

The SAGE Encyclopedia of

ACTION RESEARCH

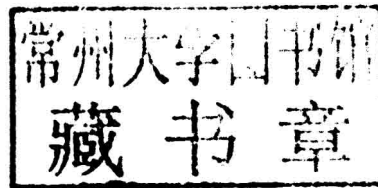
David Coghlan and Mary Brydon-Miller
Editors

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THE SAGE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
ACTION RESEARCH

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IDENTITY

Identity is a term laden with a range of meanings by scholars and practitioners, but two understandings, both relevant to action research, regularly surface. Identity can refer to core aspects of an individual—that is, what we or others view as our essence or nucleus. It can also refer to particular, pre-existing (though socially constructed) categories, including societal groups, such as gender or race; professional and occupational affiliations, such as researcher or farmer, and roles, such as manager or father. Identity has been inherent in action research since its inception because it is based on the idea that research can be pursued by those who do not identify as scholars. By design, action research brings together people with different identities—researchers and practitioners or insiders and outsiders—as part of the research process. But identity may come up in other ways as well; for example, many action researchers document conflict related to divided organizational loyalties or their own struggle with issues related to class, gender or race.

The degree to which such issues are actually engaged with ranges across approaches, especially depending on whether the research is first, second or third person research. First person research involves researchers studying their own practice; second person research is undertaken by small groups exploring individual- and group-level practice; third person research is the most similar to traditional research in that a research team (which may include scholars and/or community members) studies a separate group of individuals. First person and second person researchers customarily grapple with the implications of identity—implicitly if not explicitly—while third person researchers vary in their take-up of these concerns. This entry reviews (a) how action researchers tend to characterize identity, (b) common questions and concerns related to identity faced by researchers and (c) methodological issues and approaches.

Characterizing Identity

Action research convenes researchers and practitioners because, in part, it is based on the idea that identity affects the standpoint, or one's perspective. That is, identities function as lenses or frames that help us see some things while they obscure others. All standpoints are partial; no one is omniscient. That is the rationale for bringing together scholars and laypeople or insiders and outsiders: They will bring different and complementary insights which can create a fuller—though never complete—picture.

Many action researchers also complicate the notion of identity as standpoint in several ways. First, identities are viewed as multiple and fragmentary. As researchers, we may simplistically assign people to a category but find that those ascribed reject the label. Second, identity is constructed. While we often think in terms of taken-for-granted categories—men and women, doctor and patient, marketing and engineering—in fact, those categories are created and sustained through social interaction and are, therefore, malleable. This means that the research process itself may contribute to the blurring or reinforcing of categories. Finally, identity, and therefore standpoint, is commonly seen as fully bound up with power. Standpoints are not neutral, nor do they vary idiosyncratically; they serve some interests and not others. Moreover, identities confer or diminish power, with consequences for the authority accorded their point of view.

These characterizations of identity come into play as action researchers face basic questions and decisions related to identity in their research.

Researching Identity: Key Questions and Decision Points

While every action research project is unique, certain questions pertaining to identity emerge across studies. These interrelated questions include the following: Whose identity? What identities are explored? Is

identity the named area of study, or does it come up as a by-product or side effect—as an ‘uninvited guest’?

Members of an action research team must begin with a basic choice about whose identity they are studying: their own or others’. First and second person action research is designed to explore the self (or multiple selves), while third person researchers focus their inquiry on others. Many scholars intertwine strands of first, second, and third person research.

While any number of identities could be studied, research tends to cluster on several particular ones. First, the identities of researcher/university member/scholar and practitioner/community member/layperson are, not surprisingly, the most common area of inquiry since they are immanent in action research itself. Studies inquire into frames or assumptions held by the two groups, the kinds of conflicts that arise between them and the conditions that enable productive resolution of disagreement. A closely related set of identities is insider and outsider. Most often, the outsider is the researcher and the insider is the practitioner or community member. Similar to scholar/layperson, these kinds of studies explore their different perspectives and the possibility of confluence. Some researchers explore these topics by looking at the complexities and contradictions of being both insider *and* outsider, both academic *and* layperson.

