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Towards a cultural rhetorics methodology: Making research matter with multi-generational women from the Little Traverse Bay Band

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Introduction

Almost five years ago, I started working on two oral history projects with a group of multi-generational, urban Odawa women from Lansing, Michigan. I met these women while working with one of the community elders on developing her life history into a book for publication. About four weeks into the project, the elder, Geri, suggested that we do another oral history with more Odawa women from the area. Together, we developed and organized three talking circlesⁱ where the women shared stories about their lived experiences and their roles and responsibilities at work, in the community, and while pursuing a formal education. I hear the stories these women tell about their lived experiences as rhetorical theories on how to do intercultural research, negotiate institutional (re: dominate) discourses, and make visible the roles and responsibilities of American Indian women in their language and on their terms.ⁱⁱ

For this article, I will re-tell research stories from the talking circles and field notes to theorize relationality and there-ness as rhetorical practices for doing intercultural research. Since these practices emerge from indigenous and decolonial worldviews, stories and relationships are central to the theoretical framework of this article. The talking circles will not be presented as case studies or examples of intercultural research. Along with the research *experiences*, the stories from the talking circles will be used to create a theory of there-ness and relationality useful for intercultural research. Both of these practices call for personal and communal research where the roles of researcher and participant are fluid. In an effort to practice this personal and communal approach, I will take the time to explain the scholarly cultural communities that I belong to. In a broader sense, I am showing how the shared beliefs and practices of those communities impact my understanding of there-ness and relationality. As a Rhet/Comp scholar, I position my scholarship as both native rhetorics and cultural rhetorics. The background that I will provide barely glosses the surface of the contributions scholars in these communities make to Rhetoric and Composition and American Indian studies.

American Indian Rhetorics

Native rhetorics (or indigenous rhetorics) is a sub-field that enacts inquiry at the intersections of American Indian studies and Rhetoric and Composition. Native rhetoricians examine *how* American Indians make and disseminate knowledge within various intellectual sites: historiography, community-based research, embodied and material rhetorics, digital rhetorics, and composition theory to name a few. Native rhetorics positions its scholarship and teaching within decolonial theories and social movements because of its commitment to privileging indigenous ways of knowing, acknowledging one's complicity in colonial rhetorics, and developing options for creating and sharing knowledge that does not use colonial rhetorical practices. There is a wealth of scholarship regarding decolonial theory and practice across disciplinary fields. In an effort to practice relationality, I look to a scholarly relative, Qwo-Li Driskill (2010), who defined decolonization as the "ongoing, radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation" (p. 69).

Driskill's definition of decolonization is particularly meaningful because Driskill acknowledged the expansiveness of decolonization and that there is not an endpoint. Since native rhetoricians understand how different landbases and spaces impact knowledge making and practices, it is also prudent to acknowledge that decolonization has different implications and meanings depending on the landbase and relationship with governing systems. For example, there are far different decolonial goals and institutional barriers within United States than there are in Sierra Leone or New Zealand due to how each of these nations have distinctly complicated relations with indigenous peoples. Native rhetorics scholars recognize that decolonialism and decoloniality are linked by multiple, communal efforts to make visible how colonial rhetorics mask the many options to create knowledge outside euro-centric systems.ⁱⁱⁱ

Cultural rhetorics

Where native rhetorics is a sub-field, "cultural rhetorics is an *orientation* to a set of constellating theoretical and methodological frameworks" (Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab, 2012, p.2).^{iv} A cultural rhetorics orientation is to enact a set of respectful and responsible practices to form and sustain relationships with cultural communities and their shared beliefs and practices including texts, materials, and ideas. This orientation rejects the idea that "everything is a text" to be read and instead engages with the material, embodied, and relational aspects of research and scholarly production. One engages with texts, bodies, materials, ideas, or space knowing that these subjects are interconnected to the universe and belong to a cultural community with its own intellectual tradition and history. This is a very different methodological approach from the distant researcher who reads the text (re: object) through a lens to excavate or discover meaning.

Cultural rhetorics scholars contend that an Aristotelian history of rhetoric told through the Enlightenment is an imperial narrative that assumes Greco-Roman rhetorical practices to be the origin of *all* rhetorical practices.^v Instead, scholars draw from various theoretical and methodological frameworks to create a rhetorical tradition that is relevant to their *subjects* of study and the shared beliefs and practices of that cultural community. Due to this, cultural rhetorics scholars define culture as always rhetorical and rhetoric as persistently cultural (Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab, 2012, p. 2). Culture is not defined so much by any combination

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of race, ethnicity, gender, or class, but by the spaces/places people share, *how* people organize themselves, and *how* they practice shared beliefs. This emphasis on practice—the things that communities do to make something—is central to understanding how rhetoric and culture are interconnecting concepts.^{vi} This definition of culture, primarily drawing from Anthropology, acknowledges that all discourse systems are cultural communities with their own practices and shared belief systems. To do cultural rhetorics scholarship under this idea of “culture” allows scholars to move away from telling recuperation stories or justifying that a particular community is, in fact, intellectual. Instead, it focuses on *how* a specific community makes meaning and negotiates systems of communication to disseminate knowledge. So, what cultural rhetorics scholars *do* is investigate meaning making as it is situated within a specific cultural community, whether it is a tribal community, digital community, an archive, or a group of craftswomen.

