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Studying the Other or Becoming the Other: Engaging with Indigenous Peoples in IS Research

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Abstract:

In this paper, we report on a panel discussion at the 2019 International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) held in Munich, Germany. This panel discussed the ethics and politics of engagement with Indigenous peoples in information systems (IS) research. As members of a research team that have studied how Indigenous peoples use social media to collaborate and further their cause, we have recently learnt about some unintended consequences that IS research has. Since others could easily appropriate our findings for political purposes, we believe that we as IS researchers need to become more sensitive to the ways in which we study and engage with "the Other". Hence, the panelists discussed and debated the nature and extent of a researcher's engagement when studying Indigenous peoples and how they use information systems/information technology. The panel, which Michael Myers chaired, included three panelists who have studied how Indigenous people use media (Liz Davidson, Amber Young, and Hameed Chughtai) and one panelist who has studied Indigenous theories in IS (Pitso Tsibolane).

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples, Engagement, Ethics, Politics, Social Inclusion.

1   Introduction

Based on our interest in how information systems (IS) can promote social inclusion, our research team obtained a Worldwide Universities Network research grant to investigate how Indigenous peoples use social media. We set out to study how Indigenous peoples use technologies such as social media and the Internet to coordinate digital activism campaigns and protests (Ortiz et al., 2019). Increasingly, Indigenous peoples from around the world no longer work in isolation but collaborate across social media and attract international support for their digital activism campaigns. Most such campaigns focus on issues such as restoring cultural identity restoration and preserving natural resources (Young, 2018). A recent example includes the "Idle No More" campaign that originated in Canada. This campaign started out as a local movement to protect Indigenous environment and culture but spread as far as Hawai'i and New Zealand where other Indigenous communities appropriated the #IdleNoMore theme to address cultural and environmental issues (Caven, 2013).

Though we recognized this topic's importance from the start, shortly after we began the project, we learnt about how much this topic intimately relates to the ethics and politics of engagement in research. The need for ethical engagement has particular salience given that most Indigenous peoples are vulnerable due to the colonial oppression's lingering effects. While we have tended to think of ourselves in the past as independent, objective scholars, we have started to question this stance (see also Joia, Davison, Andrade, Urquhart, & Kah, 2011). Hence, at a panel at the 40th International Conference on Information Systems (Munich, Germany), we discussed and debated the nature and extent of a Western researcher's engagement when studying indigenous peoples. This resulting discussion, which we summarize in this paper, provides food for thought for anyone interested in promoting ethical interactions between Western researchers and indigenous peoples.

2   Indigenous Peoples and the Process of Othering

The term Indigenous peoples "is an umbrella enabling communities and peoples to come together, transcending their own colonized contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organize and struggle collectively for self-determination on the global and local stages" (Smith, 2012, p. 17). Encyclopædia Britannica defines Indigenous peoples as "native inhabitants who were dispossessed of their land by outside peoples, either by conquest, occupation, settlement, or some combination of the three. The term most commonly refers to those peoples subjugated since the late 15th century by European powers and their colonies" (Lee-Nichols, n.d.). Colonialism has marginalized many Indigenous people (also sometimes known as First Nation people, Aboriginal people, or Native people) who continue to face threats to their sovereignty, wellbeing, and natural environment. In colonized contexts where Western culture dominates, colonizers often build social constructions of meaning around a rigid hierarchy in which the colonizers outrank the colonized (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998). The "othering" process (i.e., representing the colonizers as typical and normal and the colonized as exotic or primitive and, thus, the "Other") has a central role in this hierarchical social construction (MacNaughton & Davis, 2001).

Indigenous groups may use information systems in ways similar to dominant society groups (e.g., to run tribal affairs related to finance, accounting, and member engagement). Yet, we should also consider that Indigenous groups and Westerners may conceptualize and use information systems in vastly different ways, which the academic literature does not always account for. In contemporary IS studies, one can find the following phrase (in one form or another) in abundance: "we live in an increasingly digital world". While researchers often use the latter part as a starting point of inquiry, they uncritically use the former—the "we"—to mean individuals in dominant society (i.e., the colonizers). Edward Said (2003) has argued that one can discuss and analyze this uncritical acceptance of Western authority as the default "as the corporate institution for dealing with [the Other]—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (p. 3). We agree with Said and suggest that this "we" establishes an invisible border between people in the West (including researchers based in the West or researchers who use theoretical frameworks and methods that individuals built using the principles developed in the West) and others (including the human subjects of inquiry that may reside in radically different socio-political contexts). Thus, researchers often build new insights on a moral foundation that accepts the West's theoretical dominance over other epistemes and, in so doing, contribute to the othering process and reinforce the border between the researcher and the researched (Hooks, 1992, 2013).

