

**PARTNERING WITH AMERICAN INDIAN COMMUNITIES
IN STRENGTH-BASED COLLABORATIVE HEALTH RESEARCH:
GUIDING PRINCIPLES FROM THE FORT PECK
CEREMONY OF RESEARCH PROJECT**

Elizabeth Rink, PhD, MSW, Elizabeth Ann R. Bird, PhD, Kris Fourstar, BS,
Adriann Ricker, MPH, Winona Runs-Above/Meyers, AA,
and Rachel Hallum-Montes, PhD

Abstract: Background: *The Ceremony of Research Project was implemented to strengthen tribal communities' ability to harmonize Western research processes with Indigenous ways of knowing.* Methods: *Focus groups were conducted with tribal members to understand Indigenous processes, beliefs, and practices necessary to promote positive research experiences with tribal communities.* Results: *Findings address time; relationship building and maintenance; inclusion of diverse tribal members in the research design, as well as American Indian epistemology; respect for tribal values, beliefs, and customs throughout the research process; and the reciprocity of research.* Conclusions: *Our study has important implications for how researchers can take a strength-based approach to conducting research with tribal communities.*

INTRODUCTION

In the U.S., American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) are at highest risk for a myriad of adverse health outcomes such as heart disease, obesity, cancer, diabetes, suicide, and sexually transmitted infections (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011a, b). Recognizing the persistence of health disparities in Indigenous populations as a serious issue in the U.S., the *Healthy People 2020* report calls for collaborative strength-based strategies in health research to further investigate the causes of disease and prevention strategies for underserved and at-risk populations (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). Despite this recommendation, there remains a lack of awareness regarding what is required to

develop strength-based collaborative research to address health disparities—particularly for health research with Indigenous communities (Tobias, Richmond, & Luginah, 2013).

Previous work suggests that research with Indigenous communities has a relational focus: One must understand and respect how tribal people form and maintain relationships with others, the land, and the spirits and how these relationships in turn influence ideas and ways of perceiving the world (Kovach, 2012; Wilson, 2008). This paradigm shifts the focus from one-way transfers of information to open, bidirectional exchanges that include sharing Indigenous and academic perspectives, as well as exposure of the personal self (Castleden, Morgan, & Lamb, 2012). This exchange requires establishing and maintaining trust as a foundation for any research conducted with tribal communities (Christopher, Watts, Knows His Gun McCormick, & Young, 2008). Emerging from the literature discussing collaborative strength-based research partnerships with Indigenous communities are the following understandings: 1) the need for knowledge of language, culture, place, and spirituality, their interconnectedness, and how these concepts may affect attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors among a group of people; 2) the need for expertise in a variety of research methodologies; and 3) the need for researcher awareness of self and a willingness to share self in the research process (Chilisa, 2012). These understandings call for new schemas in research on health disparities with Indigenous peoples that entail personal disclosure and presence, the melding of Indigenous knowledge with academic training, the utilization of innovative intervention frameworks and interdisciplinary approaches, and, perhaps most importantly, a focus on solutions instead of problems.

The *Ceremony of Research Project* (CRP) was conceived in light of this complexity of issues facing Indigenous communities in the U.S. and outside researchers (i.e., researchers who are primarily non-Indigenous, and not from the Indigenous communities in which the research is taking place). CRP built upon a longstanding partnership between Fort Peck Community College and Fort Peck Tribal Health Department in Poplar, Montana and Montana State University (MSU) in Bozeman, Montana. CRP's core purpose was to increase the research capacity of the Fort Peck Tribes in a way that built upon their strengths and respected tribal beliefs and values, while incorporating Western research processes. CRP was conducted within a community-based participatory research framework, in keeping with other examples of proactive Indigenous nations overseeing production of their knowledge (Christopher et al., 2011; Koster, Baccar, & Lenrelin, 2012; Salois, Holkup, Fripp-Rumer, & Weinrent, 2006). A project advisory board (PAB) was formed to work in partnership with researchers at MSU to provide direction and guidance for the project. The PAB was made up of five tribal members who were selected by

Fort Peck Community College and the Fort Peck Tribal Health Department and approved by the Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board, the governing body of the Fort Peck Tribes.

