

DISSERTATION

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

In this dissertation, I put forward ethical, methodological, and epistemological reasons that warrant the presence of participants in the appraisal of social scientific research products. I discuss the nature of appraisal through Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy and use it to support the claim that participatory research holds the capacity to improve formalized appraisal processes in cultural research. Extending the critique into a consideration of Western and Indigenous epistemologies, I attempt to deconstruct the ways in which Western academic research, specifically social scientific research, perpetrates colonialism and how, through participatory research, social scientific research practices might begin the process of decolonization. I then discuss how descriptive analytic techniques can make participant appraisal viable in academic contexts by showing how participatory strategies can license non-immersive data-collection methods, e.g., general interview-based research, in ways that are typically associated with those that are immersive, e.g., participant-observation.

DEDICATION

To all the participants and reviewers who shared their time and knowledge.

To Keri and Gracie who kept me going.

To Dr. David Flores who gave me a chance.

To Dr. Joseph Champ who never stopped believing in me.

POSITION STATEMENT

I spent the first 10 years of my life in environments that were low-income, multicultural, and integrated. Growing up in Southern California, I had friends with skin tones that spanned the dermatological spectrum. None of us cared about skin color. We had much more important things to worry about, like organizing bike races at the local BMX track and not getting caught when stealing fruit from the neighbor's tree. Whenever race was brought up, it was typically by adults from my extended family. These comments were directed toward people of color and were often derogatory. Fortunately for me, I had parents who strove to look beyond the racist cultures they were born into and did their best to instill into my sister and me values of equality and tolerance. As I grew older, I realized that children are not born racists, racism is born into them.

Although I never stopped loving my extended family, I eventually came to pity them for their racist ways. Because they were unable or unwilling to look past the mandates of their own enculturation, they denied themselves the opportunity to evolve beyond it. Some of the most meaningful relationships in my life—relationships that helped me define my own understandings of who I am—were with friends from different races and cultures. Friendship, love, and tolerance. These are innate forces of human nature that have the potential to disrupt and overcome the structural orders that keep us from each other.

I am fully aware of my own external positionality: white male. I also understand that the amber waves of grain that carpet the United States were sown with seeds of white supremacy. Whatever gave large groups of white people the idea that they were somehow superior to groups of people with different skin tones, I cannot claim to understand because it is such a ridiculous notion to me.

In the pages below, you will find my attempt to reveal and undermine white supremacy in the social sciences, and I want to state from the outset that the attempt is imperfect. As a white person who conducted research in Indigenous communities, I recognize that the structural orders of white supremacy are so ingrained within the fabric of contemporary society that it is impossible for me to fully extract myself from their grip. It is a fact that white researchers have been defining and speaking for Indigenous people throughout the history of the academy in the United States. As someone trained in this tradition, I recognize that there are power implications that my research approach cannot account for.

So why did I refrain from adopting a post-structural analytic strategy to make sense of the power dynamics that transpired during my interactions with participants? From my *own* positionality, as an academic, it would have made sense. However, the *participants* of this study would have had considerable difficulty making sense of a post-structural analysis of research data. This is consequential because the methodological and analytic strategies employed in this study were designed to warrant collaboration between researcher and participants during the review process. Had I attempted to impose a post-structural theory to explain participant behavior, meaningful collaboration with participants would likely have been elusive.

Instead, I used Wittgenstein's language-games philosophy to justify a descriptive approach to empirical research that is specifically designed to incorporate participants into the appraisal process and, in so doing, decenters epistemic power from the researcher. In granting authorial and editorial power to the participants, it was my intent to put forward a research approach capable of addressing a history of colonial misrepresentation in the

social sciences. Again, I accept there are limitations to this approach. However, as I hope to illustrate below, any foray into cross cultural research will be accompanied with issues of ethnocentrism and/or cultural appropriation. So unless one is willing to accept that researchers should only be allowed to study people from their own race and culture, the road toward fair representation in the social sciences will remain a rocky one. But so long as researchers remain committed to inclusion and integration, it is a road worth traveling.

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INTRODUCTION

At what point in the research process can the social scientist say that they have acquired knowledge? Does it happen instantaneously during observation? Later on while contemplating what has been observed? Perhaps it manifests grammatically, through the process of symbolic representation? If it does happen during any of these stages, why, then, are researchers compelled to subject what they know to the scrutiny of others? Why not just be satisfied with producing knowledge for its own sake?

I have spent some time contemplating these questions. Although I do not claim to possess definitive answers to any of them, I am confident that the answers must stem, in some way, from a recognition that knowledge, as a process and product, is derivative of human socialization. In particular, the only way that human beings can know what exists in what we perceive as reality (including ourselves) is through our communicational interactions with each other.

There is no feasible way for an individual to understand the nature of something without first being socialized to whatever it is they are attempting to understand. If this is in doubt, it is important to remember that the only way one could ever hope to counter this proposition is by putting forward other propositions. Doing so would immediately countermand the objection, since propositions are inherently linguistic, and language is inherently social.

Such matters may be regarded with apathy or even disdain by working professionals in the social sciences. They may ask: 'What does my research gain when I question its production? My job as a social scientist is to observe and analyze the ways in

which human beings organize themselves. I have received extensive training in how to go about doing this, so philosophizing about my research and its production would only serve to distract me from my primary goal of understanding human groups.’

Such concerns are valid, and there is no doubt that too much self-reflexivity can stall production in any industry. However, it should be clear to any social scientist who has ever taken the time to even briefly audit their own discipline that their way of conducting research is but one of many modes. Indeed, a feature that all academic disciplines share—from the hard sciences to the humanities—is that they are marked by internal plurality.

No discipline possesses a fully contained theory that is inoculated from the pressures of competition. Before they set out to observe and analyze whatever it is they are hoping to study, researchers are enculturated by their discipline to think about their objects of study in particular ways. When a researcher chooses one theory or method at the expense of another, they likely have reasons for doing so. Since other researchers from the same discipline justify their approaches with reasons that are (to a greater or lesser extent) at odds with the researcher’s, such reasons can never be exhaustive. So it is important for the social sciences (or any discipline) to make room for some philosophical reflection because without it, we lack the rational capacity to justify why and how we do research.

In the social sciences, such matters typically play out in the literature and methodology sections of research papers. These preambles not only provide rational justification for the research that follows but also locates the researcher—as a cultural inhabitant—within the domain of a particular discipline. Even though both are integral to the production of knowledge, far less attention is given to the latter. A primary aim of this

dissertation, then, is to reveal just how constitutive cultural positionality is in the production of social scientific knowledge.

I explore the production of social science products through a critical analysis of peer-review. Unlike the theoretical and methodological, there is little variation across social scientific disciplines in terms of how research articles are evaluated for publication. Typically, the process entails a researcher submitting an article to a journal where it is reviewed by academic editors and reviewers. Throughout this dissertation, I explore an alternative to this convention that proceeds through the incorporation of participants into the peer-review process. In so doing, I present ethical, methodological, and epistemological reasons that justify the presence of participants in the appraisal of cultural research products.

Making room for the evaluative practices of participants in research—specifically research derived from inductive, grounded approaches—engenders more rigorous outcomes, since they have been vetted not only by academic experts but also by those who engage in the very cultural practices the researcher ventures to understand. The intent is to provide grounds for the inclusion of participants in the appraisal of research products in a manner that avoids some of the complications that have surfaced in recent philosophical critiques.

In particular, I invoke Inkeri Koskinen’s 2014 article “Critical Subjects: Participatory Research Needs to Make Room for Debate” as a jumping-off-point for my analysis. Koskinen’s critique is erudite in problematizing some of the issues that come with incorporating participant knowledge into academic research. However, her analysis stops

short of explaining what participants actually gain in having their knowledge practices appraised by academics.

After summarizing Koskinen's position, I attempt to provide some clarity on this matter by drawing on elements of Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy. In so doing, I put forward a linguistic epistemology that turns cultural research away from essentialist mandates of cultural determinism and toward a recognition of individuals as culturally aware agents. Arguing that pluralism is inherent in all forms of life and that participatory research approaches can accommodate a range of perspectives in research outcomes, my analysis puts forward a mode of conducting cross-cultural research that affords participants the opportunity to appraise contextualized descriptions of their cultural practices.

In revealing the evaluative capacity of participatory research, I show how non-immersive research strategies, such as those found in general interview research, can elicit thick descriptions of social activity that are typically associated with immersive methods, such as those found in ethnography. However, if non-immersive research outcomes are to take advantage of the evaluative potential of participatory research practices, researchers must be open to making certain analytic concessions, specifically, excising the theoretical in favor of the descriptive.

I show how using theoretical precepts to explain the practices of outside cultural inhabitants is problematic for two reasons: First, it presumes that the theory being employed to explain participant practices can reveal aspects of their nature in ways that are more appropriate than other theories from the same discipline. However, any attempt by a researcher to prioritize their way of knowing over another will necessarily be

contingent upon the social and historical positioning of that researcher. So how are we to know which theoretical orientation is best suited to explain the practices of a particular group? Indeed, even the positivist must know through their own humanity.

Second, when researchers commission their own ways of knowing to explain participant practices, they are doing so at the expense of the ways in which participants know themselves. This is true for most social scientific research, but the infraction is particularly stark when theoretic explanation is applied toward people from nonWestern cultures. This is because there is a history in the social sciences of Western researchers going into Indigenous communities, collecting information, and then explaining this information through their own (outsider) positionalities.

Such practices are problematic because Indigenous communities already possess their own ways of making sense of their lives, of their religions, their language, their relationships, their cultures. In other words, they already know who they are. Is it appropriate, then, for Western social scientists to represent Indigenous communities in ways that are contrary to their own understandings? Is it not a bit condescending to these communities to be told by outsiders who they are? I argue in the sections below that any attempt to explain the practices and motivations of any group with external theory is bound to be ethnocentric.

Throughout this dissertation I present solutions to these issues that emerged from my attempts to apply a participatory research strategy to my own research practices and products. In late 2019 and early 2020, I spent two months in the American Southwest where I conducted over 30 interviews with personnel from the US Forest Service Region 3 as well as land workers from multiple tribes and pueblos. Aware of my own Western

positionality and wanting to avoid the missteps of previous social scientists, I set out to develop a research strategy capable of producing analytic outcomes that not only respected participant perspectives but also proactively integrated them into analysis.

Ultimately, these efforts produced two publications: A peer-reviewed article that was published in the journal *Fire* (hereafter referred to as the *Fire Article*) and a peer-reviewed general technical report (hereafter referred to as the *Tribal Relations Report*) that will be published by the US Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station. These publications are presented as examples of what research can look like when it adheres to the participatory research approach that I will now lay out.

THE PRACTICE OF APPRAISAL

This article considers the epistemic potential of participatory research in the social sciences, specifically as it relates to the appraisal of cultural research products. I proceed by exploring two dimensions of participatory research: 1) its capacity to validate qualitative cultural research outcomes in academic contexts (specifically, peer reviewed research articles); and 2) its capacity to facilitate collaborative spaces of knowledge between researchers and participants.

Participatory research is considered an alternative approach to traditional social science, in that it repositions social investigation from a linear cause and effect orientation to a collaborative approach focused on the contexts of people's lives (Chandler & Torbet, 2003; Kelly, 2005; Young, 2006). It has been described as "a philosophical approach to research that recognizes the need for persons being studied to participate in the design and conduct of all phases (e.g., design, execution, and dissemination) of any research that affects them" (Vollman et al., 2004, p.129). Although participatory research influences methodological design, "the key element of participatory research lies not in methods but in the attitudes of researchers, which in turn determine how, by and for whom research is conceptualized and conducted" (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995, p. 1667).

As I explore more extensively in the next section, many researchers are drawn to participatory research for its ethical dimensions. Attwood (1997) contends that participatory research embodies "the concept that people have a right to determine their own development and recognises the need for local people to participate meaningfully in the process of analysing their own solutions. . ." (p. 2). Recognizing the rights of

participants to have a say in how they are represented in research aligns with feminist methodologies that practice research *for* participants instead of *on* subjects (Miner, Jayaratne, Pesonen, & Zurbrugg, 2012). Such ethical considerations engage cultural researchers who are interested in adopting more inclusive research practices.

However, participatory research also foregrounds important epistemological issues. Notably, participatory research creates space in which both participants and researchers can reformulate their epistemologies about how political and social contexts in local communities can impact daily life (McIntyre, 2002). Participatory research outcomes engender knowledge forms that John Gaventa (1993) describes as rationally democratic, humane, and liberating in ways that are lacking in mainstream academia. By making room for participants in the research process, epistemic power is diffused, democratized, and relocated in a way that is more inclusive (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). In this sense, participatory research strategies effectively decenter epistemic power away from academics by making space for the interpretations of participants in research outcomes (Blodgett, et al., 2011).

Koskinen (2014) problematizes the adoption of participatory research practices by calling attention to the ways academics handle the presence of local knowledge in academic products, e.g. refereed journal articles. Her concern is with practices related to *cultural research*, which she defines as research that makes claims about how participants know and go about living in their social worlds. She premises her critique on cultural researchers (specifically ethnographers) accepting the existence of multiple and disparate knowledge systems: “people around the world have differing criteria for what is considered a good argument, an acceptable way of producing and justifying knowledge claims, and evaluating

them” (p. 734). When researchers (or anyone, for that matter) become aware of another culture’s knowledge system and witness its practical application to daily life, it becomes difficult to reconcile the belief that one’s native knowledge system is the only (or best) way to make sense of reality. As such, cultural researchers are compelled to accommodate foreign knowledge systems into their research products.

However, possessing an understanding that truth is relative to the culture to which it belongs does not necessarily mean that researchers can simply insert themselves into a given culture, observe cultural applications of knowledge, then turnaround and produce faithful representations of that knowledge in academic contexts. By emphasizing the privileged status of academic representations in cultural research, Indigenous studies have been instrumental in accentuating the issue of cultural misrepresentation in the social sciences (Swadener & Mutua, 2008). As Smith (1999) notes, academic theory has historically been regarded by Indigenous peoples as an instrument of oppression. This is, in large measure, a product of researchers recounting histories, analyzing arts, and dissecting cultures in ways that are distorted back to Indigenous communities through an academic lens.

To address the issue of misrepresentation, cultural researchers have increasingly turned to participatory research methods. The thinking goes: since participants are given a direct say in how they are represented in research outcomes, the risk of misrepresentation significantly decreases (Simonds and Christopher, 2013). But as Koskinen points out, there are epistemic costs that come with incorporating local knowledge into academic systems. Foremost is the tendency of cultural researchers (as well as reviewers and editors) to

abstain from critically appraising the local knowledge that participants bring into the research process.

Koskinen explores the consequences of avoiding the appraisal of local knowledge according to three types of relativism: cultural, conceptual, and postmodern. Cultural relativism presupposes that it is possible to evaluate and compare the knowledge claims of differing cultures. Such assumptions become problematic because they “lead to the practice of using the standards of evaluation accepted in an alternative knowledge system when evaluating knowledge claims made within it” (Koskinen, 2014, p. 739). Because the risk of cultural appropriation is so high, contemporary ethnographers rarely apply cultural relativism to their research practices. And although both conceptual and postmodern relativism recognize the vanity of appraising knowledge systems that exist beyond one’s own, they essentially reach the same position through separate paths.

Drawing from Mandelbaum, Koskinen explains conceptual relativism as the position that ideational frameworks are so fundamental to questions of veracity that “one cannot legitimately compare statements made in one [framework] with those made within another” (Mandelbaum 2010, 68). Conceptual relativists question the claim that it is possible for truth statements from different cultural contexts to conflict because the grounds for these truths originate from entirely different ways of conceptualizing the world. In cultural research, especially in studies that adopt ethnographic methods, researchers have attempted to resolve conceptual relativism by keeping local and academic knowledge systems strictly separated. Given the role critical appraisal plays in academic contexts, however, this strategy of segregating knowledge systems is problematic, not least because it renders researchers unable to adopt or use participant knowledge claims.

Primary among these consequences is that researchers are unable to adopt or use participant knowledge claims. Koskinen (2014, p. 741) articulates the predicament:

In stressing the significant differences between conceptual frameworks, and accordingly also knowledge systems, researchers may treat their informants' beliefs and forms of argumentation in a respectful manner, but at the same time not take them seriously as propositions that should be accepted, refuted, or compared to the researcher's own claims: for example, a Native American myth must not be compared with a scientific hypothesis even if at first sight they might seem to contradict each other.

Whereas conceptual relativism avoids the appraisal of local knowledge on the grounds that disparate knowledge systems cannot meaningfully correspond due to conceptual incongruity, postmodern relativism abstains from appraising local knowledge through the active acceptance of it. Postmodern researchers warrant their acceptance of local knowledge by comprehending research—and the knowledge derived thereof—as unavoidably political and rooted in power dynamics. Baghramian lays out the political focus of postmodern relativism: Because all knowledge is incomplete, interpretive, and derived from relations of power, “we can do little more than insist on the legitimacy of our own perspective and try to impose it on other people” (Baghramian, 2010, p. 45).

The effect of this position in the social sciences has been to draw attention away from positivistic portrayals of societal configurations and toward social inequalities. As noted above, participatory research has in many ways been developed as a response to

issues of inequality, and postmodern relativism has played a key role in its development. Participatory researchers who are influenced by postmodern relativism reason that if all knowledge is ultimately political and truth contingent upon the group or culture through which it is derived, then why adopt (and consequently advocate for) the knowledge system of a privileged group that benefits from its commanding position? Why not empower oppressed groups by welcoming their knowledge systems on their terms through participatory research?

A consequence of taking a postmodern position in cultural research is that the researcher does not critically appraise participant knowledge but simply acquiesces to it. Koskinen notes that:

... postmodern relativism does not encourage researchers to appraise the local thinking they are studying. It does not materially challenge the practice of avoiding appraisal because the aim is not to appraise beliefs and ways of argumentation but rather to empower communities and look for ways in which they could beneficially use their local knowledge. The postmodern researcher quite methodologically *supports* local knowledge systems, and support differs from appraisal.

When academics avoid the appraisal of local knowledge by way of postmodern relativism, they set “aside the principle that all reasoning in research should be subjected to criticism” (Koskinen, 2014, p. 745). Moreover, when the appraisal of local knowledge is avoided through conceptual relativism, researchers are denying participant collaborators “the status of a colleague who deserves constructive criticism” (Koskinen, 2014, pp. 744-

745). Both positions conflict with the collaborative aims of participatory research because participants (and the knowledge they bring) are not fully engaged in the research process.

Unfortunately, the solution is not as easy as academics simply making the choice to start appraising local knowledge, as one of two complications are likely to occur. First, if academics appraise local knowledge according to the dictates of their own epistemologies, their evaluative procedures are likely to unfold ethnocentrically, since they are being used to appraise knowledge practices that lie beyond their contextual domains, e.g. using structuralism to explain the spiritual practices of a shaman. Alternatively, if academics appraise local knowledge using the standards of the cultures they are studying, it is likely that such standards will be misapplied, since academics (outside of immersive participant-observation contexts) are not constituent to those cultures, e.g. a structuralist using shamanic knowledge to explain the spiritual practices of a shaman. Co-opting local knowledge in this way will inevitably lead to cultural appropriation.

Beyond stating “participatory research needs to make room for debate,” Koskinen does not provide a viable solution to the problem—nor, to be clear, was this her intent. Rather, Koskinen set out to problematize the issue, and she did this exceptionally well. My intent is to build on her critique by offering a way to justify and properly situate the appraisal of local knowledge by academics. I do so by emphasizing that the benefits of appraisal in the production of research do not end with academic evaluation. As we will see, cultural researchers have just as much to gain from having their outcomes evaluated by academics as they do by participants.

Koskinen’s treatment of appraisal presupposes that most academics regard the evaluation of knowledge as self-evident and essential. She asserts that “all reasoning in

research should be subjected to criticism” (p. 745) and that to deny participant researchers constructive criticism of their ideas is to deny them their “due” as researchers. I concur, but, if participatory research is to make room for debate, it is important to determine what it will gain from having its outcomes appraised by academics to begin with.

To help us comprehend these benefits, it will be instructive to first establish an understanding about what *academic* research gains from appraisal. In this section, I offer a deeper discussion about the nature of appraisal using Wittgenstein’s linguistic philosophy. I then reason in support of the claim that participatory research holds the capacity to improve formalized appraisal processes in cultural research.

Appraisal is multifarious. From an informal hallway conversation with a colleague to an incisive article response in a journal, appraisal is constitutive to academia. For our purposes here, I focus on the peer review process, since it is the most formalized and ubiquitous mode of appraisal in the social sciences. Traditionally, peer review has been defined as “the process of subjecting an author’s scholarly manuscript to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the same field, prior to publication in a journal” (Ware, 2008, p. 4). Because peer reviewed manuscripts are evaluated by scholars with a track record of competence in a particular field, peer review provides a viable means of ensuring the quality and reliability of research (The British Academy, 2007). The primary function of peer review is typically understood as a means of effecting quality control of published information (Ziman, 1968). In sum, peer review is a filtering procedure capable of distinguishing high-level academic products from those that are not. It does so by subjecting manuscripts to the appraisal of editors and reviewers, who are subject matter experts affiliated with discipline-specific journals.