Another common arena is various social identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability/disability, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered) and the like. Within this group, gender may be the most commonly explored, with the intertwined grouping of race, ethnicity and culture a close second. Some researchers study the intersectionality of identities, such as race and gender or gender and class. The foci of such studies vary broadly. Some researchers engaged in first person research study the impact of their own identity on the research process, such as the kinds of questions they asked and how they made sense of the data. One form of second person research is a group of people from a marginalized group, such as people of colour or the disabled, exploring how to overcome their disenfranchisement or feelings of disempowerment. Another kind of second person research investigates how people with two different and often conflicting identities, such as two cultural or religious groups, manage to bridge their differences—or fail to do so. In third person action research, a researcher might work with a group of people on an inquiry into their structural constraints or an intervention in their community. Unlike more traditional research, they might focus on how participants’ views and real-life conditions corroborate or contest popular discourse about their group, whether they are low-income African Americans, homeless men or teenage girls in rural Pakistan. Sometimes, researchers define a community in one way only to discover that

group members find other, intersecting identities to be more salient.

Finally, a connected issue is whether identity was a named focus of the original research or whether it came up as an unavoidable topic as the data collection or analysis got under way. Many studies are designed to, for example, explore a stymied policy change effort or the process by which organizational members conducted a self-evaluation, but then, they raise issues related to identity, which then becomes a theme in the write-up. This is identity as ‘uninvited guest’, meaning that it may have been seen as an intruder interfering with the ostensible focus of the study but ultimately was welcomed as an essential area to explore.

Methodological Concerns and Approaches

Action researchers studying identity face many of the methodological concerns facing those studying other topics, though the particular manifestation may vary. One common issue is voice, or the way the author or authors represent themselves in their writing. A second is validity, or how the quality of the research can be assessed. Further, those studying identity may also draw on particular approaches to data collection and analysis, especially approaches that emphasize community participation.

The authorial voice has many dimensions. One way it arises is the question of whether the voice should be univocal or multi-vocal—that is, whether the writing should include one or more distinct, differentiated perspectives. Given that identity creates standpoint, representing multiple points of view in the writing can feel truer to the basic ethos of action research. Including multiple views may also be a way to ensure that perspectives that are often marginalized—from community members, poor people or people of colour—are represented along with those of more powerful groups. However, some scholars have argued that authors should not privilege the voices of practitioners to the extent of occluding their own.

In first person research, the decision regarding one or multiple voices is usually straightforward since the author is writing about himself or herself and therefore uses his or her own voice. However, some first person research includes comments from others (taken from interviews, e-mails or other communication) that the author brings in as data and integrates into the narrative. Single authors conducting first person research can also present themselves as multi-voiced by, for example, quoting from journal entries written in the past and juxtaposing them against a more current stance or interpretation.

Second person research, by definition, raises more complexity. As research by a group on itself, it should

be written by the group, but this begs the question of whether the group should speak with a single voice or multiple voices. In some cases, authors choose to create a synthesized voice that speaks for all; in others, individual voices may be heard at various points. Usually, the individual authors are listed by name, but occasionally, a group chooses to publish under the name of the group itself.

Third person researchers must also deal with whose voice is represented. Some studies stress solidarity within groups, while others document within-group conflict and power dynamics with a multi-vocal analysis. Moreover, some research explores how the researchers' identity, however understood, influenced the dynamics between them and the group under study. The lead researchers must also identify which aspects of the study were co-shaped by others in the group. The voices of multiple group members may figure prominently, but the overarching analysis and final narrative is usually the researcher's.

Establishing validity in action research is an ongoing concern. While researchers mention a number of different assessment criteria, two stand out as particularly relevant to identity-connected inquiry. The first is visceral personal experience: Does the research feel true to those it describes, whether oneself or others? Unlike many other research topics, identity is ultimately rooted in the self, in authentic, lived knowledge. Therefore, personal reaction can play a greater role than it might under other circumstances. The second is whether the research speaks beyond just one person to multiple audiences with very different backgrounds and life experiences. Identity research can delve into one person's or one group's life experience but then radiate multiple stories that reach a disparate group of listeners.