CRP conducted a series of focus groups to gain insights about the Fort Peck peoples' Indigenous processes of knowledge acquisition and transmission, the cultural and traditional beliefs or practices that are key to these, principles to guide research projects, and how an outside researcher can best establish relationships and conduct research with the Fort Peck Tribes that is empowering and useful to the people of Fort Peck. The focus groups sought to learn directly from the people of the Fort Peck Tribes what kind of research they wanted, how they wanted research to be conducted on their reservation, and what they expected of researchers coming to the reservation. The results of the focus groups are discussed in this paper as a set of principles that may guide researchers in developing strength-based collaborative research projects with Indigenous populations.

METHODS

Study Site

The focus groups took place on the Fort Peck Reservation in northeastern Montana, a Northern Plains prairie, frontier environment that spans approximately 2.1 million acres. There are nearly 12,000 enrolled members of the Fort Peck Tribes, about half of whom currently live on or near the reservation. There are two nations enrolled at Fort Peck: the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes. The Assiniboine and Sioux are descendants of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakoda/Nakona nations of the Great Plains tribes, which have the largest geographical land base of any of the federally recognized tribes in the U.S. The Fort Peck Tribes are some of the poorest in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Participants

To gain a representative range of perspectives, the focus group participants were selected by CRP staff and approved by the PAB based on the following criteria: age, gender, knowledge of tribal history and cultural ways of life, leadership within the college and tribal governance, and geographic distribution on the reservation. Thirty-eight tribal members representing Assiniboine and Sioux cultural heritage or clan groups participated in the focus groups. The focus group participants ranged from young people to elders, and were from the six primary communities across the reservation.

Procedures

CRP staff, all members of the Fort Peck Tribes trained in Western qualitative research methods, conducted the focus groups. Each focus group lasted 1.5 hours. The focus group procedure followed tribal protocol and recommendations as set forth by the Fort Peck PAB: each focus group began and ended with a prayer, participants were provided with meals and gifts to thank them for their time and participation, and, when first invited, elders were given a special gift of tobacco as a sign of appreciation for their wisdom. Transportation was provided for participants if necessary.

The focus group interview guide was developed in partnership with the PAB, CRP staff, and the researchers from MSU. The PAB and CRP staff felt strongly that, because of the history of research abuses experienced by the Fort Peck Tribes in the past, as well as the collective history of research misconduct with tribal communities, the focus group interview guide should not directly reference “research.” Rather, the questions were designed to better understand the gathering and sharing of knowledge. Questions included:

- 1) What is your philosophy or beliefs about how knowledge is gained or learned at Fort Peck?
- 2) What cultural and traditional beliefs or practices do you think are important to include in how knowledge is gained or learned with the Fort Peck Tribes?
- 3) What are some examples of your cultural and traditional beliefs that might influence how a project or study is conducted here?
- 4) What general principles should guide projects or studies that involve acquiring knowledge about the people of Fort Peck?
- 5) What do you think is important for an outsider to do and know when he or she comes to Fort Peck to learn about us? In other words what do you need or want to see from an outsider before you would feel comfortable telling them something about yourself or your opinions or beliefs about something?

CRP staff leading the focus groups at times elaborated on the questions, especially for youth and elder participants, by rephrasing the questions or providing examples to participants. All focus group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Audio files were erased following transcription.

The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at MSU and by the Fort Peck Tribal Council Executive Board, which at the time CRP began was the ethical review board for the Fort Peck Tribes. Since then, an independent IRB has been established by the Fort Peck Tribes. This manuscript was reviewed and approved for publication by the Fort Peck IRB.

Data Analysis

The research team examined the focus group transcripts to identify major themes. Transcripts then were examined line by line using Atlas.ti qualitative analytic software, and were assigned “open codes” to categorize data and identify emergent themes following the guidelines of a grounded theory analysis. As described by Strauss and Corbin (2008), grounded theory is an inductive approach to data analysis that “allows the theory to emerge from the data.” Related codes were identified and linked according to broader analytic categories or “axial codes.” These categories were organized according to how they addressed CRP’s overall goal of building research capacity within the Fort Peck Tribes. The categories then were shared with the PAB for discussion, clarification, and approval. Few changes were made to the categories when reviewed with the PAB. PAB members also selected concepts and quotations they wanted highlighted in the presentation of the focus group findings in this manuscript.