Obviously, each discipline possesses its own set of rules that reviewers make use of when determining manuscript quality, but there can also be *variance* within disciplines as well. Indeed, some top ranked journals have rejection rates that exceed 90 percent (Goldfinch and Yamamoto, 2012). Assuming that most authors submit their manuscripts to journals believing their work merits publication and that the majority of these papers are written by subject matter experts (i.e., professors, research professionals, PhD students, etc.), discrepancies clearly exist within disciplines about what passes for a publishable manuscript. So it can be quite vexing at times for inhabitants of a particular academic discipline to know how to adequately meet these expectations, especially when different reviewers provide conflicting evaluations about the same manuscript.

There is also the issue of value circularity in the peer review process—that is, the danger of reviewers favoring or relating to manuscripts that align with their own predilections. In most circumstances, a subject matter expert is asked to serve as an editor or reviewer for a journal because they have had previous success in gaining the acceptance of other subject matter experts. Even though such mutualism serves the important function of preserving discipline rules, it can also serve to shut out the knowledge practices of those who have been enculturated to a topic of study through different means. The result is a type of appraisal that exists to both reaffirm and realize itself, one based on a kind of self-pollinating epistemology.

With these issues in mind, a participant might ask: What do I gain from having my knowledge appraised by academics? In one sense, the appraisal is inconsistent because different reviewers have different issues with my (or our) manuscript. If they are incapable of agreeing amongst themselves about the value of my manuscript, how am I to know

whose feedback is correct so that I might improve it? From another angle, why should I take seriously the perspectives of individuals who have little or no experience with my culture? Do they really think that they have a better understanding about my culture than I do, someone who possesses direct knowledge of my culture's practices? Would it not make more sense for someone from *my* culture to determine the merits of research products that depict such knowledge?

Cultural knowledge is inherent to all forms of human life, in that we all have understandings about why we do the things we do with the people we do them with. Such understandings are essential to our ability to function within culture. Although there are exceptions, most of us have an appreciation of the cultures that we inhabit, since it is easy to connect cultural practices with personal identity and survival. So what is the incentive to take seriously the conceptualizations that academics (as cultural outsiders) make about one's cultural practices, much less to participate in the research process?

The linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein provides us with a means of understanding and perhaps reconciling these discrepancies. We begin by exploring the seminal concept of his later philosophy: *language-games*. By approaching language as a type of game, Wittgenstein draws our attention to the rule-based nature of language use. As with games, language use is guided by rules and their application. Just as one's understanding of a game is determined by her capacity to act in accordance with the rules of that game, so too is a language user evaluated according to his capacity to accord with the conceptual rules that are inherent to the context in which they are applied (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 27).

Wittgenstein (1953) asserts that a rule cannot be obeyed only once (p. 81). Instead, a rule needs to be followed on several occasions, becoming customary. It is the repetitive nature of rule following that turns it into a practice, a type of standardized activity where actors can be corrected by their peers (Johannessen, 1988). Johannessen notes that “there must be *accepted* ways of performing the practices since it does make a difference to what we do as participants in a practice” (1987, p. 366, emphasis in original).

For Wittgenstein, the words *agreement* and *rule* are closely related. Indeed, to teach anyone the use of a rule is to also learn the use of agreement (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 86) and for language to function as a means of communication, “there must be agreement not only in definitions but also. . . in judgments” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 88). If this were not the case, human beings would be incapable of determining what is true and what is false because both are rendered through language use (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 88). As such, the concept of truth (along with its various analogues) must be taught through linguistic practice: “And when I do this I do not communicate less to him than I know myself. . . I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 83).

Communicational agreement among interlocutors serves as the most basic and valid means of justification among individuals. Because “concepts are generated over time through training and education. . . (i)ndividuals who make up a shared linguistic community must, by virtue of their concepts and ‘representational form,’ generally agree in their judgements about the nature of things.” (Tonner, 2017, p. 15). The concepts *culture* and *community* are not just abstractions to be studied by academics (or even self-aware practitioners) but are also elements “by which sense is made of the world,” and we are to

understand culture through the ways that language is practiced, specifically by “selecting certain practices which seem to hang together” and contrasting them with those that are disassociated (Stirk, 1999, p. 48).

Associations become visible by observing the shared linguistic practices of a community, the aggregate of which (at any given time) constitutes a culture (Glock, 1996). Language-games are embedded and diffused within culture. Each language-game possesses a unique set of rules that in some way distinguishes it from and in other ways connects it with other types of language-games, what Wittgenstein refers to as *family resemblances* (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 32). Congruity among shared practices renders “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 32). It is through associated networks of linguistic practice that particular *forms of life* manifest, and it is through forms of life that we are to understand language. As Wittgenstein states, “to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 8).

Wittgenstein’s philosophy can be read as sympathetic to all three types of relativism explored above. In one sense, Wittgenstein is a conceptual relativist. He insists that the ways human beings make sense of the world are determined by the ways we practice it through language. So the forms of life that are common among individuals consist of the concepts they use to organize and communicate experiential phenomena (Tonner, 2017). In another sense, Wittgenstein is post-modern because he accepts all forms of life as equally valid. For Wittgenstein it is impossible for one form of life to explain another from a position that is omniscient and exempt from context. Ultimately, all one can say is “this is what human life is like” (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 121).

However, Wittgenstein's coherence with conceptual and post-modern relativism does nothing to help us overcome the problem of appraisal in participatory research. In the case of conceptual relativism, the appraisal of local knowledge is still beyond the academic's grasp because she does not have access to the rules that are necessary to properly evaluate an unfamiliar language-game. Nor does his post-modern acceptance of all forms of life—including the knowledge practices embedded within them—get us any closer to justifying academic appraisal of local knowledge or vice versa.

It is through a Wittgensteinian depiction of cultural relativism that we find space for academic and local appraisal in participatory research. In line with cultural relativism, Wittgenstein thinks there is a common element that binds differing forms of life. This element is the capacity, indeed the necessity, of human beings to bear witness and be affected by the cultural practices of others, even the practices of those who we would consider foreign (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 121). Although humans may comprehend the world differently, we all share in the capacity to be affected by "*that* which has called" the incident to life (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 121). So it is through the very instance of being affected by practices of foreign cultures that the potential to comprehend them becomes accessible.

Depending on the context, bearing witness to foreign cultural practices can be trivial, profound, or somewhere in-between. Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 125) provides the example of the anthropologist James Frazer, whom he criticizes as incapable of conceiving "a life different than that of the England of his time!" Despite Frazer's aversion to mysticism, Wittgenstein reveals how Frazer, in his retelling of the sacrificial killing of the King of Nemi, is nonetheless moved by the strange and dreadful events of the

story. For Wittgenstein, the very act of Frazer experiencing dread, magnificence, horror, tragedy, etc. (anything but triviality) in response to the story shows that it is possible for someone to experience a nonindigenous culture in a way that accords with their intended meaning, even for someone like Frazer who is dubious of mysticism.

Typically, making sense of lived experience is accomplished through the rules and practices that are familiar to us, but sense-making is also possible through modes that are foreign. Anyone who has been friends with someone from another culture likely adopted some of the friend's native practices and vice versa. Even though foreign practices are initially obscure, they become intelligible by observing how the friend reacts to a mutually experienced incident and relating the friend's reaction to your own. It then becomes possible to make sense of future incidents in a likewise manner.

Consider the following example: you and a friend both work for an overbearing supervisor who regularly doles out unnecessary busywork. You notice that when the supervisor assigns your friend (who is Spanish) a pointless task, she regularly mutters, "No soy tu robot," as soon as the supervisor is out of earshot. As an English speaker, even though most of this phrase is unfamiliar, you are acquainted with the word "robot." You are also acquainted with being treated like an automaton by the supervisor, so you reason that the phrase is a negative reaction to such treatment. Later that day, the supervisor orders you to complete an especially droll task, and as soon as he walks off, you turn toward your friend and say, "No soy tu robot." She turns to look at you, and you both share a laugh.

But why do we trust that the friend's application is correct in the first place? Because we see the friend as someone who embodies a particular form of life, we trust that the friend possesses knowledge of the rules that are required to successfully play the

language-games of her culture. By observing how the friend applies these rules through linguistic practice, especially with others from her culture, we can see that her language use is culturally appropriate, at least until we have reason to believe otherwise.

The same holds true for editors and reviewers in the peer review process. Just as we trust that our friend possesses rulebound knowledge of the practices that constitute the language-games of her culture, we also trust that editors and reviewers possess rulebound knowledge of their respective disciplines. Most editors and reviewers spend their careers devoted to learning and applying discipline rules to their own linguistic practices (as authors) as well as to the practices they evaluate. So they are well versed in these rules and know when authors have followed them appropriately in their linguistic practices, such as those found in the pages of a manuscript.

From this perspective, a manuscript becomes a demonstrative artifact that indicates an author's ability (or lack thereof) to function in concert with the rules of a discipline. If an author's language sufficiently accords with a reviewer's interpretation of discipline rules, the manuscript is accepted (either with or without revisions) for publication. When the linguistic practices of an academic consistently accord with the rules of a given discipline over time, professional survival within that discipline becomes viable, and so does the form of life that accompanies it. What academics gain in having their work appraised in the peer review process, then, is the opportunity to practice a way of knowing that is shared and maintained by a community of people who have devoted their lives to a subject and its study within the parameters of their respective disciplines. Here, knowledge becomes the collection of accepted linguistic rules that specify a discipline.

This is not to suggest that editors and reviewers are fixed automata, programmed to recapitulate the rules of their discipline with exacting precision in perpetuity. Subject matter experts are bound to interpret and apply rules in ways that are distinctive to the cultural contexts from which their particular form of life derives. Because all human beings derive from contexts that are inherently distinctive, all forms of life are distinctive. No two humans practice life in the exact same way. Even where there is significant overlap among cultural inhabitants, individuals have the capacity to be critically aware of their practices and can elect to reject or alter them in ways that are peculiar to those that are widely known. What matters in the peer review process is that discipline rules are practiced in ways that are acceptable to the *specific* editors and reviewers who are evaluating them. So long as acceptance is procured, it is possible to practice the rules of a discipline in all kinds of creative ways.

Most contemporary academic disciplines proceed along these lines without significant controversy. For disciplines in the social sciences that are concerned with how participants know and go about living in their social worlds, i.e., cultural research, the theoretic rules that subject matter experts practice to make sense of foreign cultures do not necessarily extend into the corpus of rules that the people of that culture practice to understand themselves. So it is difficult to understand the sense-making practices of another culture as the people of that culture understand them. Nonetheless, I maintain that it is possible to experience nonindigenous forms of life by emulating foreign practices in foreign settings in ways that are acceptable to those who inhabit those settings. Emulating foreign practices, e.g., making changes to a manuscript based on the appraisal of *local*

subject matter experts, makes it possible to contextualize one's existing language practices to foreign settings.

Contrary to some accounts of expertise (see Holmes and Marcus, 2007), ours is not limited to the academic or technocratic, and we rule out the possibility that only intellectualized communities are capable of techniques of analysis (Williams, 1981). *Anyone* who regularly engages in practices that are consistently accepted by other inhabitants of a shared community possesses some degree of expertise within that community. So long as one is able to comply with the expectations of a given community, they possess knowledge of how to get along within it, what Rooke and Kagioglou (2007) describe as process knowledge—that is, having the ability “to perform relevant activities within” a local “setting without censure from other members” (p. 982). Let us define *expert*, then, as anyone who shares a capacity to use language in ways that are acceptable in communal contexts, is aware of this capacity, and can appraise its use accordingly.

Both *academic* and *local* subject matter experts have the capacity to be affected by cultural artifacts, e.g., research manuscripts, and are able to contextualize such incidents through the rules that are endemic to their respective cultures. Both are also capable of assessing whether a researcher's claims about a culture have met expectations, in terms of what counts as acceptable linguistic practice. In cultural research, what academic reviewers do not have access to (typically) is confirmation from local experts about whether the cultural representations being made by the researcher *as well as* their own evaluations of those representations are acceptable to the inhabitants of the culture being represented.

Why is it important for academic reviewers and researchers to achieve consensus with local experts? For the same reason it is important that local experts achieve consensus with academics. Put simply: it provides a means of evading the pitfalls of dogmatism. When people limit their sensemaking practices solely to those that are native to their own form of life, they deny themselves the possibility of understanding a subject in new ways, or, to paraphrase the French Renaissance philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1987), dogmatism does not allow us to know what we do not know. In sum, engaging with other cultures provides us with a means of experiencing new forms of life and expanding on our own.

It is clear to Wittgenstein that the lived experiences that constitute intersubjective incidents can be interpreted in a variety of ways (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 127) and that all forms of life are equally significant (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 135). Why then do some spend their entire lives viewing the world only as they see it? What prevents them from attempting to peer beyond the native form of life to which they are familiar? Perhaps they assume foreign practices are beyond their capacity, that even if they were to attempt a language-game from another culture, they would be doing so without a comprehensive understanding of the rules.

Such concern is understandable since adopting foreign practices can lead to significant problems, especially cultural appropriation. However, it is important to keep in mind that cultural learning is iterative, i.e., people learn to function within a culture by repeatedly observing how others practice it, so the more we observe a practice performed in context, the more we understand its meaning. Sometimes cultural learning is tacit and sometimes—as is the case with peer review—it is explicit. Either way, so long as foreign cultural practices are taken seriously and a legitimate effort is made to learn from the

native inhabitants who are adept at implementing them, it becomes possible to appreciate and, eventually, practice nonindigenous forms of human life (to greater or lesser extents, of course).

Researchers, participants, and reviewers (or, collectively, research practitioners) all stand to gain from having their research practices appraised by one another because when this happens, they set themselves up with an opportunity to expand their own, respective, forms of life. In so doing, they become more aware, more empathetic toward other ways of knowing, shedding the dogmatisms that prevent human beings from traversing new domains of understanding.

This is a call for participatory research modalities to become even more participatory by extending fully into the peer review process, where the appraisal of all those involved in the production of a research manuscript are valued proportionately. We contend that proportional representation of appraisal is the only valid way to evoke a research environment capable of evincing subject-to-subject relations between academic and local subject matter experts.

Critical Agency

It is difficult to overemphasize the role that language plays in determining how we experience and make sense of the world (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 20). Wittgenstein designates forms of life according to the ways that practitioners use language in a shared community and vice versa. Because the influence of language is omnipresent in shaping forms of life, it is unsurprising that some scholars have taken a deterministic or essentialist stance on Wittgenstein's position of agency.

The conservative reading, as it is known, asserts that individual language use is about following the settled and substantiated rules of a particular community in which the individual is an embedded member. For Bloor (1983), Wittgenstein "was remorseless in stressing the priority of society over the individual" (p. 1), and as explained by Nyiri (1982), "any human being must, in order to be a human being, be constrained by some form of life, by some network of tradition" (p. 59) that is immanent to an affiliated community. Plotica (2013, p. 56) summarizes the conservative reading accordingly:

If one reads Wittgenstein. . . in this way, then the political implication follows that individual agents are as such incapable of gaining critical purchase by word or deed upon the community to which they belong. . . She must use her inherited conventions whole cloth, for these conventions have been taught to her as a foundation and are for her the horizon beyond which she cannot see. The combinations she composes out of these inherited stock-phrases may be novel, but only trivially since what she means and does in her thoughts, utterances, and actions is determined externally and in advance by the conventions she reproduces (and indeed must reproduce) blindly and by rote.

From this angle, reflexive monitoring (and the behavioral practices that arise from it) is not, indicative of agential capacity because to make an intelligible claim about one's self and the societal structure with which one is embedded is to draw from the linguistic rules (or language game) of that very social structure. Nyiri (1992) reaches the conclusion that individual autonomy from one's social structure is implausible because

comprehensibility through critical reflection and conformity to the structural rules of one's own community are fundamentally inseparable.

In his essay, "Pluralism, Community, and Left Wittgensteinianism," Bernard Williams (2005) provides a critique of Bloor's and Nyiri's conservative reading of Wittgenstein that begins with a recognition that in a pluralistic society even though there is intersubjective agreement on some practices there is meaningful disagreement about others. He challenges the presumed necessity of individuals' indiscriminating compliance with whatever conceptual resources are made available to them by their society. Arguing that Wittgenstein's revelations about the conventionality of linguistic practices permits the possibility of individual critical agency within the network of communal practices, Williams contends that there exist spaces where it is possible for one practice to achieve critical leverage over others. By accepting that "people have found [within the rules and conventions that they share with others] resources with which to criticize their society," Williams argues that from a Wittgensteinian lens "practice is not just the practice of practice, so to speak, but also the practice of criticism" (p. 36).

There is no doubt that for individual agents to be competent in language practice (or any social practice for that matter), it is necessary for us to align our activities with some broader communal arrangement that we share with others. However, there is nothing that necessitates complete conformity among individuals within the entire corpus of empirical or normative communal judgments. Arriving at such a conceptualization of Wittgenstein's position on agency and language compels us to "have less temptation to assume that [the set of practices we share with others] is a satisfactorily functioning whole; and we shall be

more likely to recognize that some widely accepted parts of it may stand condemned in the light of perfectly plausible extrapolations of other parts” (Williams, 2005, p. 36-37).

Plotica (2013) builds off of Williams’ argument by developing further the essential role of criticism in determining the agential capacity of individuals. The rules that constitute language games and the practices that are enacted thereof do not fit seamlessly into a singular complex that is shared proportionately and absolutely by a linguistic community. Linguistic practices are only partially and complexly interrelated. Plotica (2013, p. 61) explains that:

It is consistent with Wittgenstein's treatment of rules and conventions of rule following to say that agency is thoroughly conditioned by intersubjective practices and patterns of behavior, yet that agency is still at its core individualistic. An individual can use the language-games of her linguistic community correctly while still making novel uses of the practices she has mastered, and even while using one practice to challenge or disrupt others. A given practice can be the site of critique and contestation even as (and among) individuals (who) use it competently.

Language use is always what particular individuals say and do, who are never mere members of some notional "we" that shares foundational practices, patterns, and dispositions of action.

Intersubjective agreement among members of the same culture is pervasive and significant, but at the periphery, no two individuals are in perfect alignment in either rule following or practice. It is possible, if not requisite, that those who share the same culture

(even in cases of fundamentalism) experience misunderstanding and disagreement. Just because individual agents share meaningful patterns of conduct within a culture, does not mean that all who share a culture are not locked in autonomous reproduction of that culture (Plotica, 2013). Plotica goes on to contend that through the practice of criticism, we draw “upon the resources of some of our practices to call into question the basis or use of others” (2013, p. 66).

Williams and Plotica’s view on agency connects with Wittgenstein’s observations about the manifold and unfolding nature of language use: “And this [linguistic] multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p.11). Where do novel practices of language use arise? From the individuals who employ them. Wittgenstein (1967) makes it clear that it is entirely possible for an individual to invent a new move when playing a language game, occasioning a “new joint” in the language game itself (p. 74). Such critical agency is produced through associations among individuals and opportunities, competencies, imagination, and events, not through some opaque unmasking moment of critique that is somehow detached from the contextualized situations that give rise to it.

Paola Rebughini (2018) contends that it is through critical agency that we are able to break with the habitual rules of structure that arrange the systems with which we regularly participate. Critical agency “consists in understanding how and to what extent the actors are able to put specific and situated forms of critique into practice, and this is related with sovereignty, with the full possession of one’s aims” (p, 11). For Rebughini, critical

agency relates to an individual's capacity to create innovative solutions to crucial problems, not the repudiation of a given social order through emancipatory abstraction.

Critical agency helps us to understand how new practices can emerge from introspection of oneself and community. Doing so helps us look beyond the familiar and toward concepts that are novel or foreign. Imagining nonindigenous forms of life is possible because "[m]ore fundamental than any one particular 'form of life' . . . is *this complicated form of life*; and that is, the fundamentally human perspective" (Tonner, 2017, p. 16).

What compels human beings to make sense of the world is a general characteristic of the mind, and it is possible to enact all kinds of different forms of life from it (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 127). Most spring from assemblages that are familiar to us, while others take shape by learning about the practices of other cultures. As Wittgenstein puts it, there is more than "*one way of assembling the data*," and it is "possible to see the data in their relation to one another and to embrace them in a general picture" (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 131).

Power/Praxis

The problem-solving objective of critical agency harkens to the legacy of classical American pragmatism, where the systematic production of knowledge is not regarded as a means toward revealing states of existence in the objective world but, instead, is gauged according to its capacity to provide practical applications to definitive problems (Holmwood, 2011). Such a perspective on inquiry precludes any definitive determination on inferior or superior causes, making the practical application of inference through the

observation of experimental outcomes the origin of productive knowledge (Hildebrand, 2008). Conceptualizing the practical aspects of knowledge is not unique to American pragmatism. In fact, the lineage of practical knowledge can be traced back to Aristotle, who referred to the pursuits of the ‘practical sciences’ as *praxis*. Although he situated *praxis* within a tripartite epistemology—along with *episteme* (disinterested scientific knowledge) and *techne* (technical craftsmanship)—Aristotle was one of the first philosophers to conjure an understanding of knowledge that emphasized the practical value of its application toward concrete problems faced by human collectives.