According to the critical theorist Bell Hooks, theory should transfer knowledge across borders and find ways to reach the other side. Recently, Indigenous scholar Linda Smith (2012) made a similar analysis and suggested "in a very real sense research has been an encounter between the West and the Other. Much more is known about one side of those encounters than is known about the other side" (p. 8). Researchers have made little effort to truly cross the border and learn from Indigenous peoples, their theories, stories, and knowledge. For example, Hooks (2013, p. 143) reflects on the uncritical state of theory as follows:

> *[While feminist theory and cultural criticism] was all about border crossing [of seeking to learn from the other], there was little talk about actual practice, of what makes bonding possible across race, class, gender, and diverse politics. Our silence about practice surfaced because no one really wanted to talk about the difficulties of bonding across differences, the breakdowns in communications, the disappointments, the betrayals.*

3   Decolonizing Information Systems Research

The term decolonization refers to the socio-political process of undoing colonization's effects. IS scholars have an interest in understanding the extent to which information systems and IS research embody colonial or postcolonial systems (Lin, Kuo, & Myers, 2015; Ravishankar, Pan, & Myers, 2013; Smith, 2012) and how systems and IS research can be decolonized (Chughtai et al., 2020). One faces two problems in decolonizing IS research. First, researchers rely too much on methods and theories that are built by/for the Western world to develop new theoretical insights. These insights—which no doubt have much value—may be unfit to explore the problems of the Other (i.e., Indigenous peoples and other ethnic social groups that subscribe to radically different worldviews). Second, researchers often consider Indigenous peoples and their work subpar and unfit for modern research. We question this orthodoxy in Hooks' (2009) critical spirit and reject the dangerous view that "the Other who is subjugated, who is subhuman, lacks the ability to comprehend, to understand, to see the working of the powerful" (Hooks, 2009, p. 92). Instead, with this work, we focus on opening a dialogue toward accepting Indigenous knowledge, methods, and perspectives in IS research.

Some IS researchers have previously warned that others can misappropriate research intended to promote social good for harm. Thus, they have called for researchers to "exert mindfulness" toward developing more responsible scholarship (Young, Selander, & Vaast, 2019). Since our research with Indigenous peoples could have unintended consequences and others could potentially appropriate it for political purposes, we believe that we as IS researchers need to become more sensitive to the ways in which we study "the Other" or engage with "the Other". We also want to be mindful to ensure social-inclusion efforts do not function as oppressive tools for assimilation. We focus on understanding ethical ways to include Indigenous peoples in the research process and consequent benefits without dictating the ways in which we include Indigenous peoples. The AIS has a mission to "serve society through the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of excellence in the practice and study of information systems" (AIS, n.d.). Thus, we need to make sure that we actually serve society and make it better, not worse. That is, we must ensure that members in a dominant society do not disproportionately benefit from our research's benefits and that individuals outside dominant society do not disproportionately carry its costs.

4   Organization of the Panel

Michael Myers chaired and moderated the panel. After he introduced the panel's purpose, Liz Davidson, Hameed Chughtai, and Pitso Tsibolane each made a presentation on the question: "How should we engage with Indigenous peoples when conducting IS research and to what ends?". As Amber Young could not attend ICIS, Myers briefly summarized her views on the topic. In discussing this question, the panelists also discussed other questions, such as:

- Should we aim to remain neutral and objective with respect to Indigenous peoples' concerns?
- If we are sympathetic to their concerns, how does that affect our studies?
- Should we support Indigenous peoples and become actively engaged in supporting them (e.g., by participating in a protest or writing papers to draw attention to their plight)?
- Should we retain a critical stance towards dominant power structures and marginalized ones?
- Should only Indigenous scholars themselves conduct research on Indigenous peoples?

Three rounds of discussion and debate followed these presentations. During each round, Myers posed a question to the panelists. After each panelist had responded, he then opened the floor for comments and questions from the audience. At the end of each round, he asked the audience to vote on a question related to the particular topic (indicating their support for or against by a show of hands). He asked the following three questions:

1) Should IS researchers study marginalized groups such as Indigenous peoples? Can IS researchers and our typical (well-accepted) research methods represent Indigenous narratives?

2) Are there substantive and consequential differences in IS research into Indigenous groups and their activities compared to IS research into other subjects and, if so, what are they? Does labeling people as "marginalized" marginalize or empower these groups?

3) How should editors assess papers that study Indigenous peoples? Should they apply the same scientific objectivity and distance to such studies?

Michael pointed out that, in answering these questions, the panelists should keep in mind the AIS's mission to "serve society through the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of excellence in the practice and study of information systems" (AIS, n.d.).

After the panelists and the audience discussed these three questions, Myers asked each panelist to give a brief final statement. He then concluded by briefly summarizing the key points raised.

