made to include male and female participants; a wide range of participant ages; both First Nations Status and non-Status participants; participants from reserves, rural, and urban areas of Ontario; participants who were placed with their siblings and separated from their siblings; and participants with Indigenous foster caregivers and non-Indigenous foster caregivers. Participants who were not practicing traditional spirituality were also recruited and included in the study for negative case testing, which will be discussed later in this paper (N. K. Denzin, 1978; Lindesmith, 1952; Manheim & Simon, 1977; Padgett, 1998; Robinson, 1951). Prolonged engagement with the participants allowed me to go back and ask participants about data that emerged in later conversations with other participants.

Since the research questions focused on the resilience of former permanent wards, a flyer was circulated asking child welfare workers to identify Indigenous adults who were former permanent wards and who they considered to be resilient. Resilience was operationalized as participation in the community, such as employment, education, parenting and/or volunteer work. Several pilot conversations were conducted with the agency advisor until we were both satisfied that the data collection instrument would achieve the desired results. The agency advisor also assisted with the development and dispersion of the participant recruitment flyer and the recruitment and sampling of research participants.

Research recruitment flyers were posted at Indigenous organizations and agencies across the province's largest metropolitan area. Child protection workers across the province distributed the flyer to former permanent wards that met the study inclusion criteria. Interested potential participants contacted the researcher directly by telephone or email to express their interest in participating and to gain further knowledge about the research project. When contacted by potential participants, this researcher followed a written script to ensure that the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria were met.

Individuals who confirmed that they would like to be involved were invited to participate in this research project. Following this initial conversation, I emailed the recruitment letter, informed consent and research questions to potential participants. This provided the time necessary for participants to review the informed consent and research questions prior to their initial conversation. Qualitative conversations occurred at a time and location most convenient to each participant. With regards to determining sample size, J. M. Morse (2000) asserted that:

Estimating the number of participants in a study required to reach saturation depends on a number of factors, including the quality of the data, the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant, the number of interviews per participant, the use of shadowed data, and the qualitative method and study design used [...] If data are on target, contain less dross, and are rich and experiential, then fewer participants will be required to reach saturation (pp. 3–4).

Pre-Conversation Preparation

Prior to each qualitative conversation, I engaged in personal spiritual ceremonies to guide me and my interactions with participants throughout the research process. I engaged in a personal smudging ceremony to cleanse myself and my research papers before each conversation. I also prayed to be able to hear, see, smell, speak, feel and think in a good and loving way. I then prepared my sacred bundle with my sacred items and was ready to meet the participants and conduct the qualitative conversations in a good way – a very important element of conducting ethical research (Castellano, 2004; Debassige, 2010; Hart, 2010).

In order to spiritually, emotionally, psychologically and physically prepare for each conversation I went outside to my cedar bush, held my *asemaa* (traditional tobacco in Ojibway language) in my left hand, and introduced myself with my spirit name in *Anishinaabe-mowin* (Ojibway language in Ojibway language). Whilst holding my *asemaa* in my left hand, I thanked *Gitchie Manitou* (Great Spirit/Creator in Ojibway language; Benton-Banai, 2010; Johnston, 2008) and the Spirit World (Hill, 2009) for their presence and wisdom and prayed for continued guidance. I concluded my prayer by offering my *asemaa* to *Gitchie Manitou* and the Spirit World by respectfully laying my *asemaa* under my cedar bush. As I conducted the qualitative conversations and data analysis, I continued to seek guidance and mentorship from my Elders, spirit guides, ancestors and advisor at an urban designated Indigenous provincial child welfare agency.

Collaborative Instrument Development

The informed consent, qualitative semi-structured conversation guide, and additional prompting questions were collaboratively developed in partnership with an urban designated Indigenous provincial child welfare agency using PAR principles and Indigenous methodologies (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Park, 1993; S. Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Restoule, 2010).