To do cultural rhetorics work is to value the efforts and practices used to make and sustain something and use that understanding to build a theoretical and methodological framework that reflects the cultural community a researcher works with. I develop a cultural rhetorics scholarly practice by drawing from Rhetorical studies, American Indian studies, and the oral history projects with the Odawa women. I consider scholars like Victor Villanueva (1999), Jacqueline Jones Royster (1996), and Malea Powell (2012) to be my scholarly elders. These scholars have taught me how to listen, dwell, and work with and alongside history. American Indian studies scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Shawn Wilson (2009) provide research models that do not end with deconstruction. In fact, these research models privilege a language of critique that reconstructs or makes and creates space for present and future generations of knowledge makers.

Regardless of the cultural community one belongs to or works with, these ideas are crucial to doing intercultural research because they provide a reorientation to talking and writing about culture. This approach recognizes that we need to create space to make all knowledge practices viable and visible (Powell, 2012). As scholars, it is our responsibility to take the time to form relationships with many rhetorical traditions and understand how these rhetorical traditions are at play with each other. So when I talk about intercultural research, I am acknowledging that all research that negotiates multiple spaces, knowledge practices, and beliefs *is* intercultural research. In addition, this distinction provides the opportunity for researchers to reflect on how they are members of cultural communities within academia with their own sets of shared beliefs and practices to use for communication. This distinction is particularly relevant for intercultural research because we need to think about the knowledge-making practices we use to communicate our research (experiences) to our disciplines. How are these practices at odds with the shared beliefs and practices of the cultural communities we work with and for? How do we negotiate the complexity of writing as the arms of the institution while being responsible and accountable to the cultural communities we work with and for?

In order to negotiate the cultural communities I belong to and the cultural communities I work with, I privilege story as methodology. For me, story is theory. We can learn from the stories we tell and *re*-tell what we do with cultural communities and the experiences of working with those communities. Those research stories are data for analysis. Here, I will re-tell these stories and re-listen to them to theorize relationality and there-ness as intercultural methods. In

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addition, I hope that I as re-tell and re-listen, you dear readers, will think about how you might tell stories about your research experiences.

It started with a request

December 19, 2008

There's a story that I like to tell about the night that led to a research relationship with a group of multi-generational Odawa women who live and work in Lansing, Michigan. I've told variations of this story a lot: during conference presentations, in current projects, during job talks, and to myself.

Susan Applegate Krouse, Geri Roossien, and I are sitting in Geri's living room. An Odawa elder, Geri has asked us to help her record her life history and turn it into a publishable document—a gift for her grandchildren and younger Odawas. At this point, I've known Geri and Susan only for a short time. I'm a first semester PhD student, and I'm taking Susan's graduate course on American Indian women. She's a fierce American Indian Anthropologist, and her work has changed how the discipline practices cultural anthropology with American Indians. We are reading oral histories, ethnographies, and personal narratives written by or about American Indian women. These narratives will impact my understanding of community-based research, rhetorical histories, and intercultural methodologies.

Susan and Geri are talking, laughing, and carrying on. I've been mostly quiet. I listen. I watch. I doodle. Susan does most of the talking. She and Geri have known each other for years. As Geri finishes her story and Susan presses, "stop" on her old tape machine, we all take a big, deep breath and smile. We look so satisfied and happy. After hearing these stories, I start to understand what healing feels like.

Finally, I say, "It is truly amazing that there are three generations of urban, native women working on this project." What I mean is that, Geri and Susan teach me how to practice being a mixed *Anishinaabeikwe* in academic spaces, tribal spaces, and home spaces; these women are my teachers. I remember this observation because I re-listened to it while transcribing Geri's oral history. I remember because of what Geri said next. She says, "Well, you know, there are more of us in Lansing;" there are more Odawa women, and most of them have daughters or granddaughters. Geri says, "You two should get them together." Susan and I look at each other and say, "Okay."

From this request, we spent the next year organizing the talking circles to begin in February 2010. Susan and I wrote a grant to the Michigan Humanities Council. Geri contacted the Odawa women and invited them to the event, and I met with the women to decide on themes and questions. After months of meetings, conversations, phone calls, and clarifications, we decided on three themes: roles and responsibilities in the community, at work, and within the university.