5 Initial Position Statements

To stimulate debate and to surface varied perspectives, the panelists each articulated a viewpoint on whether and how IS researchers might study how IS/IT Indigenous peoples use IS/IT (particularly social media) to express and gain voice.

Liz Davidson argued that most IS researchers should refrain from studying how Indigenous peoples use information technologies. As most IS researchers are typically ensconced in business schools, few have adequate anthropological or sociological training to understand the complex societal, economic, cultural, and historical issues these peoples experience. Following their dominant norms and structures, Western universities expect IS researchers to publish research in IS and management journals to advance their career. Can IS researchers authentically articulate Indigenous peoples' experiences and how they use information technically as theoretically driven "contributions" to the IS literature? Given that IS research has received criticism for lacking relevance to more obvious audiences in business settings, one can doubt whether such publications would have much relevance or utility to Indigenous peoples. Further, researchers have the potential to exploit Indigenous peoples as research subjects primarily for their own or others' (e.g., management constituents) benefit. In some fields, researchers have used Indigenous peoples as a convenience sample or as a novelty to make their research more exotic or topical. Researchers have also coerced Indigenous peoples into participating in research. Given the ease with which one can scrape user-generated social media data from various channels (with or without the content-producers' consent), IS researchers can easily repeat these patterns by expropriating the content that these groups generate in order to pursue their own interpretations, interests, and priorities. The history of marginalized peoples being experimented on reminds one about the real damage that researchers can do when they use vulnerable people. If IS researchers are too removed from Indigenous groups, they may not recognize the potential for their research to have paradoxical effects, such as when research benefits leaders but not the individuals that such leaders disenfranchise. Researchers often cannot predict ways in which others may use their research against the individuals the researchers study. Should we ask Indigenous peoples, as potential study subjects, to assume unknown risks? Perhaps, but only if IS research on how Indigenous people use IS/IT would likely benefit these groups. However, given the concerns that we express here, primarily Indigenous scholars should conduct such research (in relevant fields) as these scholars are in the best position to address issues and to serve their communities. At the least, IS researchers should not assume the right to make Indigenous peoples their study object, but rather they need to be invited to do so.

Amber Young[1] posited that non-Indigenous IS researchers can ethically study Indigenous peoples but that they should be sympathetic to the cause(s) of the Indigenous peoples they study. They should not remain neutral but take an informed stand as political and ethical issues arise. Emancipatory action research and similar methods provide a way for non-Indigenous scholars to join Indigenous peoples in their struggles. Researchers should not shy away from engaging with Indigenous peoples. Excluding Indigenous peoples from research samples may serve to further marginalize them, and researchers who exclude them may characterize vulnerability in a paternalistic manner. If all research focuses on and engages with subjects from only our dominant society, our research implications may not generalize to Indigenous societies. As a result, Indigenous peoples will not share in research-generated knowledge's benefits. Many Indigenous groups own corporations. For instance, Native American Nations are often hybrid organizations that operate in political, corporate, and cultural spheres. Thus, IS researchers' management backgrounds can prove beneficial when studying such people. Researchers should find ways to include Indigenous peoples in research processes and consequent benefits. While Indigenous scholars have unique insights, so too do non-Indigenous scholars and other Indigenous group members who may not have an Indigenous scholar to represent their views. As outsiders, non-Indigenous researchers may notice subtle patterns and political dynamics that in-group members do not notice. Yet, researchers have special obligations when working with Indigenous groups. For instance, we should not criticize cultural practices we do not understand or assume that Indigenous peoples will find value in the outcomes that we value. Research with Indigenous groups should always benefit the group and not dominant society alone. Researchers should be limited in what they can publish from research with Indigenous groups and respect cultural copyright differences. Indigenous leaders should have veto power over certain research narratives to minimize the potential for someone to weaponize research findings. Research with these groups should be altruistic, and publication incentives may muddle motives. Therefore, authors and editors should consider a publication's value against any risks it may have to the focal group.

Hameed Chughtai argued that, not only should an IS field researcher from a different culture be able to study Indigenous peoples, IS researchers should also be free to retain a critical stance on the particular movement or cause that they study. In fact, without engaging with Indigenous peoples, researchers can inadvertently further marginalize the marginalized. As for why, an Indigenous researcher might already be involved in the context and may not be able to step out of it to see the bigger picture (e.g., postcolonial context). On the other hand, an external researcher might be able to see the bigger picture. Hameed argued that an external researcher cannot fully know what occurs in the field but needs to participate in the field while upholding a critical distance. While we have a moral duty to tell the truth, we cannot truly know what occurs without becoming closer to the researched. To address this conundrum, Hameed suggested that researchers need to take a critically engaged approach. He argued that such an approach has two main steps. First, one needs to acknowledge one's own position before studying the other. Most if not all Indigenous practices reside in a postcolonial context. Researchers always have preconceptions about the research context (although they may not recognize their own prejudices), and they cannot set such preconceptions aside. Second, researchers need to critique the context. Without taking a critical stance, researchers produce an account about the Indigenous—the Other—either in relation to the dominant culture (be it the West or the East) or the dominant forces in the Indigenous culture that might contribute tow marginalization (Said, 1989, p. 212). Hence, Hameed argued that, when researchers study the Other, they should not see it as a study on the Other but as a study along with the Other toward achieving an understanding that is anchored in the Other's context. By becoming engaged with Indigenous peoples, IS researchers can better understand their complex social situations and, at least, tell the Indigenous people's stories from their own perspectives. To situate contemporary IS research in relation to the broader societal debate concerning contemporary postcolonial issues, we must begin by attending to the ways in which we—as researchers—engage with the Other.