The conversation guide consisted of 16 short answer and open-ended questions and was used to explore the factors that have contributed to the success of Indigenous adults who were raised as permanent wards in an Ontario child welfare system placement. Grounded in traditional Medicine Wheel teachings (Margot & McKenzie, 2006; Nabigon & Mawhiney, 1996), the Relational Worldview Model (Cross, 1997), and de-

colonizing Indigenous research epistemologies (Iwama et al., 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; S. Wilson, 2008), the semi-structured qualitative conversation guide questions were categorized across the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel with a goal to uncover the contributing factors to resilience and success in each quadrant. Follow-up conversations with research participants were also conducted, which allowed me to go back to earlier participants to clarify and expand on the data. This, in turn, informed the next set of conversations.

Data Collection

When arriving to meet each participant, I brought my Sacred Bundle and laid out my sacred items and inquired about each participant's comfort with this. I also created a tobacco tie with my gratitude and prayers and offered the tobacco tie to each participant before engaging in the data collection. Semi-structured conversations with participants provided opportunities to explore the multiple dimensions of the social processes related to the concepts of risk and protective factors, culture, identity, and resilience processes among Indigenous children and youth in child welfare care (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

In keeping with the Indigenous methodologies of relationship building and reciprocity, during these conversations I shared stories of my experiences and explained my positionality as the researcher with respect to the research topic (D. D. Wilson & Restoule, 2010). The term 'conversation' was used in place of 'interview' in order to emphasize the reciprocal and relational nature of this data collection method.

Some of the individual conversations were closed with a smudging ceremony, as desired by participants. The smudging ceremony was intended to take away any negative energy and emotions that may have come up during the discussion and assist participants in moving forward in a good way. Counselling services and resources were available to all participants. All of the participants reported feeling comfortable and pleased after the conversations and declined the services offered.

All participants chose to audio record their conversations because it preserved their data verbatim, with less opportunity to lose the full meaning of participants' responses. The conversations ranged from 2 to 4 hours, with one conversation lasting seven and a half hours. The conversations were conducted in several mutually agreed upon locations including a participant's place of employment ($n = 1$), participants' homes ($n = 3$), and Indigenous community agencies ($n = 2$). One conversation took place over the phone.

Data Analysis

In keeping with the purpose of grounded theory research to develop a substantive theory based on variability in the sample, participants who challenged existing theories and who were identified as having different coping skills and spiritual

practices than previously recruited participants were asked to participate in the study. A Senior Policy and Program Developer at an urban designated Indigenous provincial child welfare agency was a designated agency advisor for this research project and identified possible participants for recruitment. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, guided by the constant comparative method, theoretical sampling and member-checking processes (Barbour & Barbour, 2003; Charmaz, 2000; Giske & Artinian, 2007; Wells, 1995). Participants were continually added to the sample until theoretical saturation was reached, when no additional codes were needed to capture the participants' experiences and meanings (Drisko, 1997). For the remaining process of data collection, theoretical sampling occurred simultaneously with analysis in order to 'look for precise information to shed light on the emerging theory' (Charmaz, 2000, p. 519).

Data collection and analysis using grounded theory involved continually coding and comparing new data with already developed codes to generate a conceptual and saturated theory (Glaser, 2001). The following definition of the data analysis process, provided by J. M. Morse (1994), informed my understanding of the complexities regarding qualitative data analysis:

Data analysis is a process that requires astute questioning, a relentless search for answers, active observation, and accurate recall. It is a process of piecing together data, of making the invisible obvious, of recognizing the significant from the insignificant, of linking seemingly unrelated facts logically, of fitting categories one with another, and of attributing consequences to antecedents. It is a process of conjecture and verification, of correction and modification, of suggestion and defense. It is a creative process of organizing the data so that the analytic scheme will appear obvious (p. 25).