Stories all the way down

I am constantly re-telling the story of how this project began. Mostly, I tell it for myself and the story always changes. At times, I do voices. I make gestures. Sometimes I don't. But I keep

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telling it as I write or walk my dog or run out the door to teach. Sometimes, I will find myself holding my breath. It happens as I stand up in front of the class to lecture on research methodologies or while discussing oral history strategies with a colleague. I'll start to cough or choke. My body will remind me to take my time—to remember that the story can end, for now. Almost five years later, I am still in contact with most of the women. We're Facebook friends; we share milestones, talk about our craft projects or how we want to do more talking circles as a way to maintain our relationships with each other. I share these details because I think it's important to show what my relationships with Geri and Susan looked like that December night almost five years ago and how those relationships have changed and provided additional opportunities to do oral history work. I remember that relationships go through periods of unevenness. I tell this story to heal—to learn about my relationships with the women, the research, or myself. I tell this story to remember what it first felt like to do oral history work, to remember what it felt like to literally sit in Geri's living room and first hear the stories that I've now heard so many times. This type of reflection and embodiment is central to practicing relational accountability because it creates an opportunity to put relationships at the center of the research. Now, I will further discuss relational accountability as a practice for doing intercultural research.

Relational accountability

Relationality and relational accountability are rooted in indigenous worldviews and theories. Like all indigenous theories, relationality is not a new idea, but old. To practice relationality is to understand one's position in the world, one's relationship to land, space, ideas, people, and living beings, and to understand how these relationships have been and will always be at play with each other. Relationality has become more visible in academic discourses because of the exhaustive work by scholars who have critiqued Western research methodologies for continuing imperialism, perpetuating archetypes of American Indians, and (inaccurately) appropriating indigenous knowledges for Euro-immigrant and institutional consumption.^{vii}

In *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Shawn Wilson (2009) argued that relational accountability is central to understanding an indigenous research paradigm. As shown next in Figure 1, under an indigenous research paradigm, epistemology, ontology, axiology, and methodology are recursive and relational concepts (Wilson, 2009, p. 71).

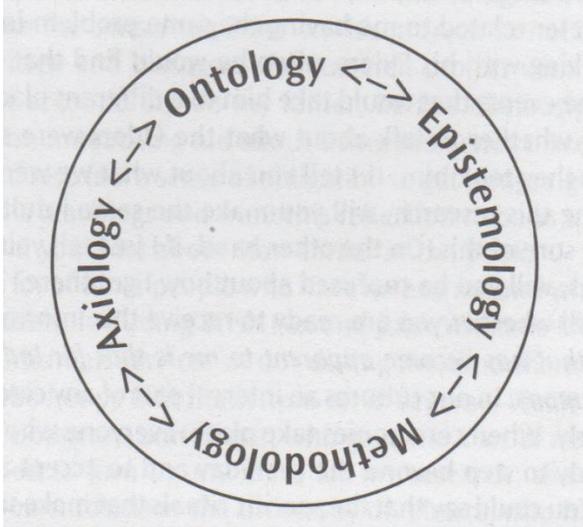


Figure 1. Indigenous Research Paradigm

Instead of thinking about these concepts as separate entities, Wilson encouraged his readers to consider how they make up a paradigm that is greater as a whole than its parts (p. 71). He wrote, “The ontology and epistemology are based upon a process of relationships that form a mutual reality. The axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining accountability to these relationships” (p. 71). This paradigm encourages a shift or reorientation to how the relationships between things and concepts are meaningful instead of the things themselves. In fact, things and concepts do not exist in reality without relationships. Wilson argued that ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology were never separate or clearly demarcated, but always interconnected. Instead, the dissecting and cataloging of these parts reflects Western science practices (p. 71).

Our responsibility as researchers is to further develop a language that articulates the interconnectedness of these concepts. For Wilson, to practice relational accountability and relationality *is* to practice respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and humility. By making his relationships to his sons, colleagues, elders, and communities visible in the text and central to his argument, Wilson simultaneously enacted and theorized these concepts. Through an indigenous research paradigm, respect, reciprocity, and accountability are not just things to do to be ethical, but a way to cultivate and maintain the relationships we form with people, spaces, land, and the universe. Clearly, to enact relationality and relational accountability is personal and communal. Wilson encouraged researchers to acknowledge and participate with their audience. He wrote, “Since I have no way of knowing if the reader is from the same culture as me, I hope I will be excused if I am being insensitive in this foreword. I come to you with a good heart” (2009, p. 7).

This personal and communal approach is difficult to practice and not always valued in academic discourses. I hear Wilson encourage readers to think about how we need to enact practices to be respectful, responsible, and accountable to the cultural communities we work across and with—including academia. Thus far, I have tried to practice this by taking the time to explain how native rhetorics and cultural rhetorics inform my understanding of intercultural research and how my relationships with Geri and Susan were the impetus for the talking circles. In doing so, I

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emphasize that I am not solely responsible for the ideas that I present here today. Instead, the theory that I have developed comes from a series of relationships with people both inside and outside of academia who have taken the time to teach and mentor me.