Pitso Tsibolane argued that, while dynamic, complex, and highly contested, Indigenous research nevertheless provides IS researchers with a rich perspective to navigate knowledge outside the Western research paradigm. He argued that researchers should understand Indigenous research not only as the study of materials and sources to establish facts and reach new conclusions but also as an engagement with Indigenous communities that seeks to re-center Indigenous voices, languages, concepts, worldviews, histories, experiences, knowledge, and beliefs. All researchers who commit to advancing knowledge

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[1] As we state in Section 4, Michael Myers presented Amber Young's position in the panel proper. However, in this paper, we simply refer to Amber Young herself as presenting for simplicity.

should enter the Indigenous research field with an attitude to know and understand theory and research from Indigenous perspectives and purposes. Such researchers need to approach Indigenous research both as a form of epistemic resistance and as a critique of the marginalizing effects of mainstream approaches and coloniality. While researchers should always be critical when conducting research, engaging in Indigenous research calls for reflexive positionality towards how power and control manifest and what they mean in a study's context. This means that Indigenous communities should have the ability to negotiate the research agenda, methodologies, and cultural boundaries. Tsibolane proposed Ubuntu, the Sub-Saharan relational ontology of being and becoming human, as a useful approach to study the various roles that information systems have in Indigenous people's lives. Embracing Ubuntu's relational humanness in Indigenous research implies that one recognizes the "complex wholeness involving the multilayered and incessant interaction of all entities" (Ramose, 2009, p. 308). These entities refer to the ethical interdependence between human beings, the natural environment, and non-living ancestors. Ubuntu as an Indigenous theory provides an ideal theoretical lens with which to better understand the concerns, struggles, and aspirations of the Indigenous Other. The Ubunti maxim is: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1990, p. 106). This maxim thus provides IS researchers from different backgrounds a generous and inclusive paradigm. A prior engagement with Indigenous theories and perspectives, therefore, serves as a necessary entry point for researchers to conduct ethical and culturally sensitive Indigenous IS research.

6   Three Key Questions for Debate

After the panelists presented their position statements that we summarize in Section 5, Myers posed three questions to the panelists and opened the discussion to audience members.

6.1   Should IS Researchers Study Marginalized Groups such as Indigenous Peoples? Can IS Researchers and our Typical (Well-accepted) Research Methods Represent Indigenous Narratives?

Liz Davidson reiterated her arguments that IS researchers should not study marginalized groups such as Indigenous peoples because a most IS academics focus on publishing papers needed for tenure and promotion, and scholars should not use vulnerable people as research subjects simply to get their research papers published in top journals. Indigenous peoples have been exploited enough without IS scholars contributing to further exploitation. Further, IS scholars tend not to be adequately trained in research methods and theories that would best suit this kind of work; hence, our current IS research methods do not allow one to represent Indigenous narratives well.

Hameed Chughtai argued that IS scholars should study marginalized groups such as Indigenous peoples. He agreed that they should be sympathetic to their cause and should certainly not exploit Indigenous people for their own purposes. However, a critical stance could be valuable. Our current IS research methods do not allow one to represent Indigenous narratives well since one needs a critically engaged stance with respect to IS research methods. He pointed out that many social theories of human interaction, social structures, and agency are built with, and for, predominantly white Western societies (Spivak, 1999). Therefore, our standard toolkit of research methods can neither capture nor represent Indigenous narratives even if researchers apply them to marginalized groups located in a Western geographical context such as the Sámi people of northern Scandinavia.

Pitso Tsibolane argued that IS scholars can study Indigenous peoples as long as they seek to understand Indigenous perspectives. They need to recognize colonial history and the ways in which it often subtly influences current research methods. Hence, our current research methods do not allow one to represent Indigenous narratives well, and we need to decolonize these methods themselves.

6.2   Are There Substantive and Consequential Differences in IS Research into Indigenous Groups and Their Activities Compared to IS Research into Other Subjects and, if so, What are They? Does Labeling People as "Marginalized" Marginalize or Empower These Groups?