RESULTS

Through qualitative analysis of focus group data, six themes emerged as important principles of collaborative strength-based research with the Fort Peck Tribes. Broadly, these themes speak to the importance of a researcher spending time on the reservation with tribal members; inclusion and respect for diversity among tribal members in the research process; respect for tribal history; respect for tribal customs throughout the research process; respect for AI epistemology; and giving back to tribal communities through the research process. A number of subthemes were related to each of the overarching themes. Table 1 summarizes the themes and related subthemes that emerged from the qualitative analysis. Below are results from our qualitative analysis.

Table 1
Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1. Spending Time in the Community Prior to Research

Subthemes: Becoming familiar with tribal history, customs, beliefs; building relationships/trust with community members; ensuring proposed research is in alignment with/ relevant to community needs/interests

Theme 2. Respect for Diversity of Community Views

Subthemes: Community is not monolithic; need to develop novel, innovative strategies to engage community members; show deference when engaging certain community members (especially to elders)

Theme 3. Respect for Tribal History

Subthemes: Historical link between institutional research and oppression of tribal communities; mistrust of outside, non-Native researchers; need for researchers to demonstrate their commitment to use research for benefit of community

Theme 4. Respect for Community Customs and Practices

Subthemes: Providing food or meals to participants; showing appreciation for community members' time through gifts; showing appreciation for/deference towards community elders through giving tobacco; understanding humor/teasing as a way to build relationships

Theme 5. Respect for American Indian Epistemology

Subthemes: Knowledge is gained through spiritual insight; knowledge is gained through experience; knowledge is gained through participation; knowledge is gained through listening; knowledge is shared from one generation to the next; knowledge is shared between families and community members

Theme 6. Ensuring Reciprocity Throughout the Research Process

Subthemes: Build reciprocity into all phases of research; research products should benefit the community; research can benefit future generations of community members

Spending Time in the Community Prior to Research

Participants emphasized that, prior to implementing a study, outside researchers must ensure that a proposed study is relevant to Fort Peck's needs and interests. Participants suggested that researchers conduct "background research" on Fort Peck's history and customs, which would include engaging a diverse representation of Fort Peck tribal members in preliminary discussions to identify research topics of interest and importance to Fort Peck. Participants explained that this immersion is necessary to ensure that researchers are familiar with practices and values of the Fort Peck peoples, and do not misinterpret and/or misrepresent what they learn through the research process.

If you were going to come here and you want someone to tell you things about their life, about where they live, you need to immerse yourself with the people you want to know. That's the only way you're going to learn.... You have to come here and you have to be with us. You have to be a part of our lives as often and as long as you can. Because we can tell you stories, but it doesn't mean you're going to understand the meaning behind them.

This comment is emblematic of an epistemology whereby knowledge is acquired by “being with,” watching, and listening.

Taken together, the collaborative development of research questions and time spent in the community can support the design and implementation of a study, build upon community strengths, and ensure outcomes are relevant to tribal members and researchers alike. This approach contrasts with past studies in which researchers came to Fort Peck for a brief period of time to get approval for their research and collect data, and then left when the research was finished—without coming back to the Tribes to interpret the research findings, share the results with the Tribes, or collaborate with the Tribes to determine how the findings should be shared and with whom.

Additionally, time spent with the community may facilitate research that is respectful of the values and practices of the Fort Peck Tribes, and relevant to tribal needs and interests.

[Research] needs to be respectful and relevant. And even if it's embarrassing that shouldn't be a reason to not do it. But I think...putting more than one person in to debate it and to discuss it and to say, “Okay. Can we see a good outcome for this? Will there be help? Will it help strengthen and keep our culture and our people alive?” So, I think those are things. Respectful and relevant.