Action research runs along a continuum from approaches that give virtually full control to university members to methods that emphasize full and equal participation by community members. Identity-related research tends towards the more participatory end of the axis, perhaps because distant, detached approaches are less able to fully document or comprehend something as personal and intimate as identity. First and second person approaches are, by definition, participatory: There is no distinction between the researcher and the researched. Third person research uses various ways to ensure participation by the study's subjects. The most common are participatory appraisals, journaling and mapping exercises and arts-based projects that call upon participants to draw upon traditional media (e.g. quilting) or photography to examine contemporary tensions. For example, the researcher might present data in non-technical, accessible ways, often via visual modes. Participants might then document their own

conditions and responses to the prompts, often using arts-based approaches.

Ultimately, identity is fundamental to the practice of action research; the question is how and how much scholars actually engage its impact and complexities.

Erica Gabrielle Foldy and Celina Su

See also autobiography; first person action research; gender issues; indigenist research; insider action research; LGBT; second person action research; third person action research

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INDIGENIST RESEARCH

Indigenist research is a form of social enquiry based on the principles and philosophies of indigenous peoples, adopted by indigenous people and designed to be conducted by indigenous people within their own communities. Its primary purpose is to allow indigenous people to represent their worlds in ways they can only do for themselves, using their own processes to express experiences, realities and understandings that are unique to indigenous society, history and culture. It achieves this purpose by drawing on indigenous philosophical understandings of the world and places itself against what is seen as an imposed (Western) view that does not acknowledge indigenous ontology and epistemology. It is an inherently political activity that critiques the assumptions of colonial constructions and understandings of indigenous society and culture.

Indigenist research comprises a range of methodologies for engaging individuals and communities in research, usually from an intra-society perspective

rather than for external interests. It presents a culturally specific way of empowering indigenous people as the creators and collectors of knowledge and information rather than as the providers of information to others. Furthermore, its core purpose is to allow indigenous communities to engage in creating their own history and understandings of culture in ways that are internally consistent with the ontologies and epistemologies of that culture and that deeply engage with their experience of events and social process, expressing them in language, narrative and styles that are culturally appropriate. It provides the intellectual context, language and rationale for research as a whole-of-life and fundamentally political engagement with the world. In this way, it reflects the principles of action research, allowing for context-specific communal self-development and empowerment amongst indigenous communities. This entry reviews the history and development of indigenist research and the epistemological foundations and principles of this form of research, emphasizing the importance of social relationships in indigenist research. It then examines the relationship between indigenist research and action research and the role of indigenist research in achieving positive change.

History and Development of Indigenist Research

Indigenist research has emerged as an alternative mode of engagement with knowledge to the dominant mode of Western research. It arose from a need to challenge outsider views of indigenous cultures, especially where these views sought to research culture for outsider purposes (e.g. in anthropological, ethnographic or scientific studies of indigenous people, communities and societies). The Māori indigenist researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith has observed that for indigenous people the term *research* is intimately linked to European imperialism and colonialism and that in a colonial context—in other words, societies within which all indigenous people now live—Western research remains a tool of power and domination, legitimating former colonial social relationships and intellectual traditions and the commodification of knowledge. For Smith, there is an urgent need to view the world through non-Western eyes (e.g. a ‘history of Western research through the eyes of the colonized’) and a need for an intellectual tradition in which the researcher undertakes a historical and critical analysis of the role of research in the indigenous world.