Liz Davidson argued that this important ethical issue does not pertain only to research that involves Indigenous peoples. In the past, IS research researchers have gained access to research settings or data sets without the informed consent of the individuals or groups studied (e.g., when firm managers have turned over employees' email data for research studies). Today's institutional review boards (IRBs) place some constraints on these practices by requiring that research subjects provide their informed consent. However, what does "informed consent" mean given the many "public" (e.g., on social media platforms) data sources that any researcher willing to "scrape" them for data can use? So-called "de-identified data" (not personally identifiable) also tend to escape IRB scrutiny. These IRB loopholes suggest that IS researchers have the right to study any groups or activities that occur "in public" (such as protest postings via Twitter, Facebook, and so on). While all such research studies have ethical considerations, the consequences for Indigenous peoples may be greater. One cannot easily mask (de-identify or anonymize) contextual details and personal identities in small, culturally distinctive communities, and members in Indigenous communities may not share the same values and expectations about what constitutes "private" activity or the proper ways to use community knowledge with researchers. Acknowledging these communities as "marginalized" in terms of dominant research practices, we should respect their right to control how researchers interpret their voices and actions in research.

Hameed Chughtai argued that radical differences in IS research into Indigenous peoples and their (digitally mediated) practices exist. Unlike conventional research subjects, Indigenous peoples subscribe to and live by philosophies that differ from Western worldviews. One can adapt some Indigenous practices to contemporary IS researchers' theoretical and methodological toolkit but not others. For example, while researchers may see a technology qua technology, Indigenous people might see it as having deep spiritual or sacred meanings and, thus, may not understand it in the same way. Similarly, the social structure or agency concepts can differ in the Indigenous context, which researchers might either overlook or dismiss under the guise of (mis)interpretation. Hameed suggested that, in interpreting Indigenous practices, researchers should use theories and methods that are built with Indigenous epistemic frameworks. Hameed also argued against using labels as they carry the danger of reinforcing "us" over "them". In order to truly address differences, one should not label Indigenous people as marginalized; instead, one should call them by their actual Indigenous names (be it of things, people, or places). While it is fruitful (and to some extent empowering) to use the marginalized perspective as a starting point of inquiry, researchers should be careful in labeling an Indigenous group as marginalized when describing their practices or engagements.

Pitso Tsibolane argued Indigenous people and the idea of scientific research have a deeply problematic historical relationship. Smith (2012) characterizes this tenuous relationship as one that "stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful" (p. 1). Researchers stepping into Indigenous research inadvertently shoulder the violent legacies associated with European imperialism and colonialism. Therefore, IS researchers who wish to explore this research area should critically reflect about the social, political, cultural, and ethical implications of their ontological and epistemological assumptions before they engage with Indigenous people and communities. Undertaking research among Indigenous communities also calls for IS researchers to understand the beliefs, values, and worldviews central to the specific community they wish to engage with. To do so, they need to study the works of Indigenous scholars who have highlighted decolonial and multi-paradigmatic approaches such as Kaupapa Maori and the Sub-Saharan relational ontology of being human—Ubuntu, the Andean philosophy good living—Buen-Vivir, and others to think critically about indigeneity and research.

Tsibolane also argued that labeling Indigenous people as "the marginalized" can be a form of epistemic violence. The powerful could potentially employ this label to create difference between themselves as the norm and the Indigenous Other as inferior in order to further deny the marginalized Other subjectivity and voice (Spivak, 1988). Therefore, IS researchers need to be reflexive about how they use marginalizing terminology, their positionality, and their attitudes towards the plight and agendas of Indigenous communities.

6.3   How Should Editors Assess Papers that Study Indigenous Peoples? Should They Apply the Same Scientific Objectivity and Distance to Such Studies?

Liz Davidson suggested that applying the dominant standards for "scientific objectivity and distance" to studies that incorporate or present research from Indigenous peoples' perspective will likely be problematic. It is a bit arrogant to assert that totally "objective" research exists when studying social phenomena. All researchers approach their studies with their own specific interests and theoretical and methodological perspectives. That said, Indigenous people' ontologies and epistemologies may differ substantively from those that one can commonly find in IS journals. Research that adopts or develops Indigenous knowledge about and for Indigenous peoples (related to IS use) might become more accepted for publication in the IS field by following the types of practices that brought qualitative, interpretive research into the mainstream of IS journals in the 1980s and 1990s. For instance, conferences, mini-tracks, and journal special issues could focus on developing new methods and theoretical perspectives and exemplar research publications could address Indigenous practices, ontologies, and epistemologies. These efforts could build a cadre of qualified and interested reviewers for such research.