According to participants, the ideal mark of “relevance” is translating research results into effective practices that can be sustained in the community beyond the funding period of a project. Researchers’ commitment to stay with the community over time, endeavoring to perpetuate or institutionalize the programs and practices that show promise to address tribal interests and needs, additionally may help ensure sustainability of practices developed as a result of the collaborative research project.

Respect for Diversity of Community Views

Participants emphasized the necessity of collaboration between outside researchers and community members in the development of research questions and study design. Of importance is engaging a diverse representation of community members—not only a select handful of key informants. This step also is important for a cultural epistemology in which knowledge is distributed—each person holds a different piece.

When people come here and they want to learn about our culture and all this stuff, they always go to the same people.... And those same people necessarily don't represent all of our views.... I think there just needs to be a broader selection of people.... So, you know, we're all represented. It's not just one certain way of things.

The diversity of beliefs, values, and practices within and across Fort Peck communities emphasizes the importance for outside researchers to develop novel and innovative strategies to engage a wide representation of community members so that studies capture and reflect this diversity.

We were raised to get out and speak our minds. But there are so many people who won't...there has to be a variety of ways where you can get information you need from the people you need it [from]...find different ways to reach everybody, not just certain people.

While participants noted the importance of engaging a diversity of community members in research, they also emphasized the cultural importance of showing deference toward community elders:

Well, there're certain things [researchers] need to understand, [with] the older ladies, and even the men...when you're doing surveys...there're certain things that you won't ask them, because they won't do it. And you already know that, so don't ask.

Overall, participants felt that understanding and respecting the balance between engagement of and deference toward community members was an important component of collaborative strength-based research with tribal communities.

Respect for Tribal History

The history of exploitation, misrepresentation, and/or suppression of Indigenous culture by outside (White) educational institutions and researchers emerged as a central theme of focus group narratives. Participants explained that the relationship between tribal communities and researchers has been strained, to say the least, due in large part to the role of institutional research in oppressing Indigenous communities.

...the worst enemy was not the [cavalry]. It was the anthropologists that were supposed to be experts on Indians.... Those are the ones that said, 'Yes, I'm an expert on the Indian.... They're Pagan. Yes, they're heathen. And yes, they have no belief system. So, we've got to save them.' That's what [the anthropologists] told [the politicians] because that's what they wanted to hear.... So, as much as the cavalry did to us, they weren't our worst enemy. It was those White anthropologist experts on Indians that hurt us more than anybody because our culture was so devastated.

Participants explained that researchers should take this history into account in the design and implementation of studies with Indigenous communities, and take extra measures (e.g., cross-validating study findings with community members) to avoid misrepresenting communities and perpetuating harmful cultural stereotypes.

Respect for Tribal Customs and Practices

Participants emphasized the importance of researchers demonstrating an understanding and respect for tribal customs and practices throughout the research process. Within Fort Peck, the practices of gift-giving and using humorous teasing as a way to build relationships are positively influential during the research process. As participants explained, providing gifts or food during research activities aligns with community principles of reciprocity, and can be important for engaging community members in research:

You got to give them a special invitation, or take them tobacco, then they'll come and gladly do it. But, they will sit back and wait, and you've got to approach them...welcome them to come and participate.

If [the researchers] want to meet with the community, it might sound funny, but in order to get to know the community you have to have food. That's the number one thing is you have to have something for them....

Participants noted that, after engaging community members, researchers should be aware of different community practices or customs used to build relationships. Within Fort Peck, humor and friendly teasing are common. It is important for outsiders to be aware of this practice:

...it should be discussed with [researchers] before [they] go out, because [with] Indian humor, they're going get teased, and [may] take offense...

Respect for AI Epistemology

Key to respect for Indigenous beliefs is an understanding of and appreciation for AI epistemology—the many different ways that knowledge is gained or shared within tribal communities. According to participants, knowledge may be gained through spiritual insight, observation and experience.

Now, when you're talking about general principles that should guide projects and studies that involve acquiring knowledge, I think you have to understand the levels of cosmos as it pertains to tribal knowledge. Like, we have four levels of understanding. And those four levels of understanding represent four times, the different stages of the Creator himself.