Foundations of Indigenist Research

Key indigenous writers include Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Norman Denzin, Lester Irabinna Rigney and Errol West. During the 1990s, these writers established and published

concepts of indigenist research as being culturally safe and culturally respectful, driven by three key principles: (1) resistance as an emancipatory imperative, (2) political integrity in indigenous research and (3) privileging indigenous voices. The Australian Aboriginal researcher Karen Martin describes indigenist research as research that is proactive, progressive and visionary, that

- recognizes indigenous world views, knowledges and realities as distinctive and vital to indigenous existence and survival;
- honours indigenous social mores as essential processes through which indigenous people live, learn and situate themselves as indigenous people in their own lands and when in the lands of other indigenous people;
- emphasizes social, historical and political contexts which shape indigenous experiences, lives, positions and futures and
- privileges the voices, experiences and lives of indigenous people and lands.

The Importance of Social Relationships in Indigenist Research

Underlying this approach is the core principle that indigenist research must reflect indigenous, rather than Western, ontologies and epistemologies. While there are practical elements that indigenist research shares with action research, it only maintains its internal logic through its intellectual framing within indigenous ontology, distinguishing it, as Martin has noted, from simply being Western research conducted by indigenous people. Indigenous ontologies, while specific to individual language and kinship groups, tend to be relational—that is, they are predicated on awareness and a sense of self, on belonging and on responsibilities and ways to relate to the self and to others. In short, they provide an intellectual basis for people’s attention on their interrelatedness and their interdependence with each other and their greater surroundings. There are two further important consequences of this world view, which distinguish indigenist research from Western research. First, authorship does not equate to authority but provides a medium for articulating cultural knowledge already expressed through story, dance, song and so on. Second, cultural tradition both informs and affirms or validates the findings and expression of the indigenist research.

In these terms, social processes and relationships are of utmost importance in the conduct of indigenist research. Indigenist research commences with the deliberate and explicit identification of the person engaging in the research as an indigenous person first and as a researcher second. In doing so, it defines the form of possible research and, importantly, provides context

for the relationships between the indigenist researcher and the people with whom he or she is engaging. This stance places the researcher in a position of empowerment rather than reactive resistance, while it represents an alternative perspective for understanding the world. Indigenist research is more about empowering communities than about opposing alternative ideologies.

Research Methodology

In common with action research, indigenist research must locate itself in its context, the researcher locating himself or herself in the community's country. Country is understood to be not only the land, waters and biotas of the place but also all entities and the spiritual and legal systems of that place; the researcher is the country, and the country is the researcher. Research is conducted with due respect for traditional customs, ceremonies and authorities. In establishing an indigenist research project, the researcher carefully defines these relations as a basis for articulating a research theory and the research problem. Martin describes this research activity through three main constructs and their processes: (1) establishing, through (indigenous) law, what is known about the entities; (2) establishing the relations amongst entities and (3) enacting ways for maintaining these relations. In Western terms, these may be known as ways of knowing, being and doing. Ways of knowing include methods of observation and engagement, and are context responsive and purposive; there are different types and levels of knowledge; they serve social group and network functions and provide a basis for ways of being. Ways of being define relationships, determining and defining rights to be earned as individuals conduct rites to country, self and others; they evolve as contexts and life stages evolve. Ways of doing provide a synthesis of ways of knowing and being, and are expressed through language, art, imagery, technology, traditions and ceremonies, land management practices, social organization and social control.

Each indigenist researcher structures his or her description of an indigenist methodology in different ways. These descriptions, however, always reflect the essence of indigenist research—that is, it is community based and addresses the research needs of that community in ways the community fully understands. Martin provides a framework comprising eight key methodological elements: (1) research assumptions, (2) research questions, (3) literature review, (4) research design, (5) conduct, (6) analysis, (7) interpretation and (8) reporting and dissemination. While these may appear familiar to non-indigenist researchers, reconceptualizing these in indigenist terms provides a framework for an indigenous research agenda aimed at achieving social revitalization and empowerment.

This agenda focuses on, in order, resetting, reclaiming, re-viewing, reframing, re-searching, revisiting, reconnecting and re-presenting through research. In practical terms, Smith closes her book with a list of 25 indigenous projects. The titles reflect the convergence of indigenous ontology, epistemology, social process and interrelationships that characterize indigenist research as it is harnessed to address indigenous research needs: claiming, testimonies, storytelling, celebrating survival, remembering, indigenizing, intervening, revitalizing, connecting; reading, writing, re-presenting, gendering, envisioning, reframing, restoring, returning, democratizing, networking, naming, protecting, creating, negotiating, discovering and sharing. These titles reflect the importance of indigenist research in addressing issues of importance to indigenous people using processes and methodologies that reflect the power and knowledge inherent in these communities.