In response to the failures of scientific knowledge to render a true picture of reality, the pragmatist philosopher James Dewey, following the legacy of Charles Sanders Peirce, attempted to reconceptualize knowledge by placing an emphasis on its practical aspects. Dewey’s understanding of *praxis* issues from social partnerships among respective actors and does not deny the political nature of knowledge production (Bacon, 2012). For Dewey, all conduct (including the generation of knowledge) constitutes shared activity that manifests through a combination of personal dispositions and environmental inducements (Dewey, 1922). Habits or customs arise from these situated contexts, rendering a form of *praxis* that establishes continuity, even as conditions and processes are altered (Wolfe, 2002).

Dewey (1938) explains that, “(t)he basic characteristic of habit is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. . . (f)or it is a somewhat different person who enters into them.” Habits, then, serve as the basis for Dewey’s conceptualization of *praxis*, in that they indicate prior activity, order

elements of activity into operative contexts, and facilitate the human capacity to make differences in future events (Dewey, 1922).

In a 2012 article titled “Does Pragmatism have a Theory of Power?” Joel Wolfe contends that Dewey’s treatment of praxis, especially as it relates to difference-making in future events, yields a basis of contention that a theory of power is embedded within the pragmatist tradition. Wolfe (2012) asserts that “power is intrinsic to human praxis because all behavior deals with the consequences of transactions in progress, in operation, partially fulfilled, partially incomplete” (p. 7) and emphasizes “making differences through conjoint action within a social medium” (p. 2). Wolfe (2012) goes on to argue that it is through human collectivities of inquiry that we are able to make transformative differences in future events, rendering an understanding of power that “is intrinsic to human conduct, since inquiry and judgment afford control of ways of acting on and with things and the differences made” (p. 13).

Wolfe (2012) argues that the pragmatist view on power also rejects this distinction, but instead of rendering an agent/structure duality, Dewey offers us the singular concept of praxis, which permeates collectivities of human knowledge production by enacting transformative capacity. Michel Foucault was also concerned with rendering a permeable and transformative conception of power. In his treatment of discourse, Foucault (1988) contends that power is everywhere not because it is monolithic or hegemonic but because power flows through the entirety of the social body through multiple mechanisms of localized power (Foucault, 1988). The circulation of power is relational and must be understood according to the networks of connections among individuals, who are localized conveyors of power, not its points of application (Foucault, 2000).

Although Foucault's description of power is compelling in its characterization of power as pervasive in all forms of human interactivity and contained in manifestations of localized discourse, his treatment of the transformative capacity of power falls short because he is unable to adequately account for the role of agency in power. In his attempt to decouple agency and power, Foucault renders a subject that is a historically diffused site of power within discourse, one that is wholly determined by power relations and unable to step beyond these relations (in the form of discursive resistance) in any meaningful way (Hayward, 2000). Caldwell (2007, p. 8) summarizes the issue:

Processes of discursive resistance are deeply problematic because resistance is situated within power, is itself a form of power and can reproduce relations of power. This renders the power-resistance dynamic fundamentally opaque, and Foucault provides very little analytical or conceptual clarification of what constitutes resistance to power. Nevertheless he insists that resistance is the 'irreducible opposite' of power. But if resistance is a 'strategy of struggle' against power then resistance has to be given some sort of normative or substantive legitimacy—collective or otherwise. Moreover, because discursive resistance as a mode of agency can have no recourse to self-certainty founded on rational knowledge or an ethical stance towards what is 'good' for others or the many, it lacks any imperative claims over our actions. How can discursive resistance be imbued with human agency if it has no connection with intentionality, causal outcomes, normative legitimacy or a collective logic of action? Without an answer to this question, discursive resistance appears as a reactive, transgressive and

fragmented counter-action against power that appears all enveloping, normalised and functional.

Caldwell (2007) goes on to state that in his attempt to create new possibilities of agential selves through discursive resistance, Foucault glosses over any real possibility of intentional action on the part of the individual. As a result, his theory of power devolves into cycles of equivocations about discourse and materiality, agency and subjectivity (see Gergen, 1999; Hardy, 2004; Newton, 1998). In sum, Foucault's conceptualization of the transformative capacity of power (through discursive resistance) is "constantly in danger of occupying an infinite space of discursive possibilities, filled with nothing but discourses about discourses, possible agential selves with no agency, change without any fixed starting point or outcome" (Caldwell, 2007, p. 18).

So Foucault understands power not as something that is held by individual actors and wielded upon others but instead as operating within "a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity" (Foucault, 1977, p. 27). Power is a coproduction of social interactivity, where meaning is negotiated as it relates to and diverges from established modes of knowing. This epistemology represents power as inextricably linked and mutually constituted with knowledge (Foucault, 1980), rendering a 'politics of interpretation' that mandates any institutional evaluation or acceptance of knowledge forms to be located within the political contexts with which they are embedded (Weick, 1995).

In her explorations of ontology, Judith Butler strikes a similar chord when she asserts that ontology, as she defines it, refers not to inherent structures of being because

such representations cannot exist outside of the political contexts that give rise to such interpretations (Butler, 2009). Individuals are inescapably social and rendered through norms of political interpretation, or, as stated by Butler, “to be a body is to be exposed to social craft and form, and that is what makes the ontology of the body a social ontology” (Butler, 2009, p. 3). As with Foucault, Butler’s ontology cannot account for the agential capacity of human beings to render their own configurations of social and personal identity. However, her ontology is quite useful as a basis for developing a communal (non-elitist) ontology that is able to accommodate the plurality of perspectives that come with participatory research approaches.

Its warrant resides in Butler’s analytic extension of political theorist Hannah Arendt’s position of *cohabitation* as an ontological mandate of political organization. Cohabitation, according to Butler’s interpretation of Arendt, is premised on the thesis that human beings have no control over with whom they inhabit the Earth. Even though certain groups of humans have attempted to eradicate (sometimes successfully) other groups of humans from the Earth in the form of physical and cultural genocide, the annihilation of all forms of the ‘other’ is implausible, making incidental proximity and unchosen cohabitation prerequisites of political experience (Butler, 2012). Since cohabitation with other humans is an unavoidable characteristic of the lived experience, Arendt argues that we are obligated to maintain and safeguard political forms that sanction an inclusive plurality of individuals (Butler, 2011). As Butler (2012) words it, “If Arendt is right. . . we not only live with those we never chose and to whom we may feel no social sense of belonging, but we are also obligated to preserve their lives and the plurality of which they form a part” (p. 151).

The interdependency that binds all humans politically and socially suggests that we are defined beyond our individual abilities of cognition. Before thinking, we are “social and embodied, vulnerable and passionate; our thinking gets nowhere without the presupposition of that very interdependency” (Butler, 2012, p. 175). Recognition of interdependency as prefiguring thought yields an ethic that understands cohabitation to be basic to the actualization of social and political forms (Butler, 2012). Possessing such an ontology complicates the legitimacy of institutional epistemologies, which are historically contingent and politically derived (see Foucault, 1977 & 1980). Thus, to question one’s own standards of normative truth is to question the legitimacy of one’s own ontological status as someone embedded in a particular political context (Butler, 2005). However, the norms we possess are fundamental to the constitution of social orders that are essential for survival, and any attempt to move beyond the ontological domains such norms bring about threatens notions of bodily identity (Butler, 2004).

The key to balancing an adherence to the norms that constitute one’s own ontological space and accepting (even participating in) the norms of those who populate different domains is through a process Butler (2003) refers to as cultural translation: “Translation will compel each language to change in order to apprehend the other, and this apprehension, at the limit of what is familiar and parochial, will be the occasion of both an ethical and a social translation” (p. 24). To understand what is “familiar and parochial” about the norms to which we subscribe is to engage in critical reflection. Through this process, we open the possibility of rhetorically maneuvering ourselves into a place of plurality, where the epistemologies and ontologies that undergird our notions of validity and truth can be gauged flatly and proportionately alongside those which are “unchosen.”

As with Foucault's concept of discursive resistance and Butler's cultural translation, Wolfe's (2012) interpretation of Dewey's *praxis* provides us with a socially pervasive and transformative conceptualization of power that *also* makes allowances for a concrete means of accounting for the individual in social change. Here, individuals are knowers who participate "in the public processes of inquiry, and human agency takes the leading role in creating knowledge" as it accords "with socially learned responses or habits, impelling problem solving and creativity" (Wolfe, 2012, p. 4). Wolfe (2012, p. 4) goes on to contend that. . .

In the search for order, pragmatism's transactional emphasis on human action, rejecting the notion of the isolated individual, gives primacy to socially encumbered actors responding to and regenerating their social medium. Individuals are not fixed essences but authors of culturally specific acts learned from and appropriate to the social context. Social connections among people provide the opportunities and means for carrying out societal purposes, whereas the self is in fact a social being formed within and through participation in various social media. . . emphasizing the role of habits and inquiry in directing practices within and through the unfolding of the social medium.

Actors possess the capacity to reflectively monitor the rules that regulate their activity, which recursively produces the social medium in which they are embedded (Campbell, 1995). Such "recursive operations" generate modes of social cooperation that emphasize "the crucial role of the agency of human actors and their use of ideas and habits

to control conduct as they construct and reconstruct activities moving them through life” (Wolfe, 2012, p. 13). The focus on experience in rendering praxis indicates that actors have the potential to play a direct role in affecting change. The informed and deliberate knowledge that arises from collectives of individuals provide the possibility of enhanced future experiences (Thayer, 1968). As Dewey (1925) notes“(t)he individual mind is important because only the individual mind is the organ of modifications in traditions and institutions, the vehicle of experimental creation” (p. 20), and “(t)he only power the organism possesses to control its own future depends upon the way its present responses modify changes which are taking place in its medium” (Dewey, 1916, p. 15). As such, it can be stated that agency arises from the reflective monitoring that guides participation in communal processes that, ultimately, have the capacity to respond productively to fluctuating environments (Wolfe, 2012).

It is a unique characteristic of human beings that we are able to apply collective outcomes of judgment to influence environmental conditions. From a pragmatist angle, then, power can be understood as processual modes of relational knowledge production and application among respective individuals who are functionally integral to communities of inquiry. These power relations encourage communication among associated individuals through a “sharing in the objects and acts precious to a community, a sharing whereby meanings are enhanced, deepened and solidified in the sense of communion” (Dewey, 1925, p. 159).

By identifying power as a type of organized and self-directed activity, power is constituted as “the effective functioning of a social medium, the intrinsic self-control by agents participating in operating a social apparatus” (Wolfe, 2012, p. 9). In Dewey’s words,

(p)ower. . . denotes effective means of operation; ability or capacity to execute, to realize ends” (Dewey, 1916, 246). So it is the efficient attainment of envisaged ends that outcomes of collective inquiry and action are rendered, where results regulate power, instead of power itself specifying truth.

Cordova’s Pluralism

The above explorations are not provided to warrant *my* predilections about human language use and the epistemologies that derive thereof. In fact, it is the indeterminateness of Wittgenstein’s philosophy that draws me to it. At no point in either the *Fire Article* or *Tribal Relations Report* will the reader find any references to *rules, practice, language games, critical agency, or praxis* to represent or explain participant activity. These concepts are employed in this dissertation merely to legitimate participants as credible possessors of cultural knowledge in their own right.

As such, my use of Wittgenstein’s *language games* as well as Butler’s *cohabitation* is an attempt to establish a research orientation capable of accommodating a plurality of epistemologies in its outcomes. However, the philosophies of both Wittgenstein and Butler are products of the Western academic tradition. In this sense, the epistemology I have put forward thus far lacks the pluralism that is present in the *Fire Article* and *Tribal Relations Report*. This being the case, I want to give some attention to the Native American philosophy of V. F. Cordova.

I do not include her philosophy simply to diversify the epistemic profile of this document. Instead, her thinking provides us with further insight on the pluralistic nature of

knowing and with additional justifications that warrant this truth. In her book, *How It Is*, Cordova (2007, p. 71) lays out her pluralistic epistemology:

There cannot be one all encompassing ‘Truth’ (or ‘true’ way of doing or defining, anything) in the face of the diversity and complexity exhibited by life in the universe. Instead of ‘Truth’ there will be truths. There will be *perspectives*—each dependent upon and relative to one’s circumstances in the world.

Accepting a diversity of truths as inherent in knowing is difficult to dispute when one observes—empirically—the multiplicity of perspectives that exist within the various disciplines of the academy (as explored above). In these contexts—specifically those that adhere to scientific ontologies—such diversity is tolerated so long as certain underlying ontological assumptions are maintained. However, Cordova complexifies the implications of epistemic diversity further when she necessitates the recognition of epistemologies that exceed such mandates.

In so doing, she shows us the human capacity to know and interpret reality in a variety of ways. Cordova (2007, p. 122) premises her position by exposing the disparities that exist between European and Native American ontologies.

The European reality that threatens Native reality consists of seeing man as an isolated, potentially self-sufficient unit of existence. This model is manifest in the belief that man, the individual, is in competition for survival against every other

man; he creates himself, not through others, but in opposition to others. Man is isolated from nature; he is superior to it.

In contrast to the rigid individualism of the European perspective, Cordova (2007) contends that most Native American realities are capable of acknowledging that. . .

. . .man is not an isolated and self-sufficient unit of existence. Man is a group being and dependent, not only on others, but on the Earth. Survival depends not on competition but on cooperation. Man is not a being in opposition to nature but a part of it. Nature gives him his subsistence; the group gives him his identity.

According to Cordova (2007), most Native Americans are capable of “accepting differences in how the world is described by various groups of human beings” (p. 104). This is because descriptions of the world play out locally through narratives that transpire in spaces that are limited and definite. Such an understanding makes possible the idea that other groups with epistemologies different than one’s own are entitled to hold such views and should be tolerated. Cordova (2007, p. 106) reminds us that:

An assumption of difference has built into it a tolerance that is absent from those views that see only one possible way of being-in-the-world. My difference, it can be said, is based on our mutual tolerance for our essential differences. Without it we would all meld into a field of sameness without distinction.

It is important to keep in mind that when we expose ourselves to nonindigenous forms of thought, we are compelled to recognize the diversity that is inherent in human knowing (Cordova, 2007). Thus, we are reminded not “to expand our own specific way of thinking so that it encompasses all others (Cordova, 2007, p. 56). Unfortunately, the history of the Western academy is replete with instances of Indigenous knowledge being devalued or shut out entirely from its epistemic domain (Cordova, 2007). Attempting to segregate foreign ways of knowing not only isolates these knowledge systems from the broader human community but also stagnates the pool of status quo epistemology. As Cordova (2007, p. 155) puts it, “(t)he attempt to depict a state of affairs in the world that leads to one massive “monoculture” would seem to be unrealistic in the face of the diversity displayed on the planet.”

The next section will expand on these issues more. I will close this section by sharing with you a statement from a pamphlet I acquired during a visit to the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Although its subject matter deals with religion, I think the ways in which the Indigenous people of the Southwest reacted to the presence of foreign beliefs is an example of tolerance and respect that we all should aspire towards, something that the European colonizers of these lands failed to embody.

When the Spanish arrived in our land in the 1500s, their friars brought the teachings and traditions of Catholicism. Even as power struggles complicated our relationship over the following century, many Pueblo people incorporated new elements into their spiritual practices. Our original pantheon of sacred spirits absorbed Catholic saints and the Christ figure. Honoring the Virgin Mary felt similar

to our veneration of the Corn Mother. While Spanish missionaries directed the construction of new churches above ground, we continued to conduct age-old ceremonies in our kivas, blending different stories and symbols into our faith. Each Pueblo adopted a patron saint and began celebrating his or her annual Feast Day. We continue to mark these holidays each year by attending a special morning mass, then filling the village plaza with dances as the sun arcs overhead. Nowadays each Pueblo, and each family and individual within it, has its own interpretations of the relationship between indigenous rites and the Christian beliefs that influenced them. One tradition that we've all kept alive: respect for each other's sacred nature as spiritual beings.

Communities of Research Practice

Accommodating multiple perspectives into a cohesive participatory research procedure is possible so long as the parties involved in its production (researchers, reviewers, and participants) are capable of maintaining not only critical agency over their own language practices but also a sustained curiosity about how others understand subjects of mutual interest. Dewey's productive conceptualization of power as arising from communities of inquiry through conjoint association shares many significant parallels with a more contemporary theory of social learning and knowledge production.

In this interpretation, 'communities of inquiry' become 'communities of practice' (CoPs), which are defined as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermontt, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). In drawing

this parallel, my intent is to show that communities of practice can engender meaningful social knowledge and transformative power capable of producing novel solutions to concrete research problems (or praxis).

According to Wenger, McDermontt and Snyder (2002), the primary purpose of CoPs is to foster learning and develop knowledge among interested actors, typically (but not always) peers or colleagues. Cultivating CoPs in strategic ways is a practical means to manage assets of knowledge, as the primary purpose of CoPs is to foster leaning and develop knowledge among interested actors, typically (but not always) peers or colleagues. Membership in a CoP is voluntary, dependent upon participation, and rooted in an ethos of collegiality. In successful CoPs, members come to find value in their interactions with peers or colleagues who can relate to each other's perspectives and for the simple fact of belonging to an interesting collectivity of people.

Over time, as knowledge accumulates among members, they become informally tied to the value they discover in cooperative learning contexts. For those who have dedicated their working lives to learning a profession, communities of research practice serve as learning opportunities to develop a corpus of common knowledge and the subsequent practices that derive thereof. Such knowledge assets can engender the development of innovative solutions to vexing problems in ways that are more audacious and unorthodox than traditional organizational contexts (Moingeon, et al. 2006).

Effective CoPs render an ideal social knowledge structure that gives practitioners collaborative opportunities to engage with others who experience similar situations or problems. This type of knowledge can be described as a living, interdependent process that resides in the relationships, skills, and language use of its members. CoP knowledge

structures provide practitioners with innovative strategies to address problems that other stakeholders may dismiss as half-baked or lacking practicality but can, nonetheless, affect the policies and actions of the external organizations that CoP members are also affiliated with.

The capacity of CoP knowledge structures to bleed into the cultures of external organizations suggests that such knowledge forms possess the potential to cause significant structural changes in the external organization and beyond. Because CoPs are not restricted to company affiliation, they are able to extend their enterprise by crossing organizational borders (Liebeskind and Oliver, 1998). Over the last three decades, organizational forms have undergone significant changes (Moingeon, et al, 2006). The knowledge that most organizations need to thrive in their interconnected environments exceeds their formal boundaries, which creates a need for the acquisition of knowledge from external organization and individuals (Wasko and Faraj 2005).

For this reason, Moingeon, et al. (2006) argue that there is a need to think about CoPs beyond their influence on and interactions within any one single organization and to make room in the CoP literature for ‘interorganizational communities of practice.’ IOCoPs are defined as collaborative organizational forms that possess “autonomous governance, gathering voluntary individuals from different organizations, with a common professional practice and aiming at developing their expertise on an individual basis” (Moingeon, et al., 2006, p. 12). An interorganizational structure of this nature holds real potential for creating unique and effective contexts of learning, since members are from different organizations and the diversity of experiences they bring to an IOCoP extend beyond their respective organizational boundaries (Moingeon and Perrin, 2006).

In cultural research contexts, the problems that are most vexing to working research professionals are those related to data gathering and its representation in analysis, that is, what is the most effective way to document those whom I wish to understand and how do I make sense of them once the data are captured? When researchers address these problems collectively—with reviewers *as well as* participants—they make possible interorganizational communities of *research* practice that are capable of enfolding multiple forms of life into the production of research outcomes. Situating cultural research as an interorganizational community that values the knowledge practices of both academic and local subject matter experts moves social science away from outcomes that are based on intersubjective agreement among cultural outsiders (researchers and reviewers) and toward intersubjective outcomes that are also capable of accounting for insider (participant) positionalities.

As we will see in Section 4, accommodating participant perspectives in research comes with significant methodological and analytic challenges. However, these challenges can be met in ways that ultimately enhance the descriptive capacity of research outcomes. Before tackling these issues, I want to spend some time exploring how participatory research strategies can provide researchers with a means of addressing some of the ethical dilemmas that arise from doing research in underrepresented communities. I turn to that objective now.

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AS DECOLONIZING PRACTICE

In this section, I explore some of the ethical dimensions that guided the production of the *Fire Article* and *Tribal Relations Report*. Because misrepresentation of Indigenous communities can in large measure be attributed to the methodological and interpretive practices of the researcher, it will be necessary to engage in a critical analysis of my own positionality as a social scientist. My critique will be premised upon a research orientation that falls under the general label of *participatory research*, which is a research orientation that has emerged, in part, as a response to the decades of misguided social science that, a growing body of researchers believes, has been practiced *on* Indigenous communities.

Obviously, the injustices imposed upon Indigenous peoples by European settlers and their descendants are not limited to the misrepresentations of social science. The effects of colonialism come in many forms, including murder, rape, enslavement, and the attempted erasure of long-established cultures. These tragedies are woven into the historical fabric of European settlement in North America (as well as most other continents). As Dunbar-Ortiz (2014, p. 2) puts it, “(t)he history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism—the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy” so anyone in search of a “history with an upbeat ending, a history of redemption and reconciliation, may look around and observe that such a conclusion is not visible, not even in utopian dreams of a better society.”

It is not my intent to gloss over this history by withholding a general account and critique of colonial depravity and hegemony. Instead, my critique of colonialism will focus on the ways in which Western academic research, specifically social scientific research,

continues to perpetrate the injustices of colonialism and how, through participatory research, social scientific research practices might begin the process of decolonization.