Spiritual insight, the influence of the metaphysical world, and belief in the Creator may profoundly impact how tribal members believe research should be conducted with their people.

In addition to direct learning through spiritual insight or experience, participants also noted that sharing knowledge within and across families is common, and an important way of not only learning, but maintaining community cohesion and solidarity:

[A]ll kinds of generational relationships...are really important to Native people... grandparents, kids, everybody's important.... We gain a lot of knowledge that way, through those relationships we can have with all of our family. It's not just our immediate family...it's more seamless for Native Americans.

Central to this process of sharing knowledge is the practice of attentive listening to both speech and silence, which participants also indicated researchers should model when interviewing community members.

You need to be open but also listen to people. Listen. We have people that have come in and...they hear what they want to hear.... But I think that's one of the things that Indians do [is listen].

According to participants, demonstrating an understanding and respect for AI epistemology is necessary for researchers, to ensure they fully appreciate the meaning of research findings and do not misinterpret or misrepresent them. The demonstrating of understanding and respect is done through listening.

Giving Back: Ensuring Reciprocity Throughout the Research Process

The practice of reciprocity is highly valued among the Fort Peck Tribes, and participants indicated it should be incorporated into any research project involving Fort Peck. This point is particularly salient given the history of exploitation of Indigenous communities by outside researchers, as one participant explained:

That's the most important thing, how're you sharing with your people...Our people are built on that type of friendship, and giving away, people just gave up everything they had, at times. It was [our] nature. But we gave away so much to the non-Indian, nothing in equal amount has ever returned to us, nothing. An equal amount. That includes goods, that includes land, that includes friendship—nothing has ever returned in equal amount.... And so [researchers who are welcome] don't just take, and take, and take, and take—they replenish.

Above all, participants indicated that reciprocity must entail using the research process and findings to benefit communities.

I think that if we're looking at developing research to overcome social problems ...associated with poverty and despair, suffered by our people today research itself is an empty bottle, unless you've got some action-oriented strategy that would come as a result of research. That's the benefit that I'm talking about. What would be that action results strategy to overcome whatever dilemma, whatever ill that we have.

DISCUSSION

Effectively addressing health disparities and achieving health equity—as laid out in *Healthy People 2020*—requires close collaboration between health researchers, practitioners, and the populations most at risk of poor health outcomes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). It requires that researchers and practitioners have a realistic understanding for what such collaboration might entail as well as how to work with Indigenous communities from a place of empowerment, resiliency, and strength. This article reports on a set of guiding principles for conducting research *with* members of the Fork Peck AI community, principles that were outlined by tribal members themselves. As tribal members indicated, any research that is carried out in their community should be relevant to Indigenous community needs and interests; respectful of community history, customs, members, and ways of knowing; and in alignment with community ethics of reciprocity.

Researchers must maintain perpetual understanding of tribal history and culture at the forefront of their research process because the abuses, atrocities, and injustices experienced by tribal communities, no matter how long ago, are continually part of the present. As profoundly stated by one participant, it was academics, with their presumed knowledge of tribal beliefs and practices, that created the most destruction for Indigenous people. Indigenous communities' history of colonization is living memory at the individual and collective levels as people's life stories have been shaped significantly by loss, trauma, and grief (Geia, Hayes, & Usher, 2013). Thus, the very act of conducting research in Indigenous communities has the real potential to re-traumatize individuals and communities. For example, traditional knowledge that might be shared with an outside researcher may not be considered valid and reliable by academic

colleagues because the information (“the data”) was not collected using a standard Western research methodology. This attitude demeans and minimizes the importance of this knowledge, which is considered sacred by the carriers of such wisdom. As another example, the terminology of the questions used in the focus groups for this study perplexed some participants because the questions were general, overarching inquiries related to how knowledge is acquired and how to implement a research study. These types of questions are not connected with tribal members’ daily life on the reservation and, therefore, at times it was difficult for the participants to respond unless further explanation or examples were given. As one counter, Lambert (2013a) asserts that an “Indigenous” approach to research will pose questions in terms of the resilience of tribal communities and their traditional knowledge, beliefs, and practices as distinct from Western research questions aimed at theoretical frameworks aimed at measuring and analyzing problems.