Bill Boyd

See also Hawaiian epistemology; indigenous research ethics and practice; indigenous research methods; Māori epistemology

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INDIGENOUS RESEARCH ETHICS AND PRACTICE

The leadership and meaningful involvement of indigenous peoples engaged in research is rapidly evolving. This is occurring within the context of indigenous

peoples around the world continuing to thrive despite often long histories of colonial interference. Written by a First Nation community-based researcher, this entry offers an introductory discussion regarding indigenous research practice and ethics. Drawing upon the values that are further described below, a perspective is offered regarding the fundamentals of developing and sustaining good research relationships.

Introduction

Self-Location

As a basic principle, knowing who is engaging in research and where they are from is essential. In contrast to Western European sociocultural restrictions (where talking about oneself is often interpreted as a sign of arrogance), properly introducing oneself to others is a way of respectfully acknowledging the ancestors who have come before us. It opens the dialogue with others to identify possible family or clan ties and begins the process of creating a relationship. The importance of beginning in 'a good way', or in a manner that is respectful of the territory where work is to unfold, is essential for everyone engaging in a research project.

Self-location as a concept requires briefly sharing details about one's self. This offers context and clarifies the position of the person involved in a project from the outset of shared work or presentations. Is an Aboriginal person leading the project? What Nation and territory is he or she from? What might this knowledge tell the participant, the community, a reviewer or someone planning action based upon the findings? What insights might be drawn about the perspective, understanding and assumptions the person might bring to the research?

Knowing, for instance, that this entry is written from the perspective of a community-based First Nation researcher's perspective positions the following comments within a certain context. The fact that the author lives, works and engages in research from sea-to-sea in Canada may offer further insight. Finally, knowing that the focus of the author's research lies in the field of health, specifically HIV/AIDS, may contribute towards further grounding the roots of the story being offered in the following pages.

A Word on Terminology

Definitions are also useful. As a people who have been labelled by others, many times in foreign languages, knowing how words are being used is important. In Canada, the term *Aboriginal* is used as an umbrella term for the three categories of First Peoples within the boundaries of what is now a nation state. First Nations (or Indians), Métis and Inuit populations reside across the country bordered by the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic

Oceans. Within each of these populations, there is great diversity: over 800 different communities, many different languages and unique customs and ceremonies.

Internationally, the term *indigenous* is used to respectfully refer to the First Peoples of a territory. As an inclusive term, *indigenous* is used in the language of the United Nations as a reference to the more than 370 million First Peoples throughout the world. The United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* specifically does not define who are indigenous peoples, in the interest of respecting the right of indigenous peoples to self-define themselves. In the interest of respectfully engaging in an international dialogue, the term *indigenous* will be used here.

The term *community* is also often referenced; therefore, some reflection upon the meaning of this word may be useful. Simply stated, communities evolve in a variety of ways with a variety of people. Indigenous communities may be described as a group of people who have lived in the same area/territory for a long time (e.g. precolonization) and have a shared history, a distinct language, family and clan ties, political structures and shared customs and traditions that are unique and different from those of the national/state population. *Community* may be defined by the specific Nation of indigenous people, such as the Mi'kmaq Nation; by membership within a grouping of indigenous populations, such as Australian Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders; by geographic boundaries, for instance, tribally controlled lands, or by reference to indigenous people who unite regarding a specific issue, such as HIV/AIDS. In urban settings, community may evolve as indigenous peoples from different territories come together through service organizations or meeting places. Nations exist within groupings of indigenous populations, and communities of interest exist within geographic communities, and this fuels the dynamic and complex web of communities within communities. More broadly, stepping back to consider the application of the term *indigenous community* in a global context, the definition becomes inclusive of all the groups of people living in different states who share a common world view of interconnected relationships and responsibility to the places where they are considered to be the first inhabitants.