Decolonizing research is an academic orientation that attempts to reveal the sources of colonialism in modes of Westernized research. Central to the decolonizing process is a demand for consistent reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Simonds & Christopher, 2013) regarding the biases that are inherent in the cultural, theoretical, and methodological discourses in which the researcher has been enculturated (Denzin, 2005). Such reflection mandates an awareness of the values and practices that influence the process of academic inquiry and, subsequently, knowledge production (Bermudez, Muruthi, & Jordan, 2016). As a researcher who has been predominately enculturated in the ways of Western social science, the following critique is as much a personal reflection of my own contributions to the perpetuation of colonialism as it is of the academic institutions to which I belong.

Before proceeding, I want to briefly address the practice of referring to cultural traditions as *Western* and *Indigenous*. Dunbar-Ortiz (2014, p. 13) is correct when she observes that “there is no such thing as a collective Indigenous peoples’ perspective.” My use of *Western* and *Indigenous* is in no way intended to conceal the expansive heterogeneity that exists within both traditions. Nonetheless, as Cordova (2007) and Smith (1999) note, there are certain traits that are common across most cultural groups that fall within a shared tradition (as explored above and below). A common trait shared by many *European* cultural groups within the *Western* tradition include a belief in white supremacy and its manifestation through colonial practices. As such, when I use the term *Western*, in

most cases, I am following Smith's (1999) lead in referring to the European strains that exists within it.

Broadly defined, "colonialism refers to the creation of unequal relationships and a hierarchal establishment of power that benefits the dominant group over others" (Bermudez, et al., 2016, p. 195). It is a process that privileges the beliefs and practices of the dominant group while concurrently subjugating those of minority groups (McDowell & Hernández, 2010). Significant institutional orders of our society are predicated on colonial ideologies and practices (Harding, 1998) that are still being experienced by Indigenous people today (Halagao, 2010).

The Western system of higher education constitutes one of these orders and can be realized through a critical analysis of the theoretical and methodological practices that determine the production of legitimate knowledge (Harding, 1998). I will refer to this system hereafter in its classical designation as the *academy*, which serves as an intentional evocation to the foundational Grecian philosophical assumptions that permeate the ideologies of most modern institutions of higher learning throughout the Western world.

A significant ontological characteristic shared by most of the classical Greek philosophers is that human beings are separated from our environmental surroundings. By using analytic tools such as language and reasoning to study the world, Europeans came to imagine themselves as existing on a higher plane of reality than the other living beings (plants and animals) we share this world with (Smith, 1999). This human-centered ontology bleeds into the language practices of European cultures, which are traditionally characterized through binary (dualist) thought patterns (Waters, 2001).

The humanistic position lies in contrast to traditional naturalistic explanations, which situate all forms of life (along with everything else) as part of the natural world (Smith, 1999). Instead of considering objects as separate from humans, traditional naturalism focuses on the relationships between the various things that constitute the world, including humans. The Indigenous epistemologies that correspond with the naturalistic worldview engender “a belief system that espouses a non-fragmented, non-human centric, holism focusing on the metaphysical and pragmatic brought alive by an animate language structure and contextualized within place and land-based knowing and teachings” (Kovach, 2021, p.67). Such constructs of language indicate a philosophy that is nonbinary and complementary (Waters, 2001). As Vine Deloria, Jr. (1999) puts it, “. . . everything in the natural world has relationships with every other thing and the total set of relationships makes up the natural world as we experience it” (p. 34).

Both ontologies serve as guiding principles of inquiry that inform not only perceptions of the world and the human relationship to it but also delimit what can be known about reality. However, it is the humanistic perspective that carries over into hegemonic frameworks of epistemological supervision in the academy. This system of oversight functions to affirm Western standards of truth and validity, while delegitimizing alternative epistemologies through exclusion (Luchies, 2015).

Stuart Hall (1992) reminds us that fundamentally the Western tradition is a set of ideas or concepts that convey complex stories, histories, and social relations. These aspects functionally influence Western perspectives on social science in meaningful ways. Hall (1992) identifies four: 1. they allow for the characterization and classification of societies into discrete categories, 2. they concentrate the cultural complexities of other societies

through a system of representation, 3. they supply standard models for comparison, and 4. they engender evaluative ranking criteria for other societies.

These guiding principles create a powerful dynamic for the researcher, who cannot help but be influenced by the dominant Western ideology that serves to perpetuate the exclusion of alternative ways of knowing and investigating the world (Bermudez, et al., 2016). The Eurocentric biases of researchers manifest in the cultural products of the academy, specifically in the form of written texts (this document not excluded, obviously). The ways in which academics select, arrange, and present knowledge are not arbitrary, though they are not necessarily explicit, either. Through a sustained process of enculturation, academics come to privilege “. . . sets of texts, views about the history of an idea, what issues count as significant; and, by engaging in the same process uncritically. . .” academic modes of thinking are often validated at the expense of Indigenous modes (Smith, 1999, p. 36).

The privileging of Western representations of other cultures negates the experiences and epistemologies of those being studied (Swadener & Mutua, 2008). Edward Said (1978) describes this as a generative process of Western discourse that “others” ways of knowing that are different and is supported by “. . .institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles” (p. 2). However, exclusionary practices are not the only means by which colonialism manifests in the academy.

As Smith (1999) notes, Western academic theory has historically been regarded by Indigenous peoples as an instrument of oppression. This is in large measure an outcome of Western researchers recounting histories, analyzing arts, and dissecting cultures in ways

that are distorted back to Indigenous communities through an academic lens (Kovach, 2021). An adherence to Western assumptions about empirical rationality provides academics with an unfounded basis for regarding their theories and methodologies as superior to other forms of “primitive” thought, which are denigrated as folklore or myth and subsequently cast to the fringes of scholarship (Egan, 1987).

In considering the ways in which Western research practices have perpetuated colonialism in minority communities, it is easy to find examples of top-down, or deductive, approaches that have been designed to not only demonstrate the “truth” of an existing theory but also to impose authoritative prescriptions about what communities should be doing (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). It is common for these approaches to be informed by positivistic/post-positivistic assumptions (i.e. the explanatory validity of generalized theories) about social relations; however, grounded approaches (which are typically carried out qualitatively) are also culpable in maintaining colonialism (Smith, 1999).

Bishop (1994) observes that qualitative or ethnographic approaches may seem more sensitive in the field, but the assumptions that underpin this type of research can be just as off-base to minority communities as top-down approaches. So even though critical theory and postmodernism have made space in research for alternative epistemologies, “Eurocentrism within research has yet to be fully unpacked in the academy or in the systems that support it” (Kovach, 2021, p. 26). Smith (1999) extends the point:

From an indigenous perspective Western research is more than just research that is located in a positivist tradition. It is research which brings to bear, on any study of indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different

conceptualization of such things as time, space, and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language and structures of power (p. 42)

To illustrate the ways in which Western research approaches can perpetuate colonialism in the academy, consider the research experiences of Dr. Vanessa Simonds and Dr. Suzanne Christopher, who conducted a public health study with the Crow people of Montana. Their experiences are detailed in a 2013 article titled “Adapting Western Research Methods to Indigenous Ways of Knowing.” The purpose of the study was to assist in the development of “. . . a program to support the Indian Health Service (IHS) in providing high-quality health care to community members, and to gather data via interviews to inform program development” (p. 2186).

At the time, Dr. Simonds was working on her doctoral degree in public health and wanted to use her experiences with members of the Crow tribe as research data. Following the recommendations of her dissertation chair, Dr. Simmonds chose to use the PRECEDE-PROCEED model (used for planning and evaluating health promotion programs) to arrange interview data into themes, which would then be used to inform the strategic development of the health program. After conducting interviews with community members from the Crow community, Dr. Simonds distributed the interview transcripts to the same stakeholders and, following PRECEDE-PROCEED emergent diagnostic protocols, requested that community members analyze the interviews by writing down salient themes. But at the next meeting, Dr. Simonds found that none of the participants had taken the time to come up with themes from the interview transcripts.

Simonds explains why members of the Crow tribe resisted the emergent approach of breaking interview data into themes:

They said that everything Crow people do has a story behind it and people share their experiences as a way of teaching others. They shared that having scattered categories and breaking apart people's stories loses the meaning and the understanding of the whole picture and purpose of the story. Moreover, it felt like a violation of the Crow culture because there is always a bigger purpose of the story that is lost when it is broken up into themes. Another CAB member (*community stakeholder*) explained, "Crow people work with words using stories, not by breaking stories apart." (p. 2187)

Because members of the Crow community place such a strong emphasis on storytelling as a method for conveying experience with others, Simonds considered adopting narrative analysis as a theoretical orientation to guide her understanding of interview data. However, Indigenous storytelling practices differ significantly from the storytelling practices conceptualized in Western academic theories. As Simonds and Christopher (2013) point out, modes of narrative analysis in the Western tradition focus on "the researcher's interpretation of another's story, not the storyteller's interpretation" (p. 12), which, as they found to be the case with the Crow people, diminishes the relational context between storyteller and story. Emphasizing the researcher's interpretation over the storyteller's would have complicated the participatory aims Simonds hoped to employ in her analytic practices.

In the process of developing an analytic strategy for the *Fire Article* and *Tribal Relations Report*, I also considered the possibility of utilizing some form of narrative analysis to structure my research design. At first blush, this seemed appropriate, given that a majority of this study's participants are Native American and there is a well-established tradition of storytelling in most Native American cultures (Iseke, 2008).

However, the lack of spirituality in Western conceptualizations of storytelling constitutes a significant ontological disconnect between Western and Indigenous modes of storytelling. As opposed to Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm, which is chiefly concerned with "what specific instances of discourse, regardless of form, provide the most trustworthy, reliable, and desirable guides to belief and behavior. . ." (p. 76), LaDuke's (2008) research describes an inherent spirituality in Indigenous storytelling practices, which are expressed in the oral tradition and connect people with the deepest aspects of their spirit and community.

As someone coming from a Western culture, who lacks an understanding of the spiritual nature that is inherent in Indigenous storytelling, the risk of cultural appropriation would have been significant had I attempted to apply a spiritual narrative analysis of research interview data for the purpose of establishing cultural alignment with participants. But it would also have been inappropriate, in terms of perpetuating colonizing research practices, to impose a Western narrative analysis upon interview data from Indigenous research participants, as such an analysis would have been unable to account for the spirituality that is integral to Indigenous storytelling practices (Iseke, 2008).

As explored in the next section, I ultimately adopted a descriptive analytic strategy to guide my writing practices. Because descriptive analysis, if done correctly, conveys data

in a manner that avoids most of the specialty jargon that typically accompanies explanatory analysis, participants are able to comprehend and evaluate descriptions in ways that are applicable to their own respective forms of life. When participants are able to find meaning in research and researchers are able to find meaning in the evaluative capacities of participants, decolonizing practices becomes viable in cultural research.

Decentering interpretive power from members of the academy by making space for participants in the research process gives community members the chance to author their own stories instead of being spoken for (Blodgett, et al., 2011). In this sense, participatory research can be viewed as a means toward recognizing the “rhetorical sovereignty” of Indigenous peoples, that is, “the inherent right of [Indigenous] peoples to determine their own communicative needs and. . . to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (Lyons, 2000, pp. 449–50). Participatory research, then, can be viewed as a response to a history of Western researchers extracting and claiming ownership over Indigenous ways of knowing while at the same time rejecting “the people who developed those ideas” by denying “them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations” (Smith, 1999, p. 1).

Although most participatory research endeavors are enacted through qualitative research methodologies (MacDonald, 2012), the fact that it *orients* research—as opposed to *prescribing* a specific research strategy—suggests that any methodological approach, including quantitative approaches, could be tailored to fit a participatory research orientation (Chambers, 1992). As Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) put it, “the key element of participatory research lies not in methods but in the attitudes of researchers, which in turn determine how, by and for whom research is conceptualized and conducted” (p. 1667).

This approach aligns with the aims of decolonizing academic methodologies because “the purposes are pedagogical, political, moral, and ethical, involving the enhancement of moral agency” and “the production of moral discernment” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14). Vollman et al. (2004) define PAR as “a philosophical approach to research that recognizes the need for persons being studied to participate in the design and conduct of all phases (e.g., design, execution, and dissemination) of any research that affects them” (p.129). The underlying philosophy of participatory research aligns with the “postmodern tradition that embraces a dialectic of shifting understandings” where “objectivity is impossible” and “multiple or shared realities exist” (Kelly, 2005, p.66).

Attwood (1997) asserts that participatory research embodies “the concept that people have a right to determine their own development and recognises the need for local people to participate meaningfully in the process of analysing their own solutions, over which they have (or share, as some would argue) power and control, in order to lead to sustainable development” (p. 2). In doing so, the orientation is aligned with feminist methodologies of practicing research *for* participants instead of *on* subjects (Miner, Jayaratne, Pesonen, & Zurbrugg, 2012).

The applied aims of participatory research, then, are to cultivate community development, empowerment, social justice, and participation (Vollman, et al., 2004). Participatory research makes possible public spaces that license participants and researchers to reformulate their epistemologies about how political and social contexts in local communities can impact daily life (McIntyre, 2002). The representations of participatory research render knowledge forms that John Gaventa (1993) describes as rationally democratic, humane, and liberating in ways that are lacking in mainstream

academic forms. By locating Indigenous voices and epistemologies at the heart of the research process, the participatory research orientation, when applied to methodological strategies, becomes a means toward decolonization (Swadener & Mutua, 2008).

Dunbar-Ortiz (2014, p. 7) recognizes that “modern Indigenous nations and communities are societies formed by their resistance to colonialism, through which they have carried their practices and histories. . . (b)ut Indigenous nations, through resistance, have survived and bear witness to this history.” The will to not only survive but actively resist colonial power portends Vizenor’s concept of *survivance*. By substituting the suffix *-al* with *-ance*, Vizenor draws attention to the active survival of contemporary Native Americans, which transcends mere subsistence in the colonial domains that have been forced upon them. Vizenor (1999, p. 1) describes *survivance* as “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name.” Instead, “Native *survivance* stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry” (Vizenor, 1999, p. vii).

Through a sustained commitment to local contexts, participatory research practices emancipate prescriptive methods by decentralizing traditional research from disciplinary customs (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As such, participatory research is regarded as an alternative approach to traditional social science, as it repositions social investigation from a linear cause and effect orientation to a collaborative approach focused on the contexts of people’s lives (Chandler & Torbet, 2003). Emphasizing local contexts occasions an integration of local knowledge with research planning that aims for greater levels of collaboration throughout the research process (Seeley, 1992).

To illustrate, let us revisit the research of Simonds and Christopher (2013). After realizing the ways in which emergent and thematic research strategies misrepresented the worldviews of the Crow people by fragmenting interviews (or stories) into themes, Simonds and Christopher attempted to implement a conceptual research approach that was contextually grounded in local tradition and knowledge. Specifically, they attempted to synthesize a Western research strategy (breaking interview data into themes) with a culturally significant metaphor of the Crow people (the 4 pole tipi). As explained by Simonds and Christopher:

The tipi lodge is sacred to the Crow people, and many traditions and stories surround this important symbol of home. The Crow tipi is unique from some other tribes in that it has 4 main base poles versus 3. The base poles were used as an analogy for the 4 main themes from the data (visit context, visit expectations, history, and time) and their connection at the top was analogous to the main theme of trust. (p. 2188)

After presenting the approach to community members, Simonds and Christopher found that there was more acceptance of the synthesized strategy than the original “Western only” approach. However, community members maintained their skeptical views about associating the 4 higher-level themes with the 4 base poles. Despite this, “there was more excitement regarding the use of the tipi as a symbol of trust in the medical interaction, with CAB members relating the strength of the tipi structure with the strength of trust in the medical interaction” (p. 2188). It seems, then, that community members were able to

accept a broad thematic category conjured from the Western research tradition, while the researchers were able to accept a nonacademic form of local knowledge to help inform their research direction.

It is important to recognize that even though Simonds and Christopher found some degrees of acceptance for their synthesized research strategy, the application of participatory research approaches “does not ensure the use and understanding of Indigenous methods” (Simonds & Christopher, 2013, p. 2189). Western methodologies may be incompatible with Indigenous research contexts because the underlying epistemologies that authorize Western theories and methods are distinct from Indigenous ways of knowing (Wilson, 2008). As such, it is difficult, if not impossible, for academics who have been enculturated in Western epistemologies and ontologies to evaluate whether research outcomes adequately represent the epistemologies and ontologies of the Indigenous community, or communities, the researcher is working with.

So not only do participatory research approaches make possible innovative cross-cultural adaptations of conventional methods, they are also capable of transcending cultural barriers of epistemology and ontology that arise from the exclusion of other forms. By making room for participants in the evaluative process, epistemic power is diffused, democratized, and relocated in a way that is more inclusive (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). As Reason (1996) contends, “(p)articipatory research has contributed to the important emphasis on power as a significant aspect of knowledge, and specifically points to the injustice that arises when the construction of knowledge is taken away from ordinary people and placed in the hands of an elite” (p. 81).

Participatory research practices are especially important when engaging with communities who have been historically misrepresented by Western research practices, as detailed above. My sensitivity to this history and a desire to go about my own research with Indigenous communities in a respectful manner is what led me to the participatory research orientation. But after coming to an understanding about how participatory research approaches broaden the communal and democratic capacity of the research process in a way that recognizes the epistemic and ontological plurality that is inherent in the lived experience (cohabitation), I think the more evaluative input a researcher has from research practitioners (reviewers, researchers, and participants) will only make the final product more valid and relevant.

ANALYTIC AND METHODOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

For participants to engage in the research process, including peer review, they must be able to render contextual meaning from it. Without sufficient context, a participant's (or anyone's) ability to appraise research becomes compromised. In this section I discuss how descriptive analytic techniques can make participant appraisal viable in academic contexts. I then show how participatory research strategies hold the analytic capacity to license non-immersive data-collection methods in ways that are typically associated with those that are immersive.

Since we are advancing the position that participants should be included in the peer review process for cultural research products, it is useful to briefly unpack the concept of "peer." In the context of academic publishing, peers are those who possess common or similar interests within a community (or discipline), not necessarily a common or similar social standing. Thus, a first-year graduate student can submit a manuscript to a journal for review, where it will be edited by a seasoned academic. Even though the editor occupies a different social standing within the discipline, the fledgling graduate student is still afforded a *peer* review.

It is possible to conceptualize "peer" similarly in cultural research contexts that are relativistic and inductive—what we will refer to as the grounded approach. Here, participants and researchers are peers in the sense that both are concerned with observing and analyzing how cultural practices are lived in communal settings that are endemic to participants. In such contexts, it is the participant who is seasoned in the rules that delineate acceptable linguistic practice and the researcher (as a cultural outsider) who is

fledgling. Even though the intent behind the researcher's enculturation is academic, both researcher and participant are concerned with how people (including the self) know and go about living in the communal environments of participants.

Although there is debate about the ability of participants to know the rules that effect their own cultural practices (an issue we explore below), it is clear that a local comprehension of knowing requires a local comprehension of language use. In most cultural research contexts, participants are recruited according to their capacity to function within language parameters that are of interest to the researcher. As with academic reviewers, such functionality indicates expertise within a language-game, and such expertise indicates a capacity for critical appraisal.

However, for social science that is positivistic and deductively rendered —what we will call the specialized approach—most participants cannot meet this standard. Here, analytic procedure hinges on language practices endemic to the researcher, not participants. Because participants are typically unfamiliar with the technical language practices of contemporary social scientists, it is unlikely they will have use for them in local contexts. That is to say, specialized social scientists have received extensive training in statistical evaluation and sociological theory, whereas participants have not.

This is not to suggest that quantitative research outcomes cannot be translated to nonacademic contexts nor that participants are incapable of comprehending specialized practices, only that they lack the necessary training. Consequently, social scientists would not consider participants peers in the academic sense, as the latter are unfamiliar with the rules social scientists employ to appraise their own knowledge claims. Participant language practices (commonly derived through scaled survey questions) are explained according to

the parameters of the researcher's language, which is often statistical and informed by theories that are exotic to participants.

Because sociological theories are quite complex and built using highly specialized concepts, social scientists are typically only interested in having their outcomes appraised by other social scientists. Such proclivities are understandable, considering a central aim of most specialized approaches is to either confirm or deny discipline-specific theories. However, the gains social scientists acquire in confirming or denying their own practices come at the expense of epistemic diversity, and this is a significant loss to anyone who can recognize that their way of knowing the world is limited and contextual and that endeavoring to know how others know the world is vital to enriching one's own form of life.

Grounded cultural research, on the other hand, makes such ambitions possible. Because the aim is to understand the rules of local contexts as participants understand them, researchers are compelled to use language in ways that are natural to participants. When the language practices of the researcher align consistently with those of participants in native communal settings, the researcher has become enculturated to that form of life. Once this happens, it becomes possible for the researcher to make knowledge claims about how participants know and go about living in local environments. In the social sciences, such enculturation is typically achieved ethnographically.

As a research methodology, ethnography attempts to understand the "local perspective" by embedding researchers within the communities they are studying. Employing immersive data collection procedures gives ethnographers a means to produce accounts of life as it is "actually lived and experienced by a people, somewhere, sometime"

(Ingold, 2017, p. 21). Ethnographers draw from a rich and varied methodological tradition that influences how they collect and analyze data. Still, at its core, ethnography is a mode of investigation that relies on a researcher's ability to observe, interact with, and learn from participants in native settings (see Malinowski, 2014).