Hameed Chughtai argued that editors should welcome research into Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples, like any other social group, use digital technologies and social media for diverse reasons (which includes raising awareness and activism). It is quite dangerous to exclude a social group because their practices do not conform to the dominant discourse. He reminded the audience that the Association for Information Systems has an aim, among other things, "to serve society". Therefore, editors have a moral duty to make sure that reputable IS journals hear the voice of the marginalized groups such as Indigenous peoples (Ortiz et al., 2019). He further argued in favor of using Indigenous methods and theories to explore the issues surrounding Indigenous peoples. He reminded the audience that cultural anthropology for many years treated its subjects (the Indigenous peoples) from a distance as a scientific curiosity. IS scholars must learn from the mistake of early cultural anthropology and take a more involved and engaged approach to study Indigenous phenomena. As the literature lacks Indigenous theoretical toolkits, we might need new principles for evaluating Indigenous research.

Pitso Tsibolane argued that peer review for Indigenous research should exercise the necessary quality standards and require researchers to disclose their reflexive positionality. Researchers need to demonstrate that they have reciprocally and meaningfully included Indigenous participants in the research process and prioritized Indigenous ways of doing and knowing. While Indigenous research remains a relatively new developing discourse in the IS field, Indigenous scholars from other fields have debated ways and principles to evaluate Indigenous research for some time. Gleaning from their work and the principles they have developed could enable the field to develop IS-relevant Indigenous research evaluation frameworks. Weber-Pillwax (1999) suggests a useful framework to do Indigenous research. She says that, unlike traditional research, one should ground Indigenous research in the ways of who and how Indigenous peoples are.

Tsibolane proposed an evaluation framework based on the seven principles that Weber-Pillwax (1999), an Indigenous researcher in educational studies, has articulated. Other researchers have subsequently affirmed and applied the principles in other research fields (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2015; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Ray, 2012; Smith, 2012). First, editors and reviewers should consider whether the research in question recognizes the relatedness and interconnectedness of living and non-living things. Second, they should determine whether the motives for the research ultimately benefit the concerned Indigenous communities. Third, they should assess whether the research's foundations reflect the lived experiences of the studied Indigenous communities. Fourth, they should assess whether the theories and methods that researchers used to conduct the research reside in the Indigenous epistemology. Fifth, research should not only be transformative but, sixth, should also value and recognize the cultures, languages, and the sacredness of personal and community integrity. Finally, they should assess whether the research recognizes indigenous languages and cultures as living processes.

6.4   Audience Response and Lessons Learnt

After a constructive discussion, we found that the audience primarily favored the position that IS researchers can study marginalized groups such as Indigenous peoples. The audience also favored (though not unanimously) the position that our typical research methods do not allow one to represent Indigenous narratives well. The audience agreed with the position that IS research into Indigenous groups differs substantially from research on other IS research subjects. As for labeling people as marginalized,

most audience members thought that this term was acceptable. Given the panel's critical nature, we unsurprisingly found that the audience agreed with the position that one should not apply positivistic objectivity criteria and distance to Indigenous research. Rather, editors need to ensure that authors engage with Indigenous theories and perspectives in an ethical and culturally sensitive way.

Despite panelists' competing positions and compelling counterarguments, we observed that the panel converged on a single issue of addressing the problematic othering process in our field. When it comes to studying Indigenous peoples and the socio-political topics entrenched in their context, the panel learnt that a conceptual ambiguity surrounding the topic exists. We can best discuss this ambiguity by categorizing it into six different issues: ambiguity in representation, ambiguity in identifying the context, ambiguity in language, ambiguity in applying theories and methods, ambiguity in knowledge-production modes, and ambiguity in assessment criteria for evaluating Indigenous research studies. These levels relate to one another in conducting and communicating academic research. Table 1 outlines these six broad levels along with a few suggested future research questions.

We agree that we need to deal with these complex and subtle issues in a careful manner. More importantly, we need to further discuss these issues by paying attention to the power relations that fuel the aforesaid ambiguities. Without solving these ambiguities, it is difficult to move toward decolonization of IS research, and we may remain shackled to the colonial ideas that are often implicit in our research.