Moreover, the wounding experienced by tribal communities in the name of research can be mitigated: Community-based participatory research methods have made major progress in establishing trust between Indigenous people and researchers to assist in the healing of tribal-academic partnerships (Christopher et al., 2008). We suggest that researchers in the health arena who work with Indigenous communities maintain a historical, cultural, environmental, and present-time perspective grounded in respect and reciprocity when conducting research. Elston et al. (2013) describes this as “holding space” for both the Indigenous research collaborators and academic partners in which the research process is allowed to unfold without judgment or fear of betrayal. In particular, we emphasize the highly critical necessity of listening, not just listening to words that are being spoken but listening to nonverbal communication, listening to the silences between words or conversations, and paying attention to what has happened and what is happening in the physical environment in which research within a tribal community is taking place (Duran, 2006; Richmond, Elliott, Matthews, & Elliott, 2005; Wilson, 2003). Furthermore, we highlight the need to be aware of and respectful toward spirituality and the connection to a universal cosmology that is central to AI belief systems and ways of life, and to how AI peoples perceive, experience, and understand the world around them (Marks, 2007).

Awareness of Indigenous epistemologies also is needed in order to create a holistic strength-based research process with Indigenous populations (Lambert, 2013b). More and more Western scientists who work with Indigenous communities are calling for the integration of Indigenous epistemologies with standard Western research methodologies (McDonald, Priest, Doyle, Bailie, & Waters, 2010). For example, researchers working with Indigenous communities in New Zealand and Australia discuss the use of storytelling with Maori communities in New

Zealand, or “yarning” as it is referred to in Australia, as a legitimate research methodology (Clandinin, 2006; Geia et al., 2013; Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). Similarly, AI communities in the U.S. use storytelling as a way to transmit and share knowledge (Cajete, 2000). Other work on Indigenous epistemologies presents Indigenous concepts of knowledge gathering through empirical observation, traditional teachings, revelation (i.e., dreams and interactions with the spirit world), and relationality (Lavalee, 2009). This literature supports the weaving together of Indigenous and Western science. Royce-Botha (2011) presents Engestrom’s concept of “knotworking” as a potential template for the mixing of Western and Indigenous methods. Knotworking depicts a tribal community and a researcher in a constant sequence of establishing, relating, identifying, reflecting, and changing the actual focus and significance of research based on past actions, present-time behaviors, and their respective knowledge; in doing so they create an authentic research process that is meaningful and relevant for Indigenous communities and researchers.

Belief systems among Indigenous populations also emphasize the importance of interdependence and reciprocity. Our focus group results highlight the Fort Peck Tribes’ core philosophies related to reciprocity, sharing, and giving back, and may be generalizable to other tribal-academic partnerships because, despite the growing body of knowledge in recent years related to conducting research with Indigenous communities, challenges still remain for outside researchers in understanding how to be authentic in a research partnership with Indigenous peoples (Jagosh et al., 2015; Mosavel, Ahmed, Daniels, & Simon, 2011). Salois and colleagues (2006) present a conceptual model grounded in spirituality, reciprocity, and harmony that emphasizes the importance of sharing from the heart to build relationships during research with tribal communities. Further, there is a foundational belief among Indigenous communities in maintaining social, cultural, and interpersonal balance among people in that, when one is given something, one must give something back (Dieter & Otway, 2002). Nicholls et al. (2009) developed the concept of reflexivity for researchers working with Indigenous communities, meaning that researchers must not come to Indigenous communities with the intention of being emotionally detached and personally withdrawn, with rigid definitions of research processes and goals, or with expectations of research participant homogeneity. Rather, strength-based collaborative research with Indigenous populations is fostered through researchers’ ability to be transparent about themselves on a personal level, to engage in meaningful interpersonal relationships with community members, and to work toward the highest good for the collective.