Participant observation constitutes the primary means through which ethnographers collect field data. As the name suggests, it is a mode of investigation that situates the researcher as both active participant and passive observer, "providing the virtues of both an insider's and an outsider's perspective" (Harrison 2020, 18).

Summarizing Dewalt and Dewalt (2010), McGrath and Rudman (2019, p. 3) identify three "guiding assumptions of participant observation: (1) we can learn from observation, (2) being actively engaged in the lives of people brings the ethnographer closer to understanding the participants' point of view, and (3) achieving understanding of people and their behaviors is possible."

For the purposes of this analysis, we are just as concerned with doing ethnographic research as a *participant* as we are with doing research as an *observer*, since they both have important methodological implications that affect the appraisal of cultural research products in participatory settings. On the observation side, one of the primary advantages of learning as an outside observer (according to most strains of ethnography) is that it allows the researcher to observe and make salient the ethnocentrism that normalizes and blinds communal inhabitants to the "practices at the center of their worldview" (Harrison, 2020, p. 19). Wengle (1988) argues that the "cultural features of a particular society that are the most deeply ingrained are the least likely to be explicated and questioned by native

members themselves” (p. xvii). As such, observing social interaction from the perimeter allows the researcher to see what participants cannot in their daily interactions.

For the moment, let us set aside any consideration of critical agency and grant the proposition that humans are largely incapable of observing the entrenched features (rules) that condition their cultural practices. Let us also presume that it is possible for an outside observer to ascertain these rules in ways that are elusive to local ways of knowing. If ethnographic analysis is to depend—at least in part—on researchers (as outside observers) to reveal hidden cultural features of a community, it presumes an implicit confidence in the capacity of outside observers to identify, comprehend, and produce valid assessments of the biases that are concealed from those who enact them. Why then is it typical for ethnographers to reconcile their own ethnocentrism by relying only on their own private reflexive assessments to disclose the practices and positionalities at play in research settings?

Reflexive analysis has become commonplace in contemporary ethnography, and with good reason: when researchers highlight the “contextual intersecting relationships between the participants and themselves (reflexivity), it not only increases the creditability of the findings but also deepens our understanding of the work” (Dodgson, 2019, p. 220). Even though ethnographic reflexivity is typically attained through the researcher’s own interpretative assessments of the racial, economic, gendered, and cultural dynamics that exist in fieldwork settings (Berger, 2015), Clifford and Marcus (1986) contend that reflexive analysis is ultimately a consideration of how *writing* denotes the practical context in which ethnographic data is produced. As Quaranta (2021, p. 278) puts it:

Ethnography ceases, therefore, to be thought of as a moment of data collection in the field, but emerges as a process for their very production. In other words, it is reconceptualised as a performative process, i.e., as a specific practice for the production of cultural knowledge.

Unlike positivistic writing, which veils the presence of the researcher behind statements of objective fact, contemporary ethnographic methodologies acknowledge the influence researchers have on the production of knowledge (Quaranta, 2021). But just because researchers take the important step of disclosing their own contextualized assessments of themselves and participants does not mean that their assessments are the only viable filters through which insightful context can pass. Raisch (2009) points out that including participants in “the production and questioning of knowledge formation in the research process is. . . a key dimension of being an ethical, socially responsible researcher” (p.367). We concur emphatically but also contend that the benefits of participant appraisal do not end with the ethical.

However, neither ethical nor epistemic dimensions can be fully realized in participatory research settings if participants (as outside observers) are unfamiliar with the language practices that are at play in research products. As noted above, specialized approaches toward social science preclude participant appraisal of research products because these approaches are highly technical, theoretically nuanced, and, generally, exotic to participants. But even qualitative approaches (including those that claim to be grounded) can fail to present findings in ways that are comprehensible to participants when they attempt to explain social interaction through their own theoretical prisms.

To understand why, all a researcher need do is imagine a cultural outsider—say a shaman from an isolated hunter/gather community—observing the everyday practices of professors as they go about a typical day. Even though the shaman does not speak the same language as the professors, she is nonetheless fully capable of observing their actions and contextualizing them through the filter of her cosmology. Now imagine that, through an interpreter, the shaman provides an account of her observations to one of the professors. Her account includes explanations of the professors’ activities that are heavily influenced by the shaman’s cosmology. In such a scenario, is the professor capable of understanding the shaman’s explanations as she understands them?

Of course not. The professor lacks the enculturation necessary to comprehend how the shaman understands her explanations of his practices, much less to make informed assessments about their veracity. He can obviously make sense of the shaman’s cosmology on his own terms, but he cannot understand it as she does. In ethnographic contexts, this is significant because (as noted above) a primary aim of ethnographic research is to understand the participant’s perspective. Just as research participants lack the necessary conditioning to understand the theoretic practices of researchers, so too does the professor lack an understanding of the rules that are necessary to evaluate the cosmological practices of the shaman. Aware of the professor’s confusion, the shaman retells her account, but this time, instead of using her cosmology to explain the professors’ practices, she merely describes them.

In this rendition, the shaman recounts the ostensive doings of the professors that she witnessed, e.g., walking, talking, sitting, smiling, etc. However, as a cultural outsider, the shaman’s descriptive analysis is limited, since she is unaware of the contexts that exist in

conjunction with these doings, so the analysis, once again, lacks meaning to the professor. Geertz (1973) classifies this limited type of analysis as *thin* description. The bottom line is this: For cultural outsiders who limit themselves to observing communities from the periphery, ethnocentric explanations or thin descriptions of social activity are really their only analytic possibilities.

Unsatisfied, the shaman decides to leave her community and continue her investigation of the anthropology professors, only this time she decides to immerse herself in their world. Over the course of a year, the shaman learns English, forges strong relationships with the professors, and eventually becomes accepted as a participating member of the department. She attends faculty meetings, conducts interviews, and reads all of the latest articles published by the professors. In other words, the shaman “goes native.”

In due course, she decides to have another go at producing an account of life in the department. In an attempt to “speak their language,” the shaman produces a written ethnography and models her analytic practices after the ethnographic conventions she learned from reading the professors’ articles as well as methodological essays. In particular, she aspires to produce descriptions of department life that are *thick*. Having read Geertz’s essay, she understands that for an ethnographic analysis to go beyond thin description, it must provide sufficient context about why people do the things they do with the people they do them with—that is, she needs to understand the deeper contextual meanings of the professors’ practices, on their terms.

Even though the shaman has spent the better part of a year carefully observing the practices of the professors and, as an accepted member, thinks she has a handle on what it

means to experience this form of life, she recognizes that the professors have traversed these hallways far longer than she has. Perhaps they have additional insights about the rules and practices that constitute life in the department. So she decides to distribute her written ethnographic account to all of the professors and encourages them to critically appraise her analysis.

Most of the professors are impressed with the shaman's account. Her analysis reveals deep insights about notable (and ordinary) incidents that transpired in the department over the last year as well as thick descriptions of the practices that comprised these events. These descriptions render ways of comprehending department life that are novel, yet, familiar to the professors. *Novel* because the shaman's descriptions of department life are heavily influenced by her tribe's form of life, *familiar* because the shaman has spent the last year learning from the professors about how to participate in theirs. Consequently, her language use resembles traits from both families.

Although most of the professors have overall favorable impressions of the shaman's accounts, most also take issue with a lengthy analogy that appears toward the end of the paper. As the professors see it, the analogy obscures the contextual details of her descriptions and, as a result, misconstrues cross-cultural associations between the shaman's tribe and the department. However, instead of ignoring their concerns and just sending her text to a journal for review, the shaman elects to critically engage with the professors.

She defends her use of the analogy by arguing that cross-cultural analyses are most effective when the reader is given an opportunity to see things from the participant's perspective. She contends that analogical writing is a viable means of achieving this aim.

Unfortunately for the shaman, the professors remain unconvinced and maintain that the analogy does nothing but restrict her capacity to make comprehensible descriptions about life in the department.

The shaman reflects on the situation: On the one hand, she regards the analogy as a useful strategy for communicating cross-cultural ideas. As someone who is familiar with the practices of both cultures, she considers her comparisons valid and maintains that they effectively draw attention to important cultural parallels. On the other hand, the shaman recognizes that the professors have inhabited this form of life far longer than she has, and, as an aspiring ethnographer, she is compelled to understand local practices from the native's perspective. Because the majority of professors took issue with the analogy, she recognizes the possibility that analogies are peculiar to ethnography and that including them in written products must violate an unwritten rule. So, ignoring the pangs of her own agency, the shaman scraps the analogy and rewrites the section using direct exposition.

It is a distinguishing characteristic of ethnography that researchers base their analytic practices, to a significant extent, on what they learn *from* participants. Clearly, this could be stated about any grounded approach. But ethnography—along with ethnomethodology—is unique in the social sciences for stipulating that researchers calibrate their analytic practices according to the ways in which participants make sense of and practice life. Because ethnographers participate in the cultural practices of native inhabitants, it makes sense that they would have a better understanding about what it means to live life in these settings than a researcher who simply interviews a participant for an hour.

But it is important to keep in mind that participants are already in possession of what the ethnographer seeks. The purpose of spending a year (or more) embedded in another culture is to learn how inhabitants practice life within it. One of the primary ways in which the ethnographer acquires this know-how is by learning local practices from participants and implementing them in situ. Why, then, do ethnographers (typically) depend solely on the assessments of cultural newcomers, i.e., their own assessments, to carry out ethnographic analysis? Would not subjecting ethnographic outcomes to the evaluations of those who have occupied cultural spaces of interest for far longer than the ethnographer do nothing but enhance the accuracy, validity, and relevancy of analytic description?

True, established cultural insiders lack the outsider's capacity to see beyond their own ethnocentrism (as explored above), but how is anyone to overcome bias if they are not made aware of its existence in the first place? Both researchers and participants have a lot to learn from each other in this regard. Nonetheless, what participants do possess is an insider's capacity to understand and describe the intricate contextualized meanings that coincide with their cultural practices.

What we gain from descriptive analysis is not a route toward some idealized notion of objective representation but a means of portraying the contextual intricacies of local settings in ways that participants can comprehend and, ultimately, appraise. Because there are multiple ways of assembling the data (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 131), relying solely on the researcher to interpret participant practices seriously undermines the analytic potential of description. So long as it can be accepted that participants possess the capacity to contextualize their own worlds and that such contextualization holds ethnographic value,

researchers not only open their analytic practices to new possibilities of ethnographic understanding but also elicit the possibility of extending ethnographic representations into non-immersive research approaches, such as general interview-based research.

For research that extends into multiple communities, the qualitative research interview is an attractive data-gathering option, as it provides the researcher with a feasible means of collecting data from a variety of participants inhabiting a variety of communities, without requiring a sustained immersion into those communities. In interview settings, the communicative methods people use to accomplish knowing about an elicited topic are on full display. When interviewees express what they know about an elicited topic (typically in response to an interviewer's question), they are not just expressing propositional content; they are also revealing the cultural modes of expression that are used to make sense of the situational incidents that constitute their daily lives, i.e., language-in-use.

Still, some ethnographers cast doubt on the capacity of general interview-based research to accurately reveal thick contextual details of a participant's lived experience. Their thinking goes: A participant's practices constitute more than what they are able or willing to tell the researcher during the course of an interview. Harrison (2020, p. 345) provides an example of a native language speaker to illustrate the point:

... (n)ative language speakers. . . would have considerable difficulty explaining the rules to their language or how they know what they know without additional linguistic training. Even in a situation where both conditions are met [someone is aware of cultural rules and can explain them], an interviewee must make decisions

about what to emphasize and what to ignore or gloss over. Such choices might lead them to steer clear of topics that the interviewer would find salient.

To the first point, unless one takes seriously the proposition that researchers are somehow capable of transcending the limits of their own language use, it must be accepted that they too have difficulty in explaining the rules that condition it, including the rules that inform ethnographic accounts of participant practice. Even those who spend their professional lives toiling over the nature of language must recognize that there are other experts within their own discipline whose conceptual understandings about language are opposed to theirs. If this were not the case, there would be far fewer competing theories in the disciplines of linguistics and communication. So if one is to claim, as Harrison does, that participants are only able to understand the rules of their language through additional linguistic training, it is only fair to ask, whose training are they to follow?

As we understand it, the research interview is a communicational setting in which participants speak to what they know about and how they go about living life in environments that the researcher is interested in studying. From a grounded perspective, whether or not participants specifically articulate their thoughts about these environments in ways that align with a researcher's theoretical proclivities is largely irrelevant. What is relevant is the researcher's capacity to provide thick descriptions of cultural environments as they are conveyed through participant language use during an interview.

But surely, a researcher's capacity to produce thick descriptions of cultural environments that exist beyond interview settings cannot be fully realized through interview data alone, right? Yes, this is true, but only when researchers depend on their

own (outsider) positionalities to interpret the data. When participants are admitted into the peer review process, the analytic descriptions put forward by the researcher become accountable to the evaluations of cultural insiders. So even though the researcher's initial descriptions may be—and likely are—inaccurate, by subjecting them to the appraisal of participants, they can be altered according to the perspectives of those who inhabit forms of life the researcher is concerned with understanding.

To Harrison's second point: Yes, participants must make decisions about what to share and conceal during an interview, but so too must the researcher during analysis. Just as participants choose to provide information they consider relevant and appropriate to the immediate interview setting, the researcher must make comparable decisions while engaged in immediate analytic incidents. As Langseth (2008) notes, "there are many ways a particular practice can be described, and different descriptions will yield different ways of understanding that which is being described" (p. 42).

So despite Wittgenstein's assertion that 'practice must speak for itself,' there is always an interpretation behind any description. From this angle, descriptive analysis becomes a comparative exercise that conveys different ways of observing and understanding the world. Where one researcher might orient their descriptions of empirical data on *norms*, another might employ *discourse*, or *narrative*, or *network*, or—in my case—*practice*.

Ultimately, there is no way to escape the influence of enculturation on the analytic process. What the researcher gains in basing analytic technique off of description is not some panacea for the problems of representation in the social sciences—i.e., ethnocentric bias, cultural appropriation—but a method of inquiry that is capable of being understood

by those who are being represented. This is a necessary condition to meet if research products are to take advantage of the cultural knowledge held by participants and pursued by researchers.

APPLICATION

If it can be accepted that the ideas and arguments presented above are relevant to the production of cultural research outcomes, specifically outcomes that arise from a participatory research orientation, how might one go about demonstrating their relevance in actual research settings? It seems to me that the most feasible way to demonstrate the practical value of these ideas and arguments is simply by presenting the outcomes that arise from them. Accordingly, the *Fire Article* and *Tribal Relations Report* are presented below in their entireties.

My aim with both was to render a research approach capable of respecting both Western and Indigenous ways of knowing by embracing descriptive analytic practices and subjecting them to the appraisal of academics as well as participants (many of whom are Native American). In this sense, the participatory research approach I put forward in these publications is as inclusive as it is controversial. In fact, it is controversial for the same reason that it is inclusive: the *Fire Article* and *Tribal Relations Report* were assessed proportionately between academic reviewers and research participants.

As you read through these products, I encourage you to keep the following questions in mind:

1. Do these products embody meaningful cross-cultural research outcomes that are epistemologically inclusive to the cultural and individual positionalities of *all* those involved in their production?

2. Do the outcomes of these products positively contribute and measure up to the aims of decolonizing research?
3. Do the analytic practices of these products engender thick descriptive accounts of participant life as they relate to interorganizational collaboration?

These are questions of orientation and production. They cannot be answered through an explicit consideration of the outcomes presented below, which are predominately concerned with the collaborative practices of US Forest Service personnel as well as land workers from the Tribes and Pueblos of the American Southwest. Instead, these questions can best be answered through a critical appraisal of the analytic practices and research orientation through which the outcomes derive. Before taking up this task, I will provide you with some background information about how these products were initiated and developed.

Background

For several years my dissertation advisor, Dr. Joseph Champ (associate professor at Colorado State University in the Department of Journalism and Media Communication), has collaborated with Dr. David Flores (research social scientist with the USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station) on various projects related to communication practices on public lands. In the summer of 2017, Dr. Flores asked Dr. Champ if he knew of any graduate students who might have an interest in authoring several chapters of a science synthesis that would survey the ecology and management of the Lassen and Modoc National Forests. The Forest Service requires that all National Forests and Grasslands be

managed according to a land management plan. The purpose of the science synthesis was to help foresters of the Lassen and Modoc National Forests revise their existing land management plan with up-to-date research from the sciences and social sciences.

When Dr. Champ approached me about the opportunity, I was quick to jump on board. My primary task was to write a chapter on traditional land management practices employed by Native American Tribes throughout the American West, with an emphasis on areas that are now encompassed by Lassen and Modoc Counties in northeastern California. My research indicated that many of the cultural traditions practiced by Native Americans were channeled from or associated with their experiences with the natural world. These traditions, in turn, served to inform their interactions with the environment that effectively maintained a sustainable ecological balance among people and land for thousands of years.

The project piqued my interest for many reasons, but I was especially intrigued by the opportunity to learn a way of knowing the world that was peculiar to the Western tradition. The previous spring, I took my first graduate epistemology seminar. Consequently, I walked into the science synthesis project with a fresh understanding about the limitations of Western ways of knowing. To be sure, it did not take long for the epistemology professor to pull back the veil of certainty that scientific positivism typically enjoys in our public and academic institutions. What I found disappointing about this seminar, however, was that it considered only epistemologies rooted in the Western tradition. Writing the chapter on Indigenous land management practices opened my eyes to a way of knowing human beings as much more connected to our external environments than the reductionist views of Western science would have us believe.

After completing the chapter for Dr. Flores, he approached me with another opportunity. Unlike the science synthesis, this project would involve conducting on-the-ground research. One of Dr. Flores' colleagues from the Forest Service, Yolynda Begay (Regional Tribal Relations Program Manager for the Southwestern Region), asked if he knew of any graduate students who might have an interest in conducting a series of qualitative interviews with ecological specialists from the Tribes and Pueblos¹ of the Southwest. The interviews were to provide the Forest Service with an assessment of how their services and outreach attempts with tribes have been received and how they might improve these outreach attempts. A similar attempt was made in 2015, when Ms. Begay sent out an open-ended qualitative survey via email to tribal ecological specialists. However, the survey had an extremely low response rate.

During the 2018 regional meeting between Forest Service officials and tribal representatives of the Southwest, which I attended with Dr. Flores and Ms. Begay, the low response rate of the 2015 survey was brought up. Some of the tribal representatives in attendance that day noted that the survey was too long. Others observed that some of the questions tried to cover too much ground. But the one refrain we heard from all who spoke about the survey was that the approach was misguided. There was agreement among tribal representatives that research of this nature should not be conducted through a medium as impersonal as an online survey. They stressed the importance of face-to-face interactions when interacting with outside researchers so that the character and intentions of the researcher could be made apparent.

¹ Like a tribe, a pueblo is a group of Indigenous people who share a common language and cultural practices. Pueblo people are less nomadic and build permanent community structures (pueblos).

These perceptions reinforced Ms. Begay's strategy of sending a qualitative researcher into the field to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews with tribal land specialists. By this point, I had already committed to the project and was eager to get into the field. As a graduate student in the Department of Journalism and Media Communication at Colorado State University, I saw this opportunity as a chance to explore the communication practices of land practitioners from different cultures in a way that could enhance collaborative capacity while simultaneously advocating for the rights of Tribes and Pueblos to have a say in how their ancestral lands are being managed.

The *Fire Article* and *Tribal Relations Report* are concerned with how federal and tribal land management agencies collaborate with each other on land management projects. In approaching this topic, it was essential to limit our sample to people from these agencies who have been involved in either the planning or implementation of these types of partnerships. Our team conducted 30 interviews with people fitting these criteria. When the topic of collaboration would surface during an interview, it was common for participants to bring up the Reserved Treaty Rights Lands program (RTRL). Designed to incentivize collaborative agreements between federal land management agencies and tribes, RTRL is a federally funded program administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2015). Many participants expressed enthusiasm and support for RTRL partnerships but there was also concern about the fairness of the program as well as its funding capacity.

After a thorough review of the interview transcripts, we decided to draft a journal article about the implementation and effects of the RTRL program in the Southwest, which would eventually become the *Fire Article*. Thematically, the paper addresses ecological,

political, and organizational elements of the RTRL program, so we needed to locate a journal that could accommodate all three. Our search brought us to the journal *Fire*. The publishers of *Fire* describe it as “an international open-access journal about the science, policy, and technology of fires and how they interact with communities and the environment” (Fire, 2022).

This description aligned with the themes of our paper more so than any other journal we researched, so we decided to pursue publication with *Fire*. However, the peer-review process did not begin with the journal. Holding true to our participatory research aims, peer-review commenced with the participants. However, since most journals do not mandate participant acceptance of a manuscript as obligatory for publication, it became the researcher’s responsibility to enact our own mandates.

Before we sent the manuscript to *Fire* for academic review, we sent each participant a document with excerpts of every instance where he or she appeared in the first draft of the RTRL Paper. At this point, we did not send a copy of the entire first draft to the participants for review because it was necessary that we first obtain their permission about how they were being depicted in the manuscript. The majority (about three-quarters) of the participants engaged in the peer-review process for the *Fire Article*. Those who did are identified by their specific position and organization, e.g. the RTRL Coordinator for Tesuque Pueblo. Those who did not participate in the peer-review process are identified by their general position and organization, for example, a grants coordinator for a regional pueblo.