Multiple coding strategies were used to synthesize and analyse the data including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, in order to find relevant and meaningful patterns (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Before coding began, each individual conversation was transcribed verbatim. The process of open coding involved reading the conversation transcripts and providing key words and phrases for each line in the margins. These key words and phrases are referred to as indicators (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Indicators were then arranged into categorically aggregated codes (concepts). Once key concepts and their indicators were identified, the processes of discrimination and differentiation were initiated whereby concepts were examined for both similarities and differences and arranged categorically. Categories are 'intended to capture not only similitude but also dimensionality among a set of concepts' (LaRossa, 2005, p. 843). The categories were developed in terms of their properties (indicators) and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). During this phase of the coding, I also

arrayed the concepts by taking several similar concepts and contemplating how they may be subsumed under a higher level heading. This process can be described as 'moving from one level of abstraction to another level of abstraction, while still remaining in the realm of the concepts' (LaRossa, 2005, p. 843).

Next I engaged in axial coding, which involved reviewing the data and collecting new data with the purpose of breaking down the identified categories into subcategories. These subcategories included (a) causal conditions (what factors caused the core phenomenon); (b) strategies (actions taken in response to the core phenomenon); (c) contextual and intervening conditions (broad and specific situational factors that influence the strategies); and (d) consequences (outcomes from using the strategies; Creswell, 2007).

Through this axial coding process, I examined the relationships between and among the categories and subcategories in order to formulate themes that captured 'patterns of human experience' (Padgett, 1998, p. 83). Axial coding continued until it was determined that no new information was emerging and no new properties and dimensions were seen in the data, also known as theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define rigour as the degree of authenticity and credible interpretations in qualitative research. The concept of trustworthiness is believed to be analogous to the concepts of reliability and validity in quantitative research, and is used to establish and evaluate the credibility of research findings. Due to the ongoing, subjective methodological decisions I faced, peer debriefings and agency supervision were used to establish credibility (Anastas, 2004; Thomas, 2006) and to reduce researcher bias (Padgett, 1998). Audio-recordings provided me with clear and exact qualitative data because the recordings preserved the wording, tone of voice, and other details of conversation, which resulted in rich data for analysis (Giske & Artinian, 2007).

Inclusion of Elders

Research undertaken with Indigenous Peoples should include the guidance and wisdom of Elders who will work with the researcher at all stages of the research study. In this context, Stiegelbauer (1996) stated that the term *Elder* refers to a person older in age who is a respected keeper of cultural knowledge and traditional ceremonies. He wrote

In traditional terms, an Elder is also a specialist in ceremonies, traditional teachings, language, and heritage as it applies to mind, body, and spirit. As each individual is unique in their experience, learning, personality and knowledge of traditional culture, each potentially has something different to offer (Stiegelbauer, 1996, p. 42).

Lavallée (2009) highlighted the important part Elders play in Indigenous cultures because "they carry the traditional

teachings, the ceremonies, and the stories of all our relations. For the research to be based on Indigenous knowledge, [E]lders need to be included” (p. 27). [Castellano \(2000\)](#) explained that Elders have an ‘obligation to consider whether the learner is ready to use knowledge responsibly’ (p. 26). In addition, they ensure that their teachings encompass “not only the intellectual context but also the emotional quality of the relationship” (p. 27). [Stiegelbauer \(1996\)](#) wrote the following about approaching an Elder with traditional tobacco:

The concept of approaching an Elder is an expression of this relational element. Approaching an Elder means that someone comes to the Elder and asks a question, or asks for help. This request becomes a kind of contract work through the presentation of tobacco to the Elder and the Elder’s acceptance of that tobacco. The presentation of the tobacco means that the conversation in some way concerns the spirit. This exchange is very important from the Elder’s perspective because it signifies the individual’s willingness to listen and take the help of the Elder seriously. The Elder will continue doing the work necessary until that work is completed (p. 51).

Even in urban environments, Elders are valued and often sought out for their experience and wisdom:

We see a natural process of aging and personal development where, as individuals grow older and accumulate knowledge and skills, they are respected for what they have learned. They are asked to teach others about culture, tradition, and “being a human being” based upon their experiences. This teaching is seen as essential to facilitating a strong sense of cultural identity and healing, especially in urban settings ([Stiegelbauer, 1996](#), p. 37).