Finally, avoiding further exploitation—which can come in the form of conducting research to get grants to fund research and publish, but not to ultimately solve problems—means that researchers must commit to project sustainability and solution-focused processes. This mindset is a challenge for the health research system, for which successful research projects or successful intervention strategies may stop after the funding has ended. Few health research dollars, currently, can be translated into perpetual programming, and funding in the social services sphere is insufficient to implement all the useful interventions that researchers may develop. One of the keys to giving back to tribal communities is building structures that ensure health intervention sustainability over time.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we present a set of principles that can guide researchers in developing strength-based collaborative research projects with Indigenous populations. Our findings are grounded in: 1) spending time with the community prior to the research taking place; 2) respect for the diversity of community values, perspective, and knowledge; 3) respect for the history of the community; 4) respect for tribal customs and practices; 5) respect for Native epistemology; and 6) giving back and reciprocity. Furthermore, despite more than a decade of efforts to improve health research with Indigenous communities through the implementation of community-based participatory research projects, our findings indicate a continued need for vigilance in understanding the profound impact of colonization on the individual- and community-level lived experience for Indigenous communities. We also found that strength-based collaborative research with Indigenous communities must embrace an Indigenous worldview and incorporate those beliefs and practices as part of the core research process, not just as something else to be studied. Finally, it is necessary to create community-academic partnerships that support both the researched and researcher in a mutually respectful and nonjudgmental manner and that allow for mutual giving, receiving, and sharing. By approaching community-academic relationships in this way, strength-based collaborative research is as much about the journey of the relationship between Indigenous communities and academics, as it is about promoting health equality.

REFERENCES

- Cajete, G. (2000). *Native science: Natural laws of interdependence*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers.
- Castleden, H., Morgan, V., & Lamb, C. (2012). "I spent the first year drinking tea": Exploring Canadian researchers' perspectives on community-based participatory research involving Indigenous peoples. *Canadian Geographer*, 56, 160-179. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0064.2012.00432.x>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2011a). *CDC health disparities & inequalities report—United States, 2011*. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- CDC. (2011b). *Sexually transmitted disease surveillance 2010*. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous research methodologies*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Christopher, S., Watts, V., Knows His Gun McCormick, A., & Young, S. (2008). Building and maintaining trust in a community based participatory research partnership. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98, 1398-1406. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2007.125757>
- Christopher, S., Saha, R., Lachapelle, P., Jennings, D., Wagner, S., Copper, C., . . . Colclough, Y. (2011). Applying Indigenous CBPR principles to partnership development in health disparities research. *Family and Community Health Journal*, 34, 246-255. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/FCH.0b013e318219606f>
- Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 27, 44-54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1321103X060270010301>
- Dieter, C. & Otway, L. (2002). Research as a spiritual contract: An Aboriginal women's health project. *Centres of Excellence for Women's Health Research Bulletin*, 2, 14-15. Retrieved from <http://www.cwhn.ca/en/taxonomy/term/4397>
- Duran E. (2006). *Healing the soul wound*. New York: Teachers Press.
- Elston, K., Saunders, V., Hayes, B., Bainbridge, R. & McCoy, B. (2013). Building Indigenous Australian research capacity. *Contemporary Nurse*, 46, 6-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5172/conu.2013.46.1.6>
- Geia, L., Hayes, B., & Usher, K. (2013). Yarning/Aboriginal storytelling: Towards an understanding of an Indigenous perspective and its implications for research practice. *Contemporary Nurse*, 46, 13-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5172/conu.2013.46.1.13>

- Jagosh, J., Bush, P., Salsberg, J., Macaulay, A., Greenhalgh, T., Wong, G., . . . Pluye, P. (2015). A realist evaluation of community-based participatory research: Partnership synergy, trust building and related ripple effects. *BMC Public Health*, *15*, 725. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-1949-1>
- Koster, R., Baccar, K., & Lenrelin, R. (2012). Moving from research ON to research WITH and FOR Indigenous communities: A critical reflection on community based participatory research. *Canadian Geographer*, *56*, 195-210. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0064.2012.00428.x>
- Kovach, M. (2012). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press.
- Lambert, L. (2013a, October). *Looking forward, reaching back*. Presentation at American Indigenous Research Association Conference, Pablo, MT. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-H199XZE4k&feature=youtu.be>
- Lambert, L. (2013b). *Spider conceptual framework. Indigenous research paradigm*. Pablo, MT: American Indigenous Research Association. Retrieved from <http://americanindigenousresearchassociation.org/mission/spider-conceptual-framework/>
- Lavalee, L. F. (2009). Practical application of an Indigenous research framework and two qualitative Indigenous research methods: Sharing circles and Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *8*(1), 21-40. Retrieved from <http://www.iiqm.ualberta.ca/en/InternationalJournalofQualitati.aspx>
- Marks, L. (2007). Great mysteries: Native northern American religions and participatory visions. *Revisions*, *29*, 29-36.
- McDonald, E., Priest, N., Doyle, J., Bailie, R., & Waters, E. (2010). Issues and challenges for systematic reviews in Indigenous health. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, *64*, 643-644. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech.2008.077503>
- Mosavel, M., Ahmed, R., Daniels, D. & Simon, C. (2011). Community researchers conducting health disparities research: Ethical and other insights from fieldwork journaling. *Social Science & Medicine*, *73*, 145-152. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.04.029>
- Nicholls, R. (2009). Research and Indigenous participation: Critical reflexive methods. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *12*, 117-126. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645570902727698>
- Richmond, C., Elliott, S.J., Matthews, R., & Elliott, B. The political ecology of health: Perceptions of environment, economy, health and well-being among 'Namgis First Nation'. (2005). *Health & Place*, *11*, 349-365. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2004.04.003>

- Royce-Botha, L. (2011). Mixing methods as a process towards Indigenous methodologies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 14, 313-325. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2010.516644>
- Salois, E., Holkup, P., Fripp-Rumer, T., & Weinrent, C. (2006). Research as a spiritual covenant. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 28, 505-524. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0193945906286809>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Suaalii-Sauni, T., & Fulu-Aiolupotea, S. (2014). Decolonising Pacific research, building Pacific research communities and developing Pacific research tools: The case of the talanoa and the faafaletui in Samoa. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 55, 331-344. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/apv.12061>
- Tobias, J., Richmond, C., & Luginaah, I. (2013). Community-based participatory research (CBPR) with Indigenous communities: Producing respectful and reciprocal research. *Journal of Empirical Research for Human Research Ethics*, 8, 129-140. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/jer.2013.8.2.129>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2014). *Population and housing unit estimates*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/popest/estimates.html>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2008). *Secretary's Advisory Committee on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives for 2020: Phase I Report: Recommendations for the framework and format of Healthy People 2020*. Retrieved from <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2010/hp2020/advisory/PhaseI/default.htm>
- Wilson, K. (2003). Therapeutic landscapes and First Nations peoples: An exploration of culture, health and place. *Health & Place*, 9, 83-93. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1353-8292\(02\)00016-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1353-8292(02)00016-3)
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Fernwood Publishing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Ceremony of Research Project was funded by the National Institutes of Health Award Number: 1 RC4 RR031336. The authors would like to thank the Fort Peck Tribal Council for their support of the Ceremony of Research and their belief in community-academic partnerships to implement respectful and relevant research with American Indian communities. We are grateful for the thoughtfulness and wisdom of the Ceremony of Research project advisory board who provided guidance and oversight for the project.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dr. Rink is an Associate Professor in Health and Human Development at Montana State University. She is the corresponding author for this manuscript and can be reached at 318 Herrick Hall, the Department of Health and Human Development, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana 59715. Her e-mail is elizabeth.rink@montana.edu. Her phone number is (406) 994-3833.

Dr. Bird is the Grants and Program Specialist for the College of Education, Health and Human Development at Montana State University.

Mr. FourStar and Ms. Ricker, at the time that the Ceremony of Research Project was implemented, worked for the Fort Peck Tribal Health Department. At present they are independent consultants.

Ms. Runs-Above/Meyers, at the time that the Ceremony of Research Project was implemented, worked for Fort Peck Community College. At present she is an independent consultant.

Dr. Hallum-Montes worked as independent consultant on the project.