Being Indigenous

Finally, there is the contentious issue of who is permitted to refer to themselves as indigenous. It is well beyond the immediate scope of this entry to answer the complex questions of identity. In Canada, and other countries in the world, official identity is based upon government regulations and lists. This is a colonial practice that negates the right to self-determination and strikes at the core of nation building by explicitly limiting

who does and does not belong as defined by powers external to the indigenous community. In simple terms, it is accepted that those who self-identify as indigenous, and are accepted by others who self-identify as indigenous, belong.

History

Researched to Death

Research is laden with tradition. Within the indigenous community, these traditions include the silencing of the indigenous voice, the disrespect of protocol and customs, the theft of traditional and/or community knowledge and the justification of colonial expansion into lands that were already inhabited by thriving civilizations. A long history of academic careers being built upon publications about indigenous people's lives and culture, whether accurate or not, has left a deep scar upon the international indigenous community. 'Helicopter researchers', who swoop down on a community, gather data and perhaps physical samples and then take off again without returning to discuss or share their findings have underpinned many of the relationships between indigenous communities and academic research. The appropriation of intellectual property and traditional knowledge about the medicinal properties of plants, for instance, has led to the exploitation of natural resources, with little or no benefit to the knowledge keepers themselves.

Leading indigenous health researchers including Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori, New Zealand) have written about research as a dirty word in the vocabulary of the indigenous community, and many indigenous people will speak about the feeling of being researched to death. This was literally so in the context of the introduction of foreign diseases and the destruction of traditional territories as eager researchers 'discovered' new indigenous Nations without considering the implications of contact and development—and figuratively so as streams of researchers documented and detailed daily life and death, the rise of poor health and the impacts of colonization (e.g. forced relocation, removal of children and policy- and law-limiting human rights) without lending support or discussing possible community-defined interventions. There is a sense that the research practices of the past have offered little other than attempts to disseminate sacred knowledge—(un)intentionally introducing and then documenting a community's struggle.

Researching Ourselves Back to Life

The times are changing. Research has always been a part of the lives of indigenous peoples and the sustainability of our communities. Western European-based

academic practices and doctrine are not the only way to undertake research, and moreover, they can be moulded and shaped to more accurately document different ways of seeing and relating to the world. The power of research to inform decision-making, to verify and validate a process or approach and to convince others of one's truth has not been underestimated by indigenous peoples.

The formal introduction of decolonizing research methodologies began to appear in literature in the 1990s. *Decolonizing Methodologies*, written by Smith and first published in 1999 (a second edition, published in 2012, is now available), became a foundational text for indigenous scholars. Increasing emphasis upon the ancient capacity of indigenous peoples to know the world around them is fuelling a new cadre of indigenous researchers who are grounded in two worlds—that of the indigenous community they are a part of and also the academic community of scientific and social scientific thinking. A new era of using research tools and approaches to retell history, rewrite the stereotypical story of the noble savage and forge a path that has yet to be explored by asking new questions is emerging. The picture of the indigenous person and the indigenous community is being interpreted and described increasingly from within the community as opposed to by someone from outside.

Responsibility

Given the damaging history of research within indigenous communities, a new research paradigm is required as we move forward. This is articulated in part in the context of the responsibility to stand up as indigenous and allied researchers and articulate the importance of research in meeting the needs of the community and answering questions of relevance to the community rather than those that fascinate the researcher. In this regard, there is a natural affinity with community-based research, Community-Based Participatory Research and action research, among other critical methodologies. The emphasis of these approaches, including the expectation that research must lead to change, resonates with indigenous community demands. Research for the sake of describing a situation, documenting the cultural practices of an indigenous population or developing an analysis of a community's context in isolation from community members/stakeholders and then publishing it is utterly and completely unacceptable.

Relationship Building

In 2005, Harris and Wasilewski wrote about the four Rs of research: (1) responsibility, (2) relationship,