The involvement of Elders has been an important component of this research project. In qualitative research, one of the ways that trustworthiness is established is by prolonged engagement with stakeholders ([Padgett, 1998](#)). The involvement of Elders in this research project helped to sustain trustworthiness and authentic engagement.

Member-Checking

Consistent with traditional grounded theory ([Glaser & Strauss, 1967](#); [Strauss & Corbin, 1990](#); [1998](#)) and constructivist grounded theory ([Charmaz, 2000](#); [2005](#); [2006](#)), participants were asked to verify and confirm the accuracy of their conversation’s transcripts and the initial themes that emerged from them. At the first follow-up conversation, participants could make any changes to the typed version of their conversation’s transcripts and to the arrangement of main themes. Once the participants confirmed the transcripts and main themes, the audio recording of the conversation was securely destroyed. Member-checking with participants improved the rigour of this research so that new information could be incorporated into subsequent encounters with new participants ([Starks & Trinidad, 2007](#)). This process

allowed explanations of the phenomena to emerge in order to produce a theory that was grounded in the data.

Selective (theoretical) coding was the process through which I began to ‘formulate patterns along with their variations’ ([Strauss & Corbin, 1998](#), p. 117), specifically the factors associated with resilience processes for Indigenous former permanent wards. The process of selective (theoretical) coding provided the way for further theoretical sampling to occur.

There were several opportunities for member-checking with participants to establish trustworthiness of the data. I stayed connected with participants throughout the duration of this research by telephone and email, requesting their feedback and welcoming their suggestions for modifications, changes or deletions.

Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement with the participants and community stakeholders increased trustworthiness of the data and helped to ‘ameliorate the effects of reactivity and respondent bias’ ([Padgett, 1998](#), p. 94). This process of member-checking ([Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#)) reflected the relationship between the participants and the researcher such that participants were viewed as expert informants rather than research subjects ([Anastas, 2004](#)). Member-checking opportunities had a positive effect on reducing the threat of researcher reactivity, researcher bias and respondent bias ([Padgett, 1998](#)).

Prior to data collection, I had connected with stakeholders through a series of engagements intended to establish trustworthiness. I began to meet with provincial Executive Directors of Indigenous child welfare agencies to discuss the possibility of conducting community-based research in their child welfare catchment areas. My tobacco tie offering was accepted by the Executive Directors and I was given permission by the agencies to continue with the development of my research project. Over the years, I maintained community engagement through regular telephone calls, emails, and in-person community and agency visits. These engagements strengthened my understanding of the principles and operations driving child welfare practice within rural First Nations contexts in the north and urban settings in the south. It also gave me the opportunity to spend time with agency staff and community members whilst familiarizing myself with their child protection practices and values.

Researcher Reflexivity

Indigenous Peoples are considered a unique population in Canada due to their sovereignty and the historical exploitation they faced ([RCAP, 1996](#)). In the past, researchers would enter Indigenous communities, sometimes without the knowledge or consent of the community, observe the community members, and release misconstrued research findings without validation from the community ([Deloria, 1991](#)). This means that much of the research about

Indigenous Peoples has not directly reflected their beliefs, teachings, and knowledge and has failed to benefit Indigenous communities in meaningful ways (Brown & Strega, 2005; Deloria, 1991; Kovach, 2005). Indigenous researcher, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) explains

The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity. Just knowing that someone measured our 'faculties' by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and compared the amount of millet seed to the capacity for mental thought offends our sense of who we are (Thompson, 1859). It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations. It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous peoples' claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments [...] This collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized (pp. 1–2).

One prominent example was publicized regarding the nutritional experiments conducted on Indigenous children and youth residing in Indian Residential Schools across Canada. It was in response to these and other such violations that research ethics, principles, protocols and best practices were created in order to protect Indigenous communities from research misuse (CIHR, 2013; First Nations Centre, 2007; Meadows et al., 2003; National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003; Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002; Schnarch, 2004; Struthers & Hodge, 2004; Weijer et al., 1999; D. D. Wilson & Restoule, 2010).