Making visible and theorizing relationships as central to theory and methodology is crucial because it contends larger institutional expectations about the role of researcher or author. The institution, as a paracolonial^{viii} space, emphasizes distance, isolation, and anonymity. Native rhetorics scholars like Lee Maracle (1990) and Malea Powell (2008) argued that this understanding of research and theory is euro-centric. In “Listening to Ghosts,” Malea Powell (2008) wrote, “[w]e have cut the wholeness of knowledge into little bits, scattered them to the four winds and now begin to reorganize them into categories invented to enable empire by bringing order to chaos and civilization to the savage” (p.15). As intercultural researchers, we need to pay attention to how we engage with these boundaries because it speaks to how we privilege certain types of knowledge over another. In fact, both Powell and Maracle encouraged researchers to blur and unmake these boundaries. Furthermore, Powell’s observation resonates for those of us who do intercultural research because it provides insight into the challenges of sharing our research with the institution. Clearly, academic discourses challenge how we use language, how we share our insights, and how we contextualize research stories. Professionally, relationality as a practice allows us to expand and sustain our disciplines, to challenge disciplinary and professional practices that emphasize strict categorization and demarcation. So, let me show you how I practice relationality and relational accountability while researching with the Odawa women.

When Geri made the request to “get the women together,” I had never met the ten other grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. Since we were asking the women to share stories about their lived experiences, I needed to get to know the women so they could decide on what stories they wanted to share. Due to the fact that the Odawa people have egalitarian and matriarchal traditions, I understood that the elders would make certain decisions and inform the younger generations without my presence. For six months leading up to the events, the women and I met over coffee, tea, and pastry to get to know each other. They invited me into their homes, or we met at their favorite lunch spot. We talked about craft projects, my course work, their children, advice about going to university, and what was happening in the community.

From these conversations, the themes of roles and responsibilities within three sites: community and home, work, and formal education started to come together. I asked the women what questions they wanted to answer. We wrote and revised the questions together. The creation and development of the talking circles were always based upon the relationships the women were forming with each other, with me, and the Lansing communities. While working with the Odawa women, they requested that if we do the talking circles, I had to “give the project longevity.” Some of the women emphasized that they had done talking circle projects before and “nothing came of them.” Initially, I believed the talking circles to be for the native community of Lansing, Michigan. I would use the support of the institution to create indigenous-centered knowledge-sharing moments. After listening to the women, I had to re-imagine how the talking circles could function as a short-term project and be the beginning of something long-term. But, I didn’t do this alone. Instead, I asked the women, “Where do you want this project to go?”

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“What do you want to do with it?” From their experiences and relationships with formal education, the women insisted that these talking circles should be made available to both students and educators. That is still our plan. It became clear that the women understood how dominant discourses, particularly education systems, affected how they enact their roles and responsibilities. In fact, the women had more experience with community-based research than I did. I had a responsibility to not just speak with their cultural community, but to the ones I belong to *with the women*. To practice relational accountability, I had to shift perspectives and listen to these women as not only research participants, but as intellectuals who understood disciplinary conversations on ethical research methodologies and representations of American Indians in formal education. When I asked for their input, I listened to it. And I took it because they were right.

From these relationships, the women became collaborators and colleagues. It is my responsibility to treat their stories the way I respect and honor our relationships. I do not write for them or on their behalf. The women can speak for themselves and choose what communities to speak to. Instead, my relationship to the women and to their stories becomes central. I carry the stories of the women with me while I speak to scholarly cultural communities about my concerns.

I begin with writing because I believe that this is where we need to learn the most on how to enact ethics practices. It wasn't difficult to hear the women as collaborators or co-workers while we got together or as I transcribed their stories. Instead, the difficulty occurs when I write about the women to the discipline: to move from sharing stories that I have always understood as theory to presenting these stories as theory in a way that is meaningful to the discipline. For example, we have set up certain institutional hoops like IRB or peer review. During these circumstances, there is always a negotiation between the expectations of the institution and my responsibility to the Odawa women. Shawn Wilson (2009) acknowledged the complexity of writing relationally (p.71). He acknowledged that the ethics practices with people feel intuitive. Yet, it's how we communicate what we do that gets in the way of practicing accountability. Since we are all rhetoricians, I find this complexity really telling of our disciplinary practices. We need to do a better job at talking about *how* we write, research, and communicate those experiences. While practicing relationality and relational accountability, I understand collective, multi-generational, or cross-cultural writing styles *as* academic writing. As a native scholar who works with native people, these styles are *also* “traditional writing.” Through story, I use similar language as the Odawa women to talk about our research and my experiences working with the women. I am able to better depict how we talk to each other, how I hear them, and what it looks like to share space with the women. But even now, as I reflect on the early beginnings of this project, this story feels too linear, too successful. So, let me further complicate this by examining how I enacted relationality and relational accountability while transcribing and analyzing the women's stories.

Since relationships are at the center of this project, I transcribed every session with Geri and the talking circles without a software program. I realize that this is not rare. Yet, what matters is *how* we use these opportunities for dwelling and listening. I began to embody the stories and carry them with me as I moved across spaces. By transcribing the stories by hand, I took the

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time to form relationships with the stories in another form. Transcription became an opportunity to reflect on my relationships with the women. In “Listening to Legacies” (2008), Terese Guinsatao Monberg wrote about the importance of using oral history as a method for feminist historiography. From her own experiences gathering stories with Pinay rhetor Dorothy Cordova, Monberg asserted that by listening to her own voice, she was able to further understand her relationship to Cordova, the stories told during the gathering process, and how this listening impacted her writing. She wrote, “I listened to my own voice as I typed my dissertation, conference papers, essays for publication, striving to resist easy generalizations and categories that academic work often fosters” (p. 93). Through listening, Monberg incorporated herself into the narrative, into the research, and into the data. Monberg encouraged her readers to not only notice how the researcher is always present, but also recognize another layer of data that needs to be examined and taken into account while building a framework. I believe that this type of reflection allows for the type of personal and communal approach to writing that Wilson called for.

Since I am trying to also form relationships with you, dear reader, I think it’s only fair to acknowledge that this approach isn’t easy. Telling stories isn’t easy—methodologically or emotionally. Since practicing relationality is partly about how we embody and carry stories and relationships with us, it’s important to recognize how stories impact bodies. How does the process of listening and reflection impact our actual bodies—as researchers and community members? How does sitting and staring at a computer for hours at a time affect the ways in which we listen to and communicate stories? The stories the women told were painful, and I experienced the pain as well from listening to the stories of people whom I love or just sitting for hours transcribing. In order to be accountable to the women and to the stories, I made sure to be in the right mind frame to listen, to feel, and to see the stories as rhetorical theories.

Often, if I was tired or grumpy, I had to train myself to step back from the research. I had to pay attention to my body, listen to it, and re-orient my own mental, emotional, and physical self. I would go for a walk along the local river trail and watch for the sumac budding. I would call a friend and go shopping or just talk over a hazelnut latte. Often, I would return to the actual talking circles on dvd or listen to recordings of Geri, Susan, and me. I would return to those experiences, remember the space, and just listen. I wouldn’t let myself write. I would play the women’s voices in the background as I prepped for dinner, graded, or wrote. It was during these moments where I could feel my body and mood shift the most distinctly. When I returned to the stories, I gave myself permission to privilege relationships as an intellectual site for knowledge making. For me, this is how I try to hold true to what Shawn Wilson said about approaching research as ceremony and with a good heart. But, this is just my story. Now, I will re-tell and re-listen to the Odawa women as they build a relational theory of there-ness.

The best stories are success stories

I watch as Dr. Le Anne Silvey and Dr. Susan Applegate Krouse thank the people of the Three Fires,^{ix} thank our elders, and thank me. I watch as Le Anne and Susan giggle and banter and play. All of the good feelings from February 2010 come back. All of the grief and pain comes back—watching, feeling, knowing that Susan is fighting cancer and will walk on five months after the talking circles. It’s taken a lot of emotional strength to return to the dvds—not just

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because of the energy it takes to sit and dwell with the materials, but to return to a past time and space.

I am an hour into the video. So far, the women have spent time introducing themselves. Some speak in both English and *Anishinaabemowin*. The women share stories about moving from Escanaba, Good Hart, or Burt Lake to the Lansing area. They talk about witnessing violence by attending and surviving boarding schools or how communities made them understand their difference “because they were Indian.” The women talk about what it’s like being adopted into White families, giving children up for adoption, and discovering siblings who are adopted. And, all along, they are laughing and joking. They are crying and patting each other on the back. I am laughing and crying with them.

Our moderator, Le Anne, another Little Traverse Bay Band woman, asks the participants: “This question is for the elders. What role do you play in the lives of your grandchildren?”

On being “here” or “there:” How Odawa women make multi-generational, collective theory

Geri, elder and retired substance abuse counselor, goes first:

I would say, “I’m there.” **I’m there.** I drive one of them back and forth to school. The littlest one—I make her lunch. The others, I’m there when they get back from school and fix them a snack. Get their laundry done and sometimes clean their room out because I can hardly climb over the stuff to put their things away.

From previous conversations, Geri has told me that her new job, being in “grandma care,” is her favorite job. Earlier, she explained her relationship to her parents; she said, “They died alcoholics trying to be white.” I hear Geri reflect on the circumstances that she grew up in and relate those experiences to the space she creates for her grandchildren. Through this *relational juxtaposition*, Geri argues that she cannot address her current relationship with her grandchildren without addressing her own relationship to her parents and grandparents.

Geri passes the microphone to Debbie, past Ingham County Commissioner and current tribal chair:

It’s sometimes more difficult to learn how to be a grandparent and make that transition from being mom...I am learning to be grandma **there**...When I have the opportunity, we are going to teach them more about their roots. I throw it in, every now and then, but the one thing I don’t want them to do is to yearn for that when they are older. And, I may not have a memory by then...My hope for them is that they never, never forget who they are and where they come from.

By showing her spatial relationship, Debbie furthers Geri’s argument about being a grandma. Yet, she also argues that being a grandmother—being an elder—does not magically happen with age or grandchildren. This role requires an awareness of one’s own bodily limitations in relation

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to time and space. Loretta, mother to Wenona and the youngest of the grandmothers, complicates there-ness by explaining that she did not have a relationship with her Odawa family because she was adopted. After explaining the process of leaving her adopted family to find her birth family, she reflects:

It feels good to have family connected. **To be there**...I am so glad I got to meet my mother. I feel bad that I wasn't raised in the Indian community, but I am getting that experience now through my daughter. I miss that. I miss that family connection. It's so important to have everyone together.

Loretta develops her grandmother role from her history of finding the family she lost and building a relationship with them. Where she didn't get to form relationships with her parents, she is able to form and maintain relationships with her daughter. Later, she insists that she will teach her grandchildren the value of surrounding oneself with their relations—that this is deeply connected to one's identity as a Native person. Rosie, elder and beadworker, continues:

Let's see. I almost lost that original question. I am old, you know! Of course, because my husband was the way he was—we went to powwows maybe twice or three times a month or whenever we could find one—our daughters were very involved...When (Carolyn) was born, we started taking care of her when Roxanne started to go to work...I would go over and basically, when she wasn't with her parents, she was with us. Anywhere we went, "We are going to a powwow; Carolyn is coming with us. We are going to this event; we are taking Carolyn with us." We didn't say, "Can we?" She is going with us. That is why she was always at ceremonies with us. We didn't go to powwows without her. We never left her at home.

Where there-ness has been mainly described in terms of how history impacts relationships, Rosie further develops the theory to include place and knowledge sharing. By showing the active role she had with Carolyn, Rosie argues that "home" is not a place, but a relationship to one's relatives.

Le Anne: "The youngers ones, it's your turn. What role do elders play in your life?"

Carolyn, eldest daughter to Roxanne and granddaughter to Rosie, speaks first. She drove from Western Michigan University to be at the talking circles.

...they're there and that's the biggest thing. **They're there**. Grandma's there, my aunts, my uncles, they are all there for me, and I can look up to them. Anytime I need them—they are there. To sit down and talk, that's one of my favorite things to do is just go home and sit at the table with grandma over some coffee and juice and see what's going on in the community and see how she has been. That's it. *Miigwetch*.

Carolyn passes the microphone to Wenona, mother to two young sons, tribal judge, Harvard graduate, and MSU law professor.

My mom is right. She comes over the house every single day. We spend time together, all the time. She is so wonderful in terms of being so helpful and so supportive; we can always laugh together. That's really a wonderful thing. I have friends who want to live far away from their family. From my perspective and my husband's perspective, we are so lucky to have them in our lives, and also it's so important for our children. We really value the time our children are able to spend with their grandparents. In some native communities, it's common for the grandparents to act like a parent. We want our parents to be as involved as they want to be. And we are deeply appreciative of that and love it.

By sharing the joy she feels when she is with her mother, Wenona shows that her relationship with her mother allows her to recognize and honor the knowledge they make and share together.

Jannus, Geri's daughter, responds last:

I am glad this is a respondent question. All I can think of is what an incredibly positive impact it continues to be to have my mom in my children's lives...When each of my children were born, **she was there**. Bringing that new baby home for the first time and how wonderfully traumatic it is and to have your mom there to help you with that. It's a beautiful thing. She continues to be on a daily basis...But, she's not only there as a caregiver, as a grandmother, and a mom, she represents the native element that would not be there otherwise. I remember being a child, their age, over there, and being dragged to functions like this and not being particularly interested. She did such a great job of continually doing it, and even though you go through that phase of wanting to sit in the corner. She still brought me every day, and eventually, I think you come home to that. I have confidence that these children will come home to that. I think it's the positive factor of keeping the kids involved and doing something that we would consider mundane, doing the dishes or whatever. She's there and a part of our family unit and representative of more than just my mom. I have to announce publicly how wonderful she is. She's here. Thanks.

Jannus reminds me of what I already know to be true, but felt unsure to say aloud, for Native women knowledge making is made and shared in both the domestic space as well as the university. By cultivating relationships, one is able to make knowledge visible and viable. The circle women remind me about the type of places and spaces elders live and work in, but are overlooked. Native women's knowledge sharing occurs during everyday tasks like conversation over a cup of coffee, gathering the cedar for ceremonies, tending the garden, doing the dishes, and making the lunches.

As the Odawa women build a theory of there-ness^x, they practice relationality by building off of each other's lived experiences to describe their own roles and responsibilities. The Odawa women use *to be there* to discuss how older generations and younger generations understand their roles and responsibilities as grandmothers and youngsters. *To be there* celebrates these roles, but also draws attention to the fact that our elders will not always be in the physical realm. I hear the older generations of women practice *to be there* as a reminder that elders, grandmothers couldn't always be with their grandchildren to make school lunches, offer advice

about being bullied at school, or chat over beadwork and coffee. The Odawa women use *to be there* as a cadence—a way to tell the history of Native women sharing knowledge with each other. These stories acknowledge the pain and trauma of being absent from American Indian history as well as each other's lives. Yet, as the women acknowledge this absence, they also emphasize the labor of making themselves present and visible to each other and their communities. For the Odawa women, there-ness is a way to form and maintain relationships. Or, as Jannus recalls earlier in the talking circle, “to *make* community while in a fragmented environment.”

As the women theorize there-ness, what becomes clear is that it is a practice of negotiating the presence and absence of roles, responsibilities, bodies, and ideas. There-ness, as a practice, draws attention to the significance of everyday tasks—that these tasks are just as meaningful as events and realizations marked by dominant discourses. As intercultural researchers, we need to pay attention to those tasks with attentiveness and care because those everyday practices lead us to theorizing relationships. There-ness, as a practice, is about being attentive to how relationships and space impact the opportunity for and construction of knowledge making. As intercultural researchers, we must be mindful of the practices we use to make ourselves present and absent—visible and invisible—to the cultural communities we work with and belong to. In fact, we need to recognize that (in)visibility is culturally specific.

There-ness encourages further examination regarding the disciplinary and professional practices that we use and the beliefs that we uphold that get in the way of making ourselves available to the communities we work with and belong to. As intercultural researchers, how have we created narratives that de-emphasize the process and relational aspect of gathering and hearing stories? How do we create narratives that emphasize linear models of success with an emphasis on the product? How can we draw attention to the complexity of moving across and participating with cultural communities? For me, I think that we need to reconsider the frameworks for which we present our research. There-ness, as an intercultural practice, teaches me that a researcher/participant framework does not satisfactorily describe the work that I do or the people whom I work with. Instead, I tell research stories to mark a shift in the framework. Clearly, I value collaborative, multi-generational, and cross-cultural research. What the Odawa women have emphasized is that knowledge should be and needs to be shared, that we all take on knowledge-sharer roles in one way or another.

There-ness and relationality create a knowledge-sharer framework where the roles of the researcher and the participant are fluid. I am just as much a participant in the creation of the talking circles as the women are researchers or principal investigators. In fact, these women are more than participants or researchers, but relatives. As the elders and youngsters talk about their relationships to each other, what becomes clear is that knowledge is made and exchanged as they share space with each other—as they make themselves visible and present to their cultural community. As intercultural researchers, we need to be attentive to the spaces we share with the cultural communities we belong to and work with. By understanding the spaces we share, we more fully understand the knowledge we create. As an intercultural researcher, I try to show that the stories of the Odawa women are always with me—that I consult their stories and lived experiences in the same way that I would the scholarship of indigenous rhetorics and cultural

rhetorics. I cite and refer to them with the same type of respect and accountability as I do scholars in the discipline.

To be there is to be visible, present, and active in the communities we belong to. I prefer the term there-ness instead of the ethics practices our disciplines rely on because it allows me to talk about the experiences that are difficult to classify and categorize. Not only does there-ness provide the opportunity to expand the roles of researcher and participant, but to develop these roles in the language and terms of the cultural community. There-ness will never be the new jargon used to please institutional desires. It shouldn't be. It's not supposed to be. It's an adverb. It answers questions. It modifies. It's the answer to those moments when I have to be at an exhibit, a feast, or a meeting, and I don't want to because it's cold outside, I'm tired, or I have a deadline. I know that *being there* will make me feel better, but first I have to fight my institutional training to isolate myself—to be more than and less than human. It modifies.

Conclusion: Towards a cultural rhetorics methodology

What I've provided is another option of research practices that are rooted in indigenous and decolonial knowledges. These practices are valuable for all researchers because we have all experienced the trauma of colonialism and are complicit in colonization. As Janice Gould (1992) observed, "there is not a university in this country that is not built on what was once native land" (p. 81). We need research practices that make visible the complexity of being the arms of the institution while working with and across cultures. We have to remember that all of us live and work on settled, colonized land—indigenous land. Throughout the article, I've talked quite a bit about visibility and presence. As researchers, we know that there is always labor involved in research projects that goes unmentioned. We understand that certain types of work are considered intellectual and theoretical. Relationality and there-ness give us an opportunity to address how that unseen labor is crucial to how projects are organized, sustained, and analyzed. It lets us make the unseen and difficult to articulate visible and intellectual.

To build a cultural rhetorics methodology is to resist the notion that community-based research should be replicable. Relationships are not replicable. The research that I did with the Odawa women is a localized and relational production of knowledge. In some ways, a cultural rhetorics methodology contradicts the idea that one can use the same rhetorical practices and methods across cultures without change. Instead, what I am proposing is to understand how the practices we develop are rooted in a specific cultural community, tradition, and history and take responsibility to give those practices longevity by sharing this knowledge across communities. I am interested to see how practices like relationality and there-ness can be interpreted, used, and built upon. Since relationality and there-ness are based upon one's relationships with the world, practicing relationality and there-ness will look, sound, and feel different for every researcher, every cultural community, and every research project.

At this point, I think it's important to acknowledge that I understand that many of you, dear readers, are not native, do not work with native peoples, or do not tell stories the way that I tell stories. You do not have to be native, work with native people, or tell stories the way I tell stories to find these practices useful and meaningful. All research practices, methods, and theories are culturally located and specific. What relationality and there-ness, as intercultural

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research practices, can offer researchers is *a way in* to making cross-cultural (research) relationships visible. Researchers provide audiences an opening to participate—to show what they look like while they talk with participants, transcribe, write, check back with participants, and theorize their findings to the discipline. Instead of speaking for participants, let's speak with and alongside them. Let's share the space.

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ⁱ Talking circles are an indigenous approach to communication and knowledge sharing. For our talking circles, we used a microphone instead of an eagle feather and did a question and answer with the audience. These aspects are atypical of traditional talking circles.

ⁱⁱ Many of the ideas from this article draw directly from my dissertation, *Theory Begins with a Story, Too: Listening to the Lived Experiences of American Indian Woman* where I build a relational theory of visibility from the stories the Odawa women tell about their lived experiences and my relationship to the women and their stories. I enacted relationality and relational accountability to examine how American Indian women use stories and relationships to contend Western images of leadership and theorize how they make themselves visible in both dominant and indigenous spaces. In this article, I reflect quite a bit on what it was like to write about the oral history projects and build a cultural rhetorics framework.

ⁱⁱⁱ While discussing decoloniality, Walter Mignolo (2011) emphasized options instead of alternatives because “if you look for alternatives, you accept a point of reference instead of a set of existing options among which decolonial enters claiming its legitimacy to sit at the table when global futures are discussed” (p. xxviii).

^{iv} My understanding of cultural rhetorics partly comes from the *collective* research that I do with The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab. The Cultural Rhetorics Research Lab is a research cluster that came out of Michigan State University’s Rhetoric & Writing Program. The lab is focused on making the theories and practices of cultural rhetorics visible both locally and nationally. Current members of the theory lab are Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Jennifer Fisch-Ferguson, Daisy Levy, Maria Novotny, Malea Powell, and Andrea Riley-Mukavetz. The lab has conducted a workshop at *College Composition and Communication Conference* and has an article under review that further defines cultural rhetorics and outlines cultural rhetorics practices.

^v In “Octalog III: The Politics of Historiography,” Malea Powell (2010) acknowledged, “[t]his belief itself is an outgrowth of a much larger, more insidious belief—a belief about civilization, about the duties and character of civilized wo/men, a belief that made it possible for the colonization of the Americas to take place” (p. 121). What this belief has erased is how the Greco-Romans wrote from a distinct cultural position. To be clear, cultural rhetorics scholars do not hate the Greeks. Instead, scholars seek to sustain the discipline by not connecting every rhetorical practice to Classic Antiquity. Furthermore, cultural rhetorics scholars acknowledge that for thousands of years, there has been intellectual production all over the globe. If we want to sustain Rhetoric and Composition as a discipline, then we need to understand all of these systems of discourse (Powell, 2012).

^{vi} My definition of rhetoric partly comes from Michel De Certeau (1984), who made visible how everyday practices or “ways of operating” are central to understanding and participating within cultures. He wrote, “Both rhetoric and everyday practices can be defined as internal manipulations of a system—that of language or that of an established order” (p. 24).

^{vii} Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) is an extraordinarily influential text. Smith’s project is two-fold: she deconstructs Western ways of knowing to show how these methodologies have devastated indigenous peoples and created distrustful relationships between researchers and indigenous peoples. Then, through a decolonial lens, she reconstructs these methodologies and provides her readers with twenty-four approaches to using decolonial methodologies. Scholars like Vine Deloria Jr., Andrea Smith, Maureen Konkle, Chela Sandoval, and Craig Womack have all expanded upon Smith’s initial argument and continue to deconstruct Western approaches to research while providing indigenous and decolonial research paradigms.

^{viii} Paracolonial refers to the colonial effects on regionally specific places. Often, paracolonial is used as a way to talk about how colonialism and imperial practices have affected current spaces, places, and landbases and the people who live and work there.

^{ix} The Three Fires refers to the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi people, who are indigenous to Michigan as well as parts of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ontario.

^x Clearly, the Odawa women are experienced orators and use *to be there* as a storytelling mechanism. In an effort to move beyond proving that the Odawa women are, in fact, intellectual, I have omitted this obvious observation.