Table 1. Ambiguities in Studying Indigenous People in IS Research

Issue	Insights	Future research questions
Ambiguity in representation	Who can and cannot represent and conduct research into Indigenous issues? One cannot consider some groups privileged over others to study select topics. Given the complex power structures that operate both inside and outside a social group, Indigenous scholars agree that it is difficult to truly know who can represent a group and who can speak on behalf of a community (Bishop, 2011; Smith, 2012). Moreover, as Bishop (1998) has said, "the manner in which 'others', that is those who are subjugated, understand their own actions and experiences often hides the true nature of their situation" (p. 213).	What ethical criteria should researchers follow to authentically represent the practices, goals, and issues related to IS research topics with Indigenous peoples? What processes might assist different stakeholders in and across affected communities to reach consensus on representation in IS research projects?
Ambiguity in identifying the context	It might be naïve to suggest that Indigenous people cannot understand their issues. Due to historical colonial issues, it is difficult to maintain a "critical distance" in order to examine sensitive issues, which pertains to both an outside researcher (who may be unfamiliar with the context) and an insider researcher (who may have an agenda that runs counter to the benefit of the community). Like Bishop (2011), we are also aware of and sensitive to "the concerns that insiders are accused of being inherently biased, too close to the culture to ask critical questions" (p. 4).	How can researchers understand the empirical setting as Indigenous sacred worlds where research is constituted, and how does the Indigenous context influence researchers? How can researchers achieve and maintain a critical distance in their empirical context?
Ambiguity in language	Others can use the language that researchers working in Indigenous contexts use against Indigenous peoples. We agree that many otherwise benign terms such as "marginal" and "oppressed" can be loaded and problematic when discussing sensitive social topics and groups. Denzin (2008) says that even the essential term "research" is a "dirty word" as it reduces the researched to subjects under the control of the researcher (p. 115). Researchers need to be positioned in the discursive practices of the Indigenous communities they wish to explore.	How can we bring language's influence on how researchers conduct IS research in Indigenous settings to the analytic foreground and critically examine it?

Table 1. Ambiguities in Studying Indigenous People in IS Research

Ambiguity in applying theories and methods	Some researchers believe that one should consider a theory or method built on the Western worldviews as being acceptable to explore Indigenous issues, with even some critical theorists holding to this view (see Bishop, 1998; Denzin, 2008).	What limitations does interpretive and critical theory have in addressing issues in an Indigenous context? What can IS researchers, who have a vested interest in traditional Western-style research methods, learn from Indigenous theories and concepts? What practical ways can IS researchers engage with Indigenous methods of doing research?
Ambiguity in knowledge-production modes	Many critical researchers and students of Indigenous studies embrace emancipation, a complex theme. By solely focusing on emancipation, one can lose sight of the larger epistemological project of uncovering, communicating, and preserving Indigenous knowledge. Hence, emancipation carries a risk of becoming an insidious theme as Smith (2012) says: "The struggle for the validity of indigenous knowledges [sic] may no longer be over the *recognition* that indigenous people have ways of knowing the world which are unique, but over proving the authenticity of, and control over, our own forms of knowledge" (original emphasis, p. 104).	How can researchers identify and address the challenges associated with the power structures and the production and legitimization of Indigenous knowledge? Who has responsibility for communicating, interpreting, translating, and applying research insights into communities and vice versa?
Ambiguity in assessment criteria for evaluating Indigenous research studies	The IS research literature contains no guiding principles to conduct and evaluate Indigenous studies. Therefore, it remains unclear how one should go about doing Indigenous research in our field. A lack of principles also creates problems for editors as they may rely on existing scholarship that may have a different agenda; for example, Denzin (2008) points out that many traditional qualitative researchers lack sensitivity to Indigenous needs and "want to control the criteria that are used to evaluate indigenous experience" (p. 100). We agree with Denzin that "the purpose of [Indigenous] research is not the production of new knowledge, per se. Rather, the purposes are pedagogical, political, moral, and ethical, involving the enhancement of moral agency, the production of moral discernment, a commitment to praxis, justice, an ethic of resistance, a performative pedagogy that resists oppression" (p. 102). Hence, we require principles for conducting Indigenous research.	What guiding principles should one follow in conducting, analyzing, and evaluating studies related to Indigenous topics?

7   Conclusions and Suggested Directions

Many people attended the panel session, which indicates that IS scholars have a lively interest in the topic. The presentations and subsequent discussion highlighted some of key challenges in moving the discussion forward. The panel and the audience agreed that research into how Indigenous peoples use IS/IT has value.

As its starting point, the panel humbly recognized that an othering process exists. That is, researchers see Indigenous peoples as unable to produce or interpret complex epistemic content and, hence, that they need to emancipate them—an emancipation that only they as Western researchers can do or that one can do only by using the theoretical frameworks and tools produced using Western knowledge. As Bishop (1998) says, some critical theorists continue to "claim that they have the formula for the emancipation of [Indigenous] as oppressed and marginalized people" (p. 212).

We observed in our panel discussion and interaction with the audience a subtle but strong preference for using Western theories in our field. For example, some scholars suggested using performativity theories that have their foundation in the new materialism and posthumanism; others pondered the possibility of using motivation and technology-acceptance theories. These theories exemplify Western thinking that decolonization debates have rejected (e.g., Bishop, 2011; Denzin, 2008; Smith, 2012; Spivak, 1999). In

contemporary qualitative studies, one can find a common thread about one's inability to take a neutral position in doing and producing research.