Irrespective of our intent, there is an inherent power differential between the researcher and the participants. Despite the utilization of Indigenous methodologies and PAR principles, this power differential must be acknowledged and considered throughout any research project. In the case of research on the experience of Indigenous provincial permanent wards, it was important to acknowledge personal experience with the topic being researched. In this case, the researcher had been raised as a provincial permanent ward. In such instances, both disclosure and reflexivity are essential. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) asserts that

The critical issue with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity. At a general level, insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships, and the quality and richness of their data and analysis (p. 137).

In the example described here, reflexivity was built into the research plan through prolonged community engagement with an agency advisor, participants, community stakeholders and Elders, the use of cultural protocols, and the authenticity with which I came to this research.

I explored this topic because I was interested in the experiences of other Indigenous permanent wards. I did not expect others to have had the same experiences that I did. However, recognizing my personal connection to the subject of study, I utilized several strategies to ensure community oversight of the research throughout the duration of the project. The supervision of academic colleagues ensured that the research process remained objective. This member-checking process and prolonged engagement with participants was both congruent with a relational Indigenous worldview and further ensured the objectivity of data analysis (Padgett, 1998).

Throughout the data collection process, I engaged in a self-reflective process of *bracketing* (Caelli, 2001). *Bracketing* involves suspending prior knowledge and assumptions as much as possible, with the goals of attending to the participants' accounts with an open mind and reducing researcher bias that may stem from previous experiences (Gearing, 2004). These safeguards ensured the research project and process were culturally appropriate for the participants and community stakeholders. As Bentz and Shapiro (1998) suggest, the research design must demonstrate a good fit between the context being researched, the research methods utilized and the worldview of the researcher.

Triangulation of the Data

The data collected in this study and the thematic codes that emerged were triangulated by rigorously comparing recurrent patterns within the data with existing literature (Drisko, 1997). An audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of memos, observations, post-conversation reflections, field notes, peer debriefings and participant feedback were used for this comparison. 'In social work research, where findings are ultimately valued for their contributions to policy and practice, rigorous research is also an ethical responsibility' (Myers & Thyer, 1997 as stated in Padgett, 1998, p. 90). Providing each participant with an opportunity to review the data analysis created opportunities for questions and discussion about emergent research findings. This was both congruent with Indigenous epistemologies and the requirements of rigour. To these ends, it was also important to examine apparently contradictory data.

Negative Case Testing

Negative case testing occurs through theoretical sampling and theoretical coding (also known as selective coding), “to verify and assess the applicability” (Berg, 1995, p. 192) of any tentative hypothesis (N. K. Denzin, 1978; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lindesmith, 1952; Manheim & Simon, 1977; Padgett, 1998; Robinson, 1951). Negative case testing: “involves searching for and discussing elements of the data that do not support or appear to contradict patterns or explanations that are emerging from the data analysis” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, p. 1). In order to include a negative case analysis that provided evidence against my hypothesis that resilience is associated with having a positive Indigenous cultural identity and participating in Indigenous traditional spiritual practices, I sought participants who had a positive identity not grounded in their Indigenous cultural identity and who were not utilizing Indigenous cultural practices of spirituality and ceremony.

Once the participants confirmed the main themes and written results, they were finalized and shared with an urban designated Indigenous provincial child welfare agency, community stakeholders, Elders, and academic colleagues for their review and feedback. Relevant theoretical perspectives were incorporated and triangulated with established theory in order to develop a grounded theory that had emerged from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Summary and Directions for Future Research

This paper provides an overview of the processes employed when integrating grounded theory with Indigenous methodologies. This process seeks both to further reconciliation and to enhance methodological rigour. In order for this integrated methodology to be successful it must be localized and grounded in the specific cultures and communities of both the researcher and the participants (N. K. Denzin, 2010). To this end, researchers seeking the methodological integration described herein should seek parallel understandings from within their own cultures and the communities involved in their research.

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