Once we received approval from the participants, we submitted the first draft of the manuscript to *Fire*. Of the four reviewers who appraised the manuscript, three supported it

for publication. The one reviewer who did not back publication felt that we did a fine job problematizing the issue but that we fell short in not presenting a viable solution. The desk editor informed us that we would need to incorporate a solution before the manuscript could be published. So we spent about three weeks dedicated to this task. After resubmitting with the solution added, we ended up with the support of all four reviewers.

However, the desk editor wanted to make sure that our research approach constituted a fair representation of Indigenous perspectives. He decided to seek out a colleague with experience doing research with Indigenous communities to review the manuscript. The desk editor wanted to confirm that our research was not violating any rules of conduct that he (as a cultural outsider) was unaware of. Despite the desk editor's trepidation, the reviewer was very supportive of the article and recommended it for publication, with one stipulation: that we include the participants as authors.

This concept of *participant author* was new to us, but we took to it immediately. During the initial participant review, several of the participants contributed full length sentences that we assimilated into the manuscript verbatim. Others provided heavy edits. But most importantly, we saw the inclusion of participant authors as a way to give back to those who had been so generous in sharing their time and knowledge with us. In addition, the parity of recognition among authors further validated our research approach as an interorganizational community of practice.

We informed the participants about the opportunity to be brought on as coauthors, and four of them took us up on the offer. We then sent out the revised manuscript to the participants one last time for a final document level review. All of the participants who

engaged in the appraisal process were supportive of the final product, so we sent it off to *Fire* for publication.

We had a similar publication experience with the Tribal Relations Report, though we should note that as of June 2022, the publication process is still ongoing. I am justifying its inclusion because it has already undergone two rounds of participant review as well as an initial academic review. The scope of the *Tribal Relations Report* is more extensive than the *Fire Article*. Instead of focusing on the implications of one funding program, the *Tribal Relations Report* offers an overview of common topics that surfaced during my interviews with participants. We provide details on the report's development and justification for our research approach in the Introduction and Background sections of the report, so I won't repeat that information here, but I will apprise you of its publication history and status.

In late March 2022, we sent out a draft manuscript of the *Tribal Relations Report* to all of the participants. This round of participant reviews had an even higher participation rate than the *Fire Article*. In fact, only three participants (out of the 22 who appear in the report) did not engage in the review process. As with the *Fire Article*, many of the participants offered augmentations and clarifications to our descriptions, especially in terms of project details and identifying information. Ultimately, those who participated were comfortable with their depictions in the report.

However, unlike the *Fire Article*, we have not yet included participants as authors. One of the most significant challenges that we faced in implementing a participatory research scheme into our research practices was the amount of time it added to the review process. Because I wanted to include the *Tribal Relations Report* in this dissertation and because its deadline was quickly approaching, I needed to fast track the review process for

the *Tribal Relations Report* to the greatest extent possible. Our experiences with the *Fire Article* showed us that the responsiveness of participants could vary significantly. Some would respond to our review requests the next day, whereas others would take over a month. I could not take the risk of further delaying the review process for the *Tribal Relations Report* if I wanted to include it in the dissertation.

Currently, the *Tribal Relations Report* is under academic review with the USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. It received an initial academic appraisal from three reviewers: an anthropologist, a research social scientist, and a communications professor. All three academics had overall favorable impressions of the report, and they also provided insightful recommendations. We incorporated most of the sentence level changes they offered. However, our grounded research approach did not register with the research social scientist, who wanted us to structure the report in a way that better validated preexisting theoretical constructs from the public participation literature. Doing so would have compromised the participatory aims of our research approach for the reasons laid out in Sections 2 and 3 above. Instead of acceding to this reviewer's advice, we drafted a concluding paragraph at the end of the report's Methodology section that reaffirmed our commitment to grounded research and descriptive analysis.

This is where the *Tribal Relations Report* stands as of late May 2022.

Fire Article and Tribal Relations Report

Perspective

Doing Work on the Land of Our Ancestors: Reserved Treaty Rights Lands Collaborations in the American Southwest

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Abstract: The intent of this article is to raise awareness about an underutilized funding mechanism that possesses the capacity to help tribal and federal land management agencies meet their goal of restoring fire-adapted ecosystems to historic conditions in the American Southwest. We attempt to achieve this through an exploration of the Reserved Treaty Rights Lands (RTRL) program and how it has been used to implement collaborative fuel management projects on National Forest lands. RTRL is a funding program administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) that is designed to protect natural and cultural resources important to tribes on non-tribal lands that are at high risk from wildfire. Over the last year, our research team has studied the RTRL program in the Southwest by conducting in-depth, face-to-face interviews with tribal land managers as well as U.S. Forest Service tribal liaisons and other personnel who work with tribes. Our interviews revealed enthusiasm and support for RTRL but also concern about the fairness of the program as well as insufficient outreach efforts by the U.S. Forest Service. In response, we propose a policy alteration that (we contend) would incentivize the BIA to increase funding allocations to the RTRL program without losing the support of partnering agencies. The aim is to strengthen and expand shared stewardship efforts between tribes and federal land management agencies. We situate these implications against the backdrop of the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn, an RTRL funded project that was instrumental in containing the Medio Fire that broke out in the Santa Fe National Forest in the summer of 2020.

Keywords: fuel treatment; prescribed burning; tribal collaboration; fire management



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we explore some of the program's limitations as described by several key actors in the Southwest responsible for the implementation of the RTRL program. We close the paper by proposing a policy alteration to RTRL to address some of these limitations. Our intent is to bring awareness of an underutilized funding mechanism that possesses the capacity to help federal and tribal land-management agencies meet their goal of restoring fire adapted ecosystems to historic conditions and to strengthen shared stewardship efforts between tribes and federal land management agencies.

2. Background and Methods

A primary objective of prescribed burning is to safely return fire back to fire-dependent ecosystems in a manner that is consistent with historic conditions [5]. In the Southwest (as well as many other locations throughout North America), historic conditions were, in part, determined by the cultural application of fire to forest lands by indigenous peoples. As Pyne notes, "The fire regime of the Southwest has been shaped by lightning and livestock, but the Apache was for centuries the intervening variable" [6].

When the original inhabitants of what is now referred to as the Americas were removed from their ancestral lands by colonial forces, so too was an ecological balance that had sustained people and the land for thousands of years [7]. In North America, the westward expansion of Euro-American settlement brought with it a conviction that wildfire should be suppressed. This view ran counter to the traditional burn practices of many Native American tribes, who had long used fire as a land management tool [8].

Through a comprehensive review of over 300 studies, Williams [9] identified 11 categories of traditional fire used by indigenous Americans: hunting, managing crops, improving the growth and yield of wild plants, fireproofing areas around settlements, collecting insects, managing pests, waging war, extorting trade benefits from settlers and trappers by depriving them of easy access to big game (scorched earth policy), clearing travel routes, felling trees, and clearing riparian areas. Despite the crucial historical role these practices played in modulating forest ecologies, early generations of U.S. Forest Service land managers, motivated by an ethos of profit and sustainability, regarded wildfire suppression as a vehicle capable of delivering an abundant and verdant future to the United States [10]. This conviction was formally instituted in the Forest Service through the adoption of an agency-wide fire suppression program that lasted until the early 1970s [11].

However, it is now widely recognized by most forest and fire ecologists that the wildfire suppression strategies of the 20th century have contributed significantly to functional and structural changes in forest ecologies throughout the Western United States [12–14]. Along with increased drought and temperatures [15,16], the buildup of fuel loads from wildfire suppression is considered a primary contributing factor to the rise in high intensity forest fires [17]. The shift in fire regime from frequent low-intensity burns to suppression has provided indigenous land practitioners with a new use for fire: to restore fire-dependent ecosystems to precolonial conditions.

Over the last year, our research team has studied collaborative partnerships between the U.S. Forest Service and tribes in the Southwest. On two separate occasions (from fall 2019 to winter 2020), the first author traveled to New Mexico and Arizona to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews with tribal land managers as well as U.S. Forest Service personnel who work with tribes. An interview can be understood as "semi-structured" when it has a preplanned set of general questions that the researcher asks all participants but also gives the researcher freedom to vary the questions as the situation demands [18]. An interview can be understood as "in-depth" when the researcher seeks to achieve the same deep level of knowledge and understanding about a topic(s) as the participants [19].

Additionally, this study attempted to ground itself in a participatory research orientation. Participatory research is considered an alternative approach to traditional social science, as it repositions social investigation from a linear cause and effect orientation to a collaborative approach focused on the contexts of people's lives [20,21]. The intent is to design and conduct research studies that promote self-determination, a key component

that has “been missing from much research involving indigenous communities in the past” [22]. By making space for the interpretations of participants in research outcomes, participatory research provides community members a chance to author their own stories instead of being spoken for by researchers [23]. Participatory research, then, can be viewed as a response to a history of Western researchers’ extracting and claiming ownership over indigenous ways of knowing while at the same time rejecting “the people who developed those ideas” by denying “them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations” [24].

As such, participants in this study were given the opportunity to review and, ultimately, approve how they are represented in this report. Each participant represented in the following pages was sent a document with excerpts of every instance where he or she is mentioned in the analysis. If a participant agreed with the way he or she was represented, we kept it as is. If a participant was dissatisfied (for whatever reason), we worked together to find a way to represent the participant in a manner that was acceptable to him or her. This research orientation positions us to understand participants as knowledgeable and socially aware beings who have the capacity to make sense of their own social lives [25,26] and that researchers have the capacity to describe these perspectives accurately and with credibility [27].

3. Case Study: The Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn

On 17 August 2020, lightning sparked the Medio Fire in the Santa Fe National Forest, just north of Santa Fe, New Mexico [28]. For 28 days, the wildfire burned over 4000 acres [29], with 30 percent of these acres burning at moderate to high severity [30].

Firefighters confined and eventually extinguished the fire by guiding it to an existing burn scar from a 2011 wildfire, which limited its progress to the north. To the south, firefighters herded the flames to an area of forest that had been treated with a prescribed burn in 2019 [31]. U.S. Forest Service officials credit this prescribed burn—known as the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn—with creating a fuel break that prevented the Medio Fire from gaining intensity, consuming additional acres of forest, degrading Santa Fe’s watershed, and spreading to a local ski area [32].

The Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn was financed through the RTRL program. According to the Department of Interior’s (DoI’s) *Budget Justification for 2020*, “the RTRL program upholds our trust responsibilities by supporting Tribes’ participation in collaborative strategic fuels management projects on non-Tribal lands to protect priority Tribal natural resources that are at high risk from wildfire” [33], though (as several participants in our study pointed out), it is possible to do RTRL fuel treatment work on Tribal lands, so long as it adds to the aim of the overall project.

In 2019, after securing RTRL funds from the BIA, the Pueblo of Tesuque partnered with the U.S. Forest Service (and other regional agencies) to initiate a 500-acre prescribed burn, within the 2400-acre Pacheco Canyon Project. Despite Tesuque lands not receiving any direct fuel treatments from the prescribed burn (though it should be noted that Tesuque lands did receive fuel buffers as part of the broader Pacheco Canyon Project), the Pueblo of Tesuque’s Department of Environment and Natural Resources gained access to new resources and revenue streams that allowed the department to expand its capacity. The RTRL Coordinator for the Pueblo of Tesuque explained that, with RTRL funds, the Department’s Wildfire Response Unit participated and received training for their Incident Qualification Cards.

However, Tesuque acquired more than training from the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn. They also gained a fair and advantageous partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. Tesuque’s RTRL Coordinator described the partnership as a “50/50 collaboration”. The equitable nature of this collaboration registered during the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) review process, which is required for all prescribed fire projects on federal lands [34]. NEPA mandates assessments of both cultural and environmental impacts before any fuel treatment operation can begin [35]. For the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed

Burn, Tesuque administered the cultural survey while the U.S. Forest Service managed the environmental assessment.

In our interviews, it was common for participants from the US Forest Service to stress the importance of letting tribes conduct cultural surveys on federal lands, especially on lands that are part of a tribe's ancestral domain. For example, the Forest Archaeologist for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest expressed an appreciation for the long history tribes have with the landscape, arguing that the original inhabitants of the land "should be number one on the list of collaborators to help with restoration projects." The traditional knowledge that tribal elders bring to archaeological projects has augmented her formal training in beneficial ways, and she provided several examples of learning from tribal elders in the field that led to new discoveries and approaches to looking at landscapes.

Collins et al. note that landscape-level fuel treatment projects can take several years to complete and that "forest managers are often limited in time, and in some cases expertise, when conducting these comprehensive evaluations" [36]. Allowing tribes to conduct cultural surveys on federal lands for fuel treatment projects induces a level of cultural expertise that goes beyond what can be learned in a classroom or textbook. As the RTRL Coordinator for the Pueblo of Tesuque put it, "Although we implement projects on Forest Service lands, we're still doing work on the land of our ancestors, our aboriginal lands."

4. Some Limitations and a Policy Alteration

With the success of the Pacheco Canyon Burn (and other RTRL fuel treatment projects), it is clear that the RTRL program possesses the collaborative and financial capacity to assist tribal and federal land management agencies with addressing the glut of fuel loads that have accumulated on the forest floors of the Southwest. What remains less clear is why allocations for the RTRL program are underrepresented in the DoI's budget, accounting for just 0.05 percent of DoI's 2020 fuel treatment program [33].

A Partnership Coordinator for the Southwestern Region of the U.S. Forest Service provided a possible reason why the DoI does not put more financial support behind the RTRL program: The BIA does not want tribal fire crews who have been trained with BIA monies to be doing work on non-tribal lands, since much of BIA's funding is tied to project accomplishments that occur on tribal territories. Tribes do not get project accomplishments for doing work on U.S. Forest Service lands, so the US Forest Service gets all of the accomplishments for RTRL projects. He wants to see the US Forest Service and BIA figure out a way to adjust project accomplishments and reports so that BIA funding opportunities are not dinged for providing RTRL-trained crews to do work off reservation lands.

Even though most tribal land managers praised the success of RTRL fuel treatment projects in the Southwest, others expressed frustration that the program limits projects—and the accomplishments that follow—to non-tribal lands. The Natural Resource Director for the Pueblo of Santa Ana explained that there is already enough of a need on tribal trust lands that tribes should be sufficiently funded by the DoI to meet its trust responsibilities. He went on to state that the way RTRL is set up is unfortunate: federal agencies have thousands of employees, whereas the Santa Ana Natural Resource Department only has a 4-person crew with 140,000 acres to manage. "We have enough need to do work on our lands." The federal government has a fiduciary responsibility to protect trust lands, and this is why the RTRL program could go to funding work on tribal lands as well.

Other tribal land managers voiced concern about the lack of outreach efforts by the U.S. Forest Service in pursuing RTRL partnerships with regional tribes. A Natural Resources Director for one of the Pueblos in our study explained that his department has tried to "get some traction" with the U.S. Forest Service to start an RTRL project, but "we just haven't had a lot of interactions with the Forest Service's RTRL folks." The Director reported that when he first spoke with U.S. Forest Service representatives about the RTRL program, they did not make it clear who he would have to speak with about initiating a project.

In light of these limitations, we want to suggest an alteration to the RTRL program that would not only incentivize the BIA to increase the RTRL funding slice in its suppression

budget but also enhance the intercultural competence and outreach capacities of federal land management agencies. Obviously, we are not policy experts privy to the elaborate power networks that ultimately determine how and why monies get allocated at the BIA; however, it seems plausible that if the BIA is capable of funding tribes and their federal partners to implement extensive fuel treatment projects on non-tribal lands, they could likely do the same on lands that *do* belong to tribes. What we are advancing is the possibility of proportional representation of treated acres between tribes and their partnering agencies for RTRL projects. Simply put: for approximately every acre treated with RTRL funds on federal lands, there would be an equal amount treated on tribal lands.

As noted above (in the previous section), some of the participants we interviewed explained that it is already possible for RTRL projects to also treat acreage on adjacent tribal lands. However, the fuel treatments that occur within tribal boundaries are subsidiary to the *primary* fuel treatment project that occurs beyond tribal domains. This means that the total number of acres treated on tribal lands is typically much less than those treated on the federal side, even though—as we were told numerous times by multiple tribal land managers—there is just as much of a need for fuel treatment and restoration work on tribal lands as there is on federal lands.

We maintain that altering the RTRL program so that fuel treatment efforts proportionally benefit tribal and federal lands would lead to two positive outcomes:

1. The BIA would receive project accomplishments for fuel treatments completed on tribal lands. From a basic return-on-investment standpoint, it does not make sense for the BIA to allocate substantial monies from their suppression budget to projects that primarily benefit lands that fall under the territorial domains of other federal agencies. Treating more acres of tribal land through RTRL monies would give the BIA more justification to fund RTRL projects since these fuel treatment projects would take place directly on BIA administered or supervised lands.
2. From the same return-on-investment standpoint, shifting RTRL project funds from federal to tribal lands would disincentivize the U.S. Forest Service and other federal land management agencies from participating in the RTRL program as tribal partners, since less acres would be treated on their side of the fence. However, what the U.S. Forest Service would lose in acres treated, it would gain in its capacity to develop as an *intercultural and participatory management* agency, which Eloy et al. [37] define as the “equitable participation of different stakeholders in the process of planning and decision making based on the promotion of respect and mutual understanding among stakeholders, with different knowledge, needs and worldviews.”

To understand why the U.S. Forest Service might be willing to sacrifice acres treated for intercultural growth in its management practices, it is necessary to understand the extent to which it takes seriously its relations with tribal communities. According to the most recent edition of its *Tribal Relations Strategic Plan* [38], the U.S. Forest Service acknowledges that tribes possess “indelible ties to the Nation’s forests and grasslands” and that these ties affect “current knowledge, perspectives, and resources that will help the Forest Service as we focus on the future of our mission.” The same report goes on to state that the U.S. Forest Service is committed to seeking “opportunities to partner with Tribes in work across boundaries and leverage resources to accomplish together what we could not each do on our own.”

Based on these statements, it seems evident that the U.S. Forest Service values the knowledge of its tribal partners, to such an extent, in fact, that the agency is open to letting tribal knowledge influence its organizational aims. Moreover, the U.S. Forest Service not only appears interested in developing partnerships with tribal communities but in pursuing partnerships that take place “across boundaries”.

As such, the basis for intercultural and participatory management already exists in the institutional discourse of the U.S. Forest Service, and in many ways, it has already taken active steps toward meeting this ideal, as evidenced by the agency’s willingness to partner with tribes on a variety of projects, including through the RTRL program. However, most

of the partnerships reported in our interviews have taken place on National Forests. The few collaborative projects that we did hear about taking place on tribal lands were small in scale and infrequent.

Allowing RTRL projects to extend onto tribal lands would give tribal officials the final say over how their portion of the project is designed and implemented. Even though tribal land management departments would still be required to comply with NEPA regulations (since RTRL is financed with federal funds), the fact that the U.S. Congress has recognized tribes as sovereign governments gives them greater autonomy over the development and implementation of federal programs, per the Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994 [39].

Accordingly, it is quite possible that tribal land managers would design and implement their portion of an RTRL fuel treatment project distinctly from their federal peers. A project orientation such as this would present U.S. Forest Service land managers with a unique learning opportunity, one where they would not only be in a position to cull knowledge from their tribal peers but also assist in the application of that knowledge, moving the agency closer toward a management ideal rooted in intercultural competence and participatory action.

5. Final Thoughts

Even though there is room for improvement in the RTRL program, the success of recent fuel treatment partnerships has shown that RTRL funds and projects can be used to cultivate stronger relationships that develop mutual benefits:

For example, the success of the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn (as well as other collaborations) illustrates that interagency fuel treatment projects are capable of restoring the health and resiliency of fire adapted ecosystems. These outcomes show that when federal agencies collaborate with tribes on fuel treatment projects, they gain qualified partners who can manage forest lands on par with federal agencies. A Partnership Coordinator for the Southwestern Region of the U.S. Forest Service recognized that the RTRL program has historically been a hard sell for agency leadership because it requires them to relinquish power to tribes, but he remains optimistic about the future of the RTRL program, as a new generation of leaders who embrace shared stewardship has taken root in the agency.

In addition, putting fewer resources into fuel treatment projects allows federal land management agencies to maintain their commitment to restoring fire adapted ecosystems to historic conditions [40] while saving significant financial and personnel resources that can be directed toward other pressing circumstances, such as wildfire suppression efforts. When the US Forest Service partners with tribes on RTRL projects, they are securing access to an external source of funding (via the BIA) that effectively circumvents the suppression-focused budget directives that currently constrain fuel treatment efforts in the agency [41]. The Natural Resource Director for Jemez Pueblo acknowledged that RTRL makes it easier to partner with federal agencies, since his department is able to bring in money for projects federal partners want done.

The benefits of the RTRL program (even in its current configuration) do not end with federal land management agencies. As a grant coordinator and forestry worker for a regional pueblo explained, the RTRL program is a means of keeping their forestry department operational while simultaneously providing them with an “opportunity to get involved in projects that protect the lands that we have left.” From this vantage point, the RTRL program can be viewed as a funding vehicle capable of moving the federal government towards meeting its funding obligations to tribal communities, which have been chronically and significantly unmet for decades [42].

Our intent with this paper is to bring awareness about as well as enhance (potentially) an underutilized funding mechanism that possesses the capacity to help federal land management agencies meet their goal of restoring fire adapted ecosystems to historic conditions and to strengthen shared stewardship efforts between tribes and federal land management agencies. The RTRL program achieves this by allowing the indigenous

inhabitants of these ecosystems to return an essential natural force that has been unnaturally suppressed for decades [43].

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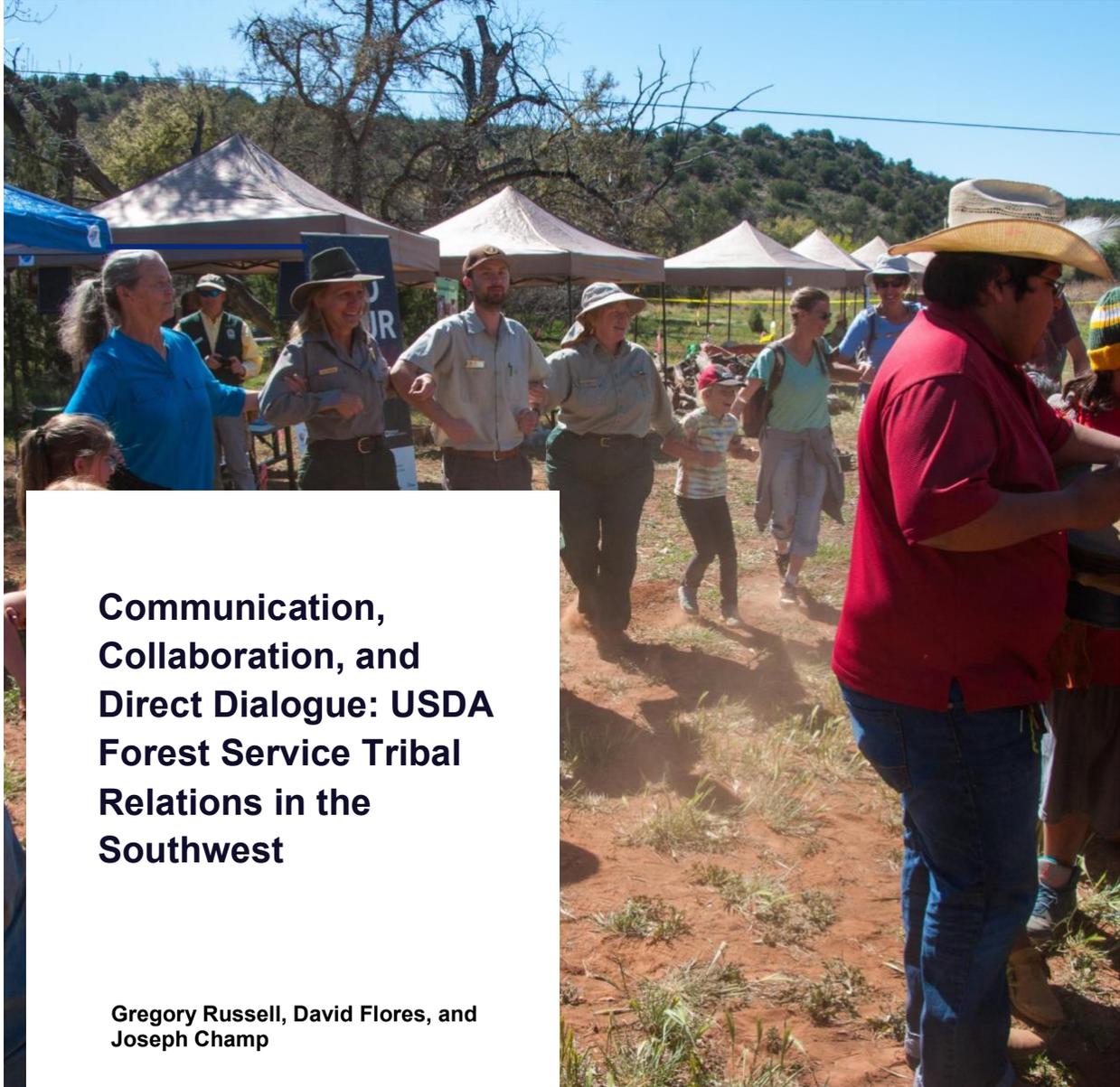
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**Communication,
Collaboration, and
Direct Dialogue: USDA
Forest Service Tribal
Relations in the
Southwest**

**Gregory Russell, David Flores, and
Joseph Champ**



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Front cover: Apache youth dance troupe performance at the Archeology Discover Days Celebration, March 25, 2016. USDA Forest Service Coconino National Forest photo by Deborah Lee Soltesz.

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SUMMARY

The general purpose of this report is to examine the state of contemporary relations between the US Forest Service Southwest Region and the indigenous Tribes & Pueblos of New Mexico and Arizona. Our investigation proceeds not through an evaluation of current policies and practices but, instead, by providing the reader access to the perspectives of tribal land managers and US Forest Service Tribal Liaisons. Our goal is to provide government and tribal personnel (and anyone else) with a comprehensive depiction of tribal relations in the Southwest Region of the United States. Learning about the perspectives on both sides of land management opens meaningful lines of communication that may not otherwise be apparent. This analysis of tribal relations also holds the possibility of strengthening existing partnerships, improving those that are strained, and creating new partnerships where they do not currently exist.

This general technical report identifies the challenges and opportunities that emerged from the authors' discussions with Tribes & Pueblos as well as US Forest Service tribal liaisons across the Southwest Region. The main findings in this report are organized as follows:

Outreach and Relationship Building. This section examines communication practices and challenges, outreach efforts and consultation, development of partnerships, advantages of having US Forest Service Tribal Liaisons, the challenge of San Francisco Peaks, and how some challenges have turned into opportunities.

Collaboration. This section examines complexities in collaboration between Tribes & Pueblos and the US Forest Service, specifically, perceptions of exclusion from Tribes & Pueblos, perceptions of inclusion from US Forest Service personnel, collaborations using the Reserve Treaty Rights Lands program, and other model collaborations described by participants.

Key Takeaways. The study concludes with key takeaways that may help to improve the programmatic aims of the Southwest Region Tribal Relations program:

- 1) Participants identified in-person communication as the most effective way in which to improve outreach and relationship building.
- 2) The Regional Forester Intertribal Roundtable is perceived as an example of meaningful tribal consultation.
- 3) Greater investments in US Forest Service Tribal Liaisons at the forest level are needed to engage the diverse perspectives of Tribes & Pueblos across the Southwest Region.
- 4) The use of reclaimed sewage water for snowmaking on the San Francisco Peaks functions as a barrier to building trust with Tribes & Pueblos.
- 5) Tribal perceptions of exclusion from US Forest Service programs can be mediated by assisting Tribes & Pueblos in identifying existing funds.
- 6) Using the Reserve Treaty Rights Lands (RTRL) program can function as a mechanism to incentivize collaborative agreements between the US Forest Service and Tribes & Pueblos.
- 7) The co-management of forest lands is a long-term goal.

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to provide a qualitative assessment of tribal relations between the US Forest Service Southwest Region and Tribes & Pueblos across New Mexico and Arizona, specifically the challenges and opportunities that arise when these entities collaborate on land management projects. This study proceeds not through an evaluation of current policies and practices but, instead, by providing the reader access to the perspectives of tribal land managers and US Forest Service Tribal Liaisons. Our goal is to provide federal and tribal land managers (and anyone else) with a comprehensive depiction of tribal relations in the Southwest Region of the United States. Learning about the perspectives on both sides of land management opens meaningful lines of communication that may not otherwise be apparent. This analysis of tribal relations also holds the possibility of strengthening existing partnerships, improving those that are strained, and creating new partnerships where they do not currently exist.

BACKGROUND

The indigenous inhabitants of what is now referred to as the American Southwest have been indelibly connected to the forests of these lands for thousands of years. They are the people who have experienced, cared for, and revered land in a way that brought about a unique balance between humans and nature. With the colonization of the Southwest by the United States of America, much of these ancestral lands are now overseen by federal land management agencies.

The US Forest Service Tribal Relations Strategic Plan (USFS, 2018) acknowledges Indigenous Americans right to access national forests for goods, services, and opportunities, including the collection of cultural and natural resources. The same document also states that the Forest Service strives to engage inclusively with the peoples of tribal nations through active collaboration and shared stewardship by pursuing meaningful consultation opportunities with Tribal Nations and their communities (USFS, 2018, p. 6).

Such commitments are especially salient in the Southwest. According to the US Forest Service Tribal Relations webpage of the Southwest Region, the total land area of reservation and non-reservation trust lands accounts for 20 percent of the combined land area in Arizona and New Mexico (A.K.A. Region 3). National Forest lands of the Southwest share 637 miles of common boundaries with tribal lands, which amounts to nearly one-third of the US Forest Service's shared boundaries in the two states (USFS, 2021). In response to the significant tribal presence in the region, the Southwest Region's Tribal Relations Program aims to:

- Provide tribes equal opportunity and access to US Forest Service programs.
- Eliminate barriers to tribal participation in US Forest Service land management projects conducted on ancestral lands.
- Improve overall knowledge of tribes and tribal cultures.
- Develop partnerships and accomplish common goals in accordance with the Forest Service mission and regional priorities.

This study examines how well tribal relations between the US Forest Service and Tribes & Pueblos are meeting these aims. The need to address pressing environmental issues through effective interagency partnerships is critical. From drought and temperature rise (Wotton & Flannigan, 1993; Westerling et al., 2006) to the accumulated fuel loads and bark beetle infestations that contribute to high intensity forest fires (Quintero-Gradilla et al., 2015), the threats faced by forests in the Southwest do not recognize political boundaries. As the 2011 Las Conchas Fire demonstrated, wildfire can be just as destructive to forests on tribal lands as it can be on national forests (Wright, 2015). This is one of the reasons the US Forest Service, through its Tribal Relations Programs, actively supports and pursues collaborations with their tribal neighbors (USFS, 2018).

This study highlights successful practices, strengths, and limitations to tribal relations in the Southwest within two overarching topics that emerged during our qualitative data collection process: 1) Outreach and Relationship Building and 2) Collaborations. These topics are explored through the perspectives, experiences, and lessons of tribal land managers and US Forest Service personnel. Issues are explored using an adapted grounded theory that aligns with fundamental precepts of participatory research, which we will now explore.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This general technical report identifies the challenges and opportunities that emerged from in-depth interviews we conducted with tribal and puebloan land managers as well as US Forest Service tribal liaisons. Following a description of the methodology used for this study, we share our findings in two interrelated sections. First, we discuss outreach and relationship building. This section examines communication practices and challenges, meaningful outreach efforts and consultation, development of partnerships, advantages of having US Forest Service Tribal Liaisons, the challenge of San Francisco Peaks, and how some challenges have turned into opportunities. Second, we discuss collaboration. This section examines complexities in collaboration between Tribes & Pueblos and the US Forest Service, specifically, perceptions of exclusion from Tribes & Pueblos, perceptions of inclusion from US Forest Service personnel, collaborations using the Reserve Treaty Rights Lands program, and other model collaborations described by participants. Finally, we conclude with key takeaways by identifying mechanisms that work to encourage and maintain productive working relationships between the US Forest Service and Tribes & Pueblos in the Southwest.

METHODOLOGY

We utilized semi-structured one-on-one interviews as our primary data gathering technique. A semi-structured interview can be understood as a preplanned set of general topics that the researcher discusses with all participants, but also gives the researcher freedom to vary the conversation as the situation demands (Lichtman, 2014). The interviews in this study were analyzed according to the methodological specifications of grounded theory. Grounded theory understands “humans as active agents in their own lives who create meaning in the processes of action and interaction” (Conlon, Carney, Timonen, and Scharf, 2015). Recognizing the human capacity to create meaningful understandings about their lived experiences aligns with a research orientation known as participatory research.

Participatory research is considered an alternative approach to traditional social science, as it repositions social investigation from a linear cause and effect orientation to a collaborative approach

focused on the contexts of people's lives (Chandler & Torbet, 2003; Kelly, 2005; Young, 2006). By making space for the interpretations of participants in research outcomes, participatory research provides community members an opportunity to author their own stories, instead of being spoken for (Blodgett, et al., 2011). As Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) put it, "the key element of participatory research lies not in methods but in the attitudes of researchers, which in turn determine how, by and for whom research is conceptualized and conducted" (p. 1667). Participatory research produces knowledge that is rationally democratic, humane, and liberating in ways that are often lacking in mainstream social science (Gaventa, 1993). Such considerations are especially salient when working with underrepresented communities. Native American communities are not only underrepresented financially (see USCCR, 2003; Fonseca, 2018) but also in research. Participatory research has emerged, in part, as a response to the decades of misguided social science that a growing body of researchers believes has been practiced on underrepresented communities. Participatory research can be viewed as a response to a history of scientists extracting and claiming ownership over Indigenous ways of knowing while at the same time rejecting "the people who developed those ideas" by denying "them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations" (Smith, 1999, p. 1).

This study attempts to ground itself in a participatory research orientation in the following ways:

First, interviews were conducted *in-person*. In 2018, we traveled to Albuquerque, New Mexico to attend the Regional Forester Intertribal Roundtable. There was agreement among tribal representatives that social scientific research should not be conducted through channels as impersonal as online surveys or telephone calls. Instead, they stressed the importance of face-to-face communication when interacting with outside researchers so that the character and intentions of the researcher could be made apparent. We took this perspective seriously and designed our discussions with participants according to the wishes of tribal leaders.

Second, this study utilizes an inductive analysis strategy based on *analytic description*, not prescriptive explanation. It achieves this by maintaining fidelity with Wittgenstein's (1953) assertion that the job of the investigator is to *describe* language practice, not to *prescribe* theoretic assumptions upon it. As such, we do not attempt to explain participant activity by imposing (deductively) an existing social scientific theoretical framework. Instead, our analytic procedure is designed to serve as a conduit to let participants speak for themselves in research.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, participants were given the opportunity to review and, ultimately, approve how they are *represented* in this assessment. Each participant was sent a document with excerpts of every instance where they are mentioned in analysis. If a participant was happy with their representation, we kept it as is. If a participant was unhappy (for whatever reason), we worked together to find a way to represent the participant in a manner that was acceptable to them. As the report neared completion, we sent participants a copy and invited them to review and make comments at the document level. By giving participants the final say in how they are represented in research, outcomes become products of collaboration between participant and researcher.

On two separate occasions (spanning from 2019 to 2020), a doctoral student from Colorado State University traveled to New Mexico and Arizona to meet with tribal land managers as well as US Forest Service personnel who work with tribes. On average, interviews lasted about an hour and typically took place at the participant's place of employment. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and thematically organized using NVivo software.

This study is concerned with the perspectives of tribal land managers as they relate to their interactions with US Forest Service personnel in the southwestern United States. The authors reached out to every tribe & pueblo across New Mexico and Arizona and set up meetings with representatives who agreed to participate in this study. Some did not respond to our outreach efforts or chose to not participate and we respect their decision. Nonetheless, the authors are hopeful that Tribes & Pueblos across the Southwest will find the results from this study useful in their work with the US Forest Service and perhaps other government land management agencies. The participants who engaged in the review process are identified by position and organizational affiliation. The identifying information of those who did not participate in the review process has been anonymized.

In the following section, we collapse literature and findings into a cohesive analytic discussion. We employ this organizational strategy to emphasize shared associations of meaning that exist across academic and local perspectives, specifically those related to tribal relations, organizational collaboration, and land management. In staying true to the principles of participatory research, we do not prioritize academic conclusions over those that have been sourced locally from participants. In fact, literature is included simply to contextualize the data, not validate it. So there is no modeling or force fitting of the data into preexisting theoretic constructs. Considering that all participants from this study are working experts in their respective fields *and* that the overarching goal of grounded research is to construct theory from empirical data (Tie, Birks, and Francis, 2019), our primary analytic aim is to describe—as best we can—the experiences and conclusions of participants on their own terms, not to explain or generalize them with antecedent theory. Academic knowledge is synthesized with local knowledge in order to provide relevant information and context for both researchers and practitioners, so that both might learn how others comprehend topics of mutual interest.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

OUTREACH AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The vast majority of tribal land managers had positive evaluations of the communication and outreach efforts of the US Forest Service. Each person had their own unique reasons for holding this belief, but there appears to be a general consensus among tribal land managers that the US Forest Service does an effective job keeping Tribes & Pueblos informed about US Forest Service activities that affect tribal lands. For example, the Forestry Supervisor for the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) described their relationship with the US Forest Service as “smooth sailing.” He explained that for day-to-day operations, the US Forest Service ensured they were available at all times. “There have been regular meetings, coordination, phone calls and emails.” In addition, site field trips were conducted. It was common for tribal land managers to characterize the outreach attempts of the US Forest Service as transparent and proactive. The Forestry Director for White Mountain Apache

described the communication practices of the US Forest Service as “open” and that the agency is good about sharing “what they are planning.”

Moreover, tribal land managers frequently complimented the US Forest Service on their outreach efforts in relation to cultural resource collection. Multiple participants put forward the perspective that the Forest Service does an effective job at reaching out to Tribes & Pueblos about accessing cultural resources on US Forest Service Lands. In one of our discussions, a natural resources director for a New Mexico pueblo affirmed that the “Forest Service has always been very generous” about letting tribal members gather cultural resources on national forest lands. He perceives the US Forest Service as sensitive to the cultural needs of tribal members because of the practical and concrete steps the agency takes to make forest products accessible to tribal members. As the Environment Director of the Pueblo of Pojoaque put it, removing administrative barriers to forest access leads to a mutually beneficial relationship between agencies: “Pojoaque allows the Forest Service access to tribal lands, and in return Pojoaque community members are permitted to do resource collection on Forest Service land for Pojoaque religious activities.” However, the relationship between the US Forest Service and the Tribes & Pueblos of the Southwest is a complex one. And despite the outreach gains made by the US Forest Service, the interviews also revealed some criticism about the agency’s communication practices.

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Several participants expressed the belief that even though the US Forest Service does a good job listening to the concerns of and reaching out to Tribes & Pueblos, the agency’s communication attempts amount to little more than “lip service.” According to the former Environmental Director of Picuris Pueblo, the US Forest Service does a good job of listening to concerns but, ultimately, “does not really do anything to address these concerns” and that when a tribe does need to communicate with the US Forest Service, that tribe must press the agency to listen to their concerns. The Director of Natural Resources for Santa Ana concurred that the “Forest Service does a good job of reaching out to the pueblos in general,” but he also believes that the US Forest Service has its own agenda and often times it does not align with the interests of tribes.

The former Environmental Director for Picuris Pueblo also brought up the issue of the US Forest Service failing to keep his department up to date on current or proposed projects at the local level. He provided an example of how he found out about the US Forest Service making plans to expand the local ski resort:

I found out that the Forest Service was in talks to expand the local ski resort through a flyer that was posted for public meetings in a restaurant. This expansion was directly related to snow making activities as well as breaking ground in the water right-of-way. No one in my department got any notification of these plans. This was too late for them to be getting this information.

Some tribal land managers noted a lack of initiative on the part of the US Forest Service to instigate collaborative projects with their tribe or pueblo. While he recognizes that the Forest Service would probably benefit more from collaborating with other pueblos who share more borders with US Forest Service lands, a former natural resources manager for a New Mexico pueblo disclosed that “the

Forest Service doesn't really reach out to collaborate with [our pueblo]." He went on to say that his department has approached the Forest Service on multiple occasions looking for collaborative opportunities, but each time the Forest Service told them that nothing was available. The Yavapai-Apache Nation Environmental Protection Department (EPD) implemented a riparian restoration program, which addresses the growing problem of invasive species, on the Verde River, mainly tamarisk (salt cedar) and tree of heaven (paradise) trees by removing, treating and monitoring those trees. The EPD continues to receive grants from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and U.S. Fish & Wildlife, to fund this project. Since they began this project many years ago, these particular trees have continued to be difficult to completely eradicate. It will take the involvement of these federal agencies and others, including the US Forest Service, to provide the collaborative and communicational support needed to address this issue.

STRIVING FOR MEANINGFUL OUTREACH

Other tribal land managers indicated that the US Forest Service provides them with too much information that does not directly relate to the needs of their tribe or pueblo. When decision-makers are confronted by a barrage of information that surpasses their capacity to adequately process, their ability to determine best possible outcomes can become compromised (Roetzel, 2019). The Pueblo of Pojoaque's Environment Director explained that "the Forest Service sends Pojoaque notification for any project in northern New Mexico that we may have concerns with, but, most of this communication does not impact Pojoaque's tribal boundaries, so I end up disregarding it." Many of the tribal liaisons we spoke with were aware of these issues. Tonto National Forest's Tribal Relations Manager summarized how many of the communication problems that exist between Tribes & Pueblos with the US Forest Service stem from a lack of internal coordination within the agency.

If you add it all up, we're really demanding a lot of time, money, and effort from the tribes to keep up with our own internal processes and our demand for constant consultation. I don't think we ever really take the time to audit that. Tribes are dealing with the Forest Service, they're dealing with the Park Service, they're dealing with the BLM, they're dealing with the State, private contractors, it goes on and on. The Forest Service is just one agency, but our agency divides itself regionally and then by forest. As independent operating units, we tend to only think about that one micro-perspective of what our forest is asking from this one tribal entity, instead of asking what the Forest Service, as a whole, and as just one agency is really asking from this tribe. If we took the time to think about that, I think we could come up with a more intentional approach and make it easier for the tribes to work with us.

So perhaps the underlying issue is not a matter of too much or too little outreach, but instead, whether or not the outreach is meaningful and productive to Tribes & Pueblos. It seems clear that both tribal land managers and Forest Service personnel acknowledge that the communication and outreach practices of the Forest Service can be improved. The question becomes: What can be done about it? The former Natural Resource Director for the Pueblo of Santo Domingo suggests that holding regular face-to-face meetings with the US Forest Service would go a long way toward improving relations. She explained that “this would give the Forest Service an opportunity to inform pueblos about potential partnerships and collaborations from grant funding or about projects they can work on with them, especially when it comes to shared stewardship.”



Photo: US Forest Service with permission of the Pueblo of Jemez.

The importance of meeting in person with Tribes & Pueblos on a regular basis has not been lost on the Tribal Liaison from the Santa Fe National Forest. He has had success initiating memorandums of understanding with four pueblos in the Santa Fe area. These MOUs do not provide specific details about projects or policy goals. Instead, they establish quarterly in-person meetings in a government-to-government fashion about important projects to both pueblos and the Santa Fe National Forest. He revealed that. . .

. . . the important thing about MOUs is that they solidify our relationship with tribes. To honor the MOU, we will meet quarterly and face-to-face. The MOU stipulates that we are not going to rely on emails to discuss important matters. This means that we will not meet each other for the first time during a catastrophic wildfire, because this is what was happening. Forest supervisors and rangers were meeting with tribal leadership in a crisis situation. You don't want to get to know someone during a crisis, you want to know someone a year or two in advance.

MEANINGFUL CONSULTATION

While quarterly MOU meetings strengthen the communication bonds that exist between tribal land management departments and the federal forestry departments that manage neighboring lands, the Regional Forester Intertribal Roundtable (RFIR) meeting gives all Tribes & Pueblos in the Southwest region an opportunity to sit down collectively with Forest Service leadership to express their concerns and establish new partnerships. The Tribal Relations Program Manager for Region 3 explained that these meetings are attended by the Regional Forest Supervisor, Forest Supervisors, Tribal and Pueblo leaders, and their staff.

The RFIR provides leaders with a chance to speak in a government-to-government capacity about not just consultation topics but also about collaboration efforts on restoration work as well as projects related to the US Forest Service's wildland fire activities. With the RFIR, the intent is to provide an inclusive and transparent space for dialog, where participants can disagree about a particular topic

but still allows all parties to come to the table and have a productive exchange of ideas about how to move forward on important land management projects together.

Outreach efforts like MOUs and the RFIR are part of the reason why the vast majority of tribal land managers were quite favorable in their overall assessments of the communication and outreach efforts of the US Forest Service, and all participants recognized the importance of maintaining open channels of communication. As mentioned above, positive communication practices can lead to mutually beneficial relationships. This is not only understood by tribal land managers but also by US Forest Service personnel. Much of this recognition stems from an understanding that the Forest Service, as a federal agency, has a fiduciary responsibility to protect trust lands and the people who live on these lands.

DEVELOPING DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS

US Forest Service personnel take seriously their responsibility to pursue and engage in meaningful partnerships with tribes. A former Partnership Coordinator for the Forest Service's Southwest Region (Region 3) explained that the US Forest Service builds partnerships to establish a better vision of resource management by addressing the priorities and needs of not only US Forest Service lands but of other lands. "Our mission, in my mind, does not end at a Forest Service Boundary. We work for the federal government, for all the people."

One of the major challenges US Forest Service personnel face in their communications with Tribes & Pueblos concerns their ability to understand the diversity of perspectives that exists across tribal governments. Integrating multiple perspectives into a coherent tribal relations platform is a challenge. As the Tribal Relations Program Manager for Region 3 put it, "We serve 55 federally recognized tribes, and each of those tribes has its own perspective and has its own connection to the land." The former Tribal Liaison for the Kaibab National Forest went a step further when he emphasized the challenge of accommodating the diversity of perspectives that exist within governments:

We can get trapped in talking about the "Apache perspective" about this or the "Hopi perspective" about this. That can be problematic sometimes because you're not talking about a group of people that all think and want the exact same thing. It's a group of people. There's going to be beliefs all along the spectrum with a lot of varying viewpoints and perspectives. So sometimes we tend to overgeneralize, and I think we just got to be careful to not do that.

To address the challenge of fair representation both across and within tribal governments, the US Forest Service is reevaluating how it interacts with Tribes & Pueblos by going beyond its official consultation responsibilities and working toward building more personalized relationships with tribal representatives. Instead of focusing only on meeting official requirements, US Forest Service Tribal Liaisons are now looking for ways to engage tribal members on a personal level. The Tribal Relations Program Manager for Region 3 proposes "breaking down this barrier of consultation and that not being the driver for working with tribes but, rather, having a conversation, communicating, collaborating, and having a direct dialogue across staff areas."

US FOREST SERVICE TRIBAL LIAISONS

An important strategy the US Forest Service has employed in its attempt to build stronger and more personalized relations with Tribes & Pueblos is to institute tribal liaison positions in some of the national forests in the Southwest. The tribal liaison position is designed to bridge communication gaps between tribal leaders and the US Forest Service by keeping Regional Foresters and Forest Supervisors informed about the concerns and interests of indigenous communities (Dockry, Gutterman, and Davenport, 2018). For tribal liaisons, working with Tribes & Pueblos means that they must first gain their trust. Considering the history of broken treaties and land grabs suffered by tribes at the hands of the federal government (see Brown & Shipman, 2014, Deloria, 1988), trust can be difficult to come by. However, multiple studies have shown that one of the most effective ways to earn the trust of tribal representatives is by forging personal relationships (see Hansen, 2011; Davenport, et al., 2007). The tribal liaison position provides a channel to pursue such relationships, and these efforts seem to be working.

For example, many tribal land managers from New Mexico spoke positively of the personal relationships they have formed with the Santa Fe National Forest's Tribal Liaison. The Environment Director of Pojoaque Pueblo stated that "If [Santa Fe Forest's Tribal Liaison] ever needed anything from the tribe, I would probably do anything within my ability to help him out." A land director from a New Mexico pueblo revealed that he has "been very engaged with my friend, [Santa Fe Forest's Tribal Liaison], who, in turn, was happy to see that I was hired [as land manager for our pueblo]." More and more forests are beginning to realize how developing strong personal relationships with tribes can lead to better government-to-government partnerships. Forests are also beginning to see how establishing stand-alone tribal liaison positions can help cultivate these types of relationships.

In the past, tribal relations were typically relegated to forest archaeologists, whose archaeological responsibilities already constituted a fulltime job. Originally hired on as both a forest archaeologist *and* tribal liaison, the former forest archaeologist for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest explained that she could never devote enough time toward her outreach efforts with tribes because her archaeology workload was (and still is) so huge. Reflecting back on her time as a tribal liaison, she recognizes that she "didn't have enough time to do the tribal liaison work justice," and even though she was able to develop a few working relationships with representatives from the White Mountain Apache Tribe, Zuni Pueblo, and the Pueblo of Acoma, she was unable to establish the kind of long-term relationships that are needed to enact meaningful collaboration.

If the US Forest Service is to live up to its standing "as a leader among Federal land management agencies in partnering collaboratively with American Indian and Alaska Native governments," (USFS, 2015, p. 1), assigning tribal outreach efforts to overworked forest archaeologists seems at odds with this goal. As summed up by the Santa Fe National Forest's Tribal Liaison:

The de facto tribal relations person in the Forest Service has been the forest archaeologist. And that's still how it's done on the Gila, Carson, and Lincoln National Forests. Forest archaeologists already have a huge workload with cultural obligations. Adding liaison responsibilities is overwhelming. It's unfortunate that some Arizona and New Mexico forests have not tried to replicate Santa Fe's liaison model, because not having one weakens that government-to-government relationship they are supposed to uphold.

All tribal land managers in this study recognized the value of engaging directly with tribal liaisons and appreciated their outreach efforts. And many recognized that the tribal liaison position gives tribes not just a voice in the US Forest Service but also a line of communication to engage with the decisionmakers who are making choices that affect their ancestral homelands. As the former Director of Natural Resources for Santo Domingo Pueblo put it, “My relationships with [Sant Fe Forest’s Tribal Liaison] and [USFS Tribal Relations Program Manager] help to give Santo Domingo a voice in Washington because when they take their message to Congress, funding can follow.”

THE SAN FRANCISCO PEAKS

Tribes, pueblos, and the US Forest Service remain dedicated to building stronger, more personalized relationships. However, circumstances remain that prevent such relationships from being fully realized. One of the more contentious issues that complicate the development of constructive outreach efforts in the Southwest is the US Forest Service permitting the use of reclaimed sewage water to make artificial snow at the Snowbowl Ski Resort, which is located on the San Francisco Peaks in the Coconino National Forest.

Since the 1960s, land management policy at the Forest Service has been guided by the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act (Wolf, 1990), which mandates that US Forest Service leadership develop and administer the renewable resources of timber, water, range, wildlife, and recreation. What the law



Photo: US Forest Service. Lockett Meadow, San Francisco Peaks at Coconino National Forest

does not require is for US Forest Service leadership to uphold the concerns of Indigenous peoples in terms of how sacred areas should be managed. The San Francisco Peaks are held sacred by 13 tribes, who consider the snowmaking activities of the Snowbowl Ski Resort to be profane to their religious practices (Finnerty, Ruelas, and Kiefer, 2018). Because the Coconino National Forest issues the recreation permit that authorizes the ski resort,

many Tribes & Pueblos consider the Forest Service as complicit in the denigration of sacred land. The decision to allow artificial snow making on the San Francisco Peaks with reclaimed water continues to impact the Forest Service’s relationship with Tribes & Pueblos in the Southwest region. The Tribal Relations manager of the Tonto National Forest described the ripple effect that resulted from the fallout of Snowbowl:

When I got a job as a Tribal Liaison, I conducted more than a dozen consultation meetings, where we asked the tribes: How are we managing your sacred sites, what can we do better? And I think in every

single meeting, regardless of how far the tribe was away from Snowbowl, that issue came up every single time.

Almost all of the US Forest Service personnel interviewed for this research sympathized with the tribes' position on the importance of protecting sacred sites. Each expressed a deep frustration at their inability to help find solutions to issues like Snowbowl. It became clear that the US Forest Service's adherence to a multiple-use management directive prevents well-intentioned employees and leaders from enacting meaningful change to land management practices within the US Forest Service. Despite this obstacle, US Forest Service personnel, especially tribal liaisons, are working with tribes to cultivate meaningful lines of communication and outreach. According to the Tribal Liaison of the Coconino National Forest:

From Snowbowl, we pivot and work on partnership projects, youth projects that relate to spring restoration, spring inventories. If a tribe doesn't want to participate because of what's going on with Snowbowl, we understand. We do not hold it against them. When they want to work with us again, we will work with them.

TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

Many tribal land managers expressed a willingness to look beyond difficult situations by reopening channels of communication with the US Forest Service. In the mid-2000s, the relationship between the Pueblo of Zuni and the US Forest Service soured over the development of an access road and residential subdivision. The Zuni were concerned about the impact the subdivision would have on their watersheds in the Zuni Mountains and asked the US Forest Service to refuse a development permit. Ultimately, to Zuni's disappointment, the US Forest Service approved the access road and a scaled-down version of the development. Despite this setback, the Pueblo of Zuni kept their lines of communication open with the US Forest Service, and, as with Snowbowl, found ways to turn a challenge into an opportunity. The Hydrologist for the Pueblo of Zuni, who was heavily involved with the dispute, specified that. . .

. . . the experience allowed us to build a relationship with Forest Service personnel. This led to more efforts by the Forest Service to recognize Zuni's concerns and to have more government-to-government consultation meetings. This led to the Forest Service taking Zuni more seriously as a sovereign nation. So it set the groundwork for future interactions with the Forest Service on consulting with Zuni about resources in the Zuni Mountains.

Now, the US Forest Service regularly asks for Zuni's input on development projects that extend across their ancestral lands. For example, a former Natural Resource Director for the Pueblo of Zuni described how the US Forest Service now asks for Zuni's advice on a regular basis "to review things from the forests that are in their general land footprint, especially from the Arizona forests." Although persistent issues remain that complicate the US Forest Service and tribes from fully realizing both personal and official relationships, tribal land managers made it clear that the US Forest Service has taken and continues to take steps in the right direction. Open communication practices have led to positive relationship building, which in turn has led to productive collaborations for both sides. We will now explore some of these collaborations.

COLLABORATION

Some of the fuel treatment and forest restoration partnerships we heard about in our interviews were funded by US Forest Service programs. Programs such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP)—which has funded over 200 projects and restored over 30,000 acres of National Forest land in New Mexico (USFSA, 2021)—and the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4 FRI)—which spans 2.4 million acres across 4 of Arizona’s National Forests (USFS, 2012)—have

initiated multiple collaborative projects between the US Forest Service and tribal land management departments throughout the Southwest.



PERCEPTIONS OF EXCLUSION FROM US FOREST SERVICE PROGRAMS

There is no doubt that both 4 FRI and the CFLRP have helped move the US Forest Service closer toward meeting many of its restoration goals. However, we heard concerns from several

participants—especially with regards to 4 FRI—that tribes have been generally excluded from participating in the planning and implementation of these programs as collaborative partners.

For instance, the former forest archaeologist for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest noted that tribal participation in 4 FRI is much lower than it should be. She said she believes that since 4 FRI restoration projects are taking place on lands that are integral to the cultural heritage of tribes across Arizona, it only makes sense that they administer or at the very least be included in the cultural assessments that are required before any 4 FRI restoration project can begin. Unfortunately, she has not seen the 4 FRI program regard regional Tribes as valuable interest groups.

Our conversations with several tribal land managers appear to support this claim. A former Natural Resources Director for the Pueblo of Zuni stated that he attended a US Forest Service meeting with a Pueblo councilmember to see how they could establish a partnership through the 4 FRI program. At the meeting, he explained that he runs a hazardous fuels crew that specializes in thinning work and put forward the idea of expanding it into a multiagency crew with the US Forest Service. Although the US Forest Service expressed interest and eventually drafted an agreement to incorporate his crew into the broader 4 FRI restoration effort, as of 2021 Zuni is still waiting on the US Forest Service to fund a project.

PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION IN FOREST PROGRAMS

In our discussions with other US Forest Service leaders, we found that a funding mechanism for forest restoration and tribal partnerships already exists. A former Partnership Coordinator for the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service informed us about 638 Contracts, which are legal mandates that transfer the responsibility and funds of federal services to a partnering tribe. He explained that 638 Contracts are a viable way forward in helping the US Forest Service realize its collaborative aims with tribes because under 638 Contract agreements, a tribe manages a federal program just as if a federal agency were administering it. Some of the program costs that can be

covered by 638 Contracts include funding for staff, training, vehicles, equipment, computers, offices, indirect costs, overhead, salary, and benefits, among others. Despite the potential of 638 Contracts to enhance the collaborative capacity between the US Forest Service and tribes, none of the tribal land managers we interviewed mentioned 638 Contracts or indicated that they had ever participated in one. It seems, then, that 638 Contracts have yet to be fully realized as a means toward collaborative engagement between the US Forest Service and the Tribes & Pueblos of the Southwest.

However, our interviews *did* reveal a fuel treatment and forest restoration funding program that participants had a lot to say about. Known as the Reserved Treaty Rights Lands program (RTRL), it is a funding mechanism administered by the BIA that is designed to incentivize collaborative agreements between federal land management agencies and tribes (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2015). Many participants expressed enthusiasm and support for RTRL but there was also concern about the fairness of the program as well as its funding capacity.

RTRL AND THE PACHECO CANYON PRESCRIBED BURN

We explore these implications against the backdrop of the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn, an RTRL funded project that was instrumental in containing the Medio Fire, which was sparked by lightning on August 17, 2020 just north of Santa Fe, New Mexico (Santa Fe National Forest Public Information Officer, 2020). For 28 days, the wildfire burned over 4,000 acres in the Santa Fe National Forest (Santa Fe National Forest Public Information Officer, 2020a), with 30 percent of these acres burning at moderate to high severity (Santa Fe National Forest Public Information Officer, 2020b). Firefighters confined and eventually extinguished the Medio Fire by guiding it to an existing burn scar from a 2011 wildfire, limiting its progress to the north; to the south, firefighters herded the flames to an area of forest that had been treated with a prescribed burn in 2019 (Cantor, 22 September, 2020). US Forest Service officials credit this prescribed burn—known as the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn—with creating a fuel break that prevented the Medio Fire from gaining intensity, consuming additional acres of forest, degrading Santa Fe’s watershed, and spreading to a local ski area (The Greater Santa Fe Fire Shed Coalition, 2021).

As noted above, the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn was financed through the RTRL program. According to the Department of Interior’s (DoI) Budget Justification for 2020, “the RTRL program upholds our trust responsibilities by supporting Tribes’ participation in collaborative strategic fuels management projects on non-Tribal lands to protect priority Tribal natural resources that are at high risk from wildfire” (DoI,



Photo: US Forest Service. Fire Crew on the Coconino National Forest

2020), though (as several participants in our study pointed out), it is possible to do RTRL fuel treatment work on tribal lands, so long as it adds to the aim of the overall project.

In 2019, after securing RTRL funds from the BIA, the Pueblo of Tesuque partnered with the US Forest Service (and other regional agencies) to initiate a 500-acre prescribed burn, within the 2,400-acre Pacheco Canyon Project. Despite Tesuque lands not receiving any direct fuel treatments from the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn, the Pueblo of Tesuque's Department of Environment and Natural Resources gained access to new resources and revenue streams that allowed the department to expand its capacity. The RTRL Coordinator for the Pueblo of Tesuque explained that with RTRL funds, the Department's Wildfire Response Unit participated and received training for their Incident Qualification Cards.

However, Tesuque acquired more than training from the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn. They also gained a fair and advantageous partnership with the US Forest Service. Tesuque's RTRL Coordinator described their partnership with the US Forest Service as a "50/50 collaboration." The equitable nature of this collaboration registered during the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) review process, which is required for all prescribed fire projects on federal lands (Ahuja & Perrot, 2020). NEPA mandates assessments of both cultural and environmental impacts before any fuel treatment operation can begin (Council on Environmental Quality, 2020). For the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn, Tesuque administered the cultural survey while the US Forest Service managed the environmental assessment.

Collins et al. (2009) note that landscape-level fuel treatment projects can take several years to complete and that "forest managers are often limited in time, and in some cases expertise, when conducting these comprehensive evaluations." When tribes conduct cultural surveys on federal lands for fuel treatment projects, the evaluation includes a level of cultural expertise that goes beyond what can be learned in a classroom or textbook. As the RTRL Coordinator for the Pueblo of Tesuque put it: "Although we implement projects on Forest Service lands, we're still doing work on the land of our ancestors, our aboriginal lands."

RTRL AND THE GREENS PEAK PROJECT

Our interview with tribal land managers from the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) revealed another RTRL project—Greens Peak—that brought positive outcomes for both the US Forest Service and a Southwestern Tribe. Located on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, Greens Peak is the highest of a series of rounded knolls that stand atop a raised highland in the White Mountains of Eastern Arizona.



US Forest Service. Apache-Sitgraves National Forest

The US Forest Service has a particularly strong interest in protecting this area because it houses a communications tower complex that is located at the top of Greens Peak. For many years, this complex, which is valued at over 500 million dollars, was at risk of being damaged or destroyed by an unplanned wildfire because stands of timber, woodlands, and grasslands were encroaching upon its perimeter (USFS, 2021b).

The WMAT has an inherent interest in protecting Greens Peak because they consider the area to be sacred. The Forestry Supervisor for WMAT explained that the historical and cultural significance of the site was determined by a tribal elder who serves as the WMAT's cultural resources director. He went on to describe the importance of having a tribal elder conduct a cultural survey for a land restoration project because, unlike younger generation tribal members, tribal elders "have more knowledge about where to look."

Tribal elders have knowledge of protecting sensitive cultural heritage resources, such as medicinal plants, sacred sites, various animal species, and sacred riparian habitat. After receiving RTRL funds for new chainsaws, communication radios, vehicles, personal protective equipment, and "other important supplies and equipment needed to implement the projects that were identified by the US Forest Service," the White Mountain Forestry Department successfully completed the first phase of the project by developing an interagency agreement. This agreement led to collaborative team building, hiring a workforce, refining goals and objectives, purchasing necessary support supplies and equipment, and lastly, hand thinning 60 acres out of 261 acres around Green Peak.

A BROADER LOOK AT RTRL

With the success of the Pacheco Canyon Burn, Greens Peak, and other RTRL fuel treatment projects, it is clear that the RTRL program possesses the collaborative and financial capacity to assist tribal and federal land management agencies in addressing the glut of fuel loads that have accumulated on the forest floors of the Southwest. What remains less clear is why allocations for the RTRL program are underrepresented in the