Of course, our field follows an unfortunate trend in qualitative studies. As Bishop (1998, p. 208) demurred:

> *Much qualitative research has also maintained a colonizing discourse of the 'other' by seeking to hide the researcher/writer under a veil of neutrality or of objectivity, a situation where the interests, concerns, and power of the researcher to determine the outcome of the research remain hidden in the text.*

Ten years after Bishop's protest, the situation remained more or less the same as Denzin (2008, pp. 99-100) pointed out:

> *Under the guise of objectivity and neutrality neoconservatives deny the culture's rights to self-determination… And some radical theorists think that only they and their theories can lead the culture into freedom, as if members of the culture suffered from an indigenous version of false consciousness.*

More recently, Kovach (2018) argued that the Western gaze still dominates qualitative research. However, we hope that our panel provides a starting point if not the way out of this colonial mindset and moves researchers towards decolonizing our field. We provide one simple but powerful message: we invite researchers to do research into Indigenous issues. The panel accepted the value that our current theories and methods generate but believed that we need new ones to understand Indigenous contexts. Like Said (2003, p. 322), we have been:

> *Arguing that [the Other] is itself a constituted entity, and that the notion that there are geographical spaces with [I]ndigenous, radically "different" inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture, or racial essence proper to that geographical space is equally a highly debatable idea. I certainly do not believe the limited proposition that only a black can write about blacks, a Muslim about Muslims, and so forth.*

7.1   Recommendations

To conclude, Myers asked each panelist to make a short concluding statement. He then thanked the panelists and the audience for the engaging panel discussion. The panel ended by calling for more research into Indigenous affairs but suggested to proceed with care. We suggest some future research directions below.

First, we recommend that scholars should revisit research's fundamental definition. As Denzin points out, critical thinking has challenged many prevalent views but "the definition of research has not changed to fit newer models of inquiry" (p. 110). We should change it. The change may require engaging with local bodies such as institutional review boards (IRBs) and the research ethics committee (RECs) that manage and control how researchers do research. Like Denzin (2008), we also take the position that "IRBs are institutional apparatuses that regulate a particular form of ethical conduct, a form that may be no longer workable in a transdisciplinary, global, and postcolonial world" (p. 97). These institutional bodies amount to "coldly calculating devices" that simplify complex concepts to build one model to fit all forms of research, which we find wrong and reflects an uncritical approach (p. 108). We encourage Indigenous researchers to work with their local research institutions in order to legitimize Indigenous research methods; the Assembly of First Nations in Canada provides some notable examples as guidelines.

Second, we recommend that researchers should attune themselves to for whom we write and for whom text speaks (Chughtai et al., 2020; Clarke & Davison, 2020) to address the problems surrounding representation, legitimacy, and authenticity in Indigenous research. We reiterate Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong's (2000) view "that questions of responsibility-for-whom will, and should, forever be paramount" (p. 125).

Third, we recommend that researchers working in Indigenous contexts should resist the temptation to blindly follow recent trends in theory and method. Many new theories have their foundations in colonial views, lack sensitivity to Indigenous peoples' issues, and, consequently, enforce, as Kovach (2018) explains, "a Western gaze that propels a ruthless materialism" (p. 388). We encourage researchers to engage with Indigenous philosophies and worldviews.

Fourth, we recommend that editors and reviewers should encourage Indigenous knowledge in the corpus of the IS research literature. Editors should encourage and guide authors to engage with Indigenous research methods and go beyond "normal" qualitative research.

Fifth, we recommend that researchers should focus on developing principles for conducting Indigenous research in our field. We provide future research questions as a starting point to develop these principles. More specifically, the principles should follow Indigenous sacred epistemology. Denzin (2008) provides one possible explanation in saying that "this sacred epistemology recognizes and interrogates the ways in which race, class, and gender operate as important systems of oppression in the world today" (p. 118).

Sixth, we recommend that researchers and editors should pay attention to the larger societal and methodological issues that surround Indigenous research. Indeed, although we have taken a small step towards decolonizing IS research, decolonization forms part of a much larger project in critical Indigenous theory. Specifically, decolonization should pave the way to healing, transformation, and mobilization (Denzin, 2008; Smith, 2012).

We believe that IS scholars have a moral duty to engage with world affairs. To that end, we require a critical stance and a stance that accepts the Other and invites the Other to speak. But, as researchers, we cannot truly know what occurs with Indigenous people without becoming closer to them. The Association for Information Systems has an aim to serve society, but it rarely discusses how researchers should do so (beyond working in and for industry and businesses). Therefore, we suggest that IS research requires a decolonial turn—a decolonial position that critiques Eurocentric hegemonic knowledge patterns and discovery claims and encourages plural ways to understand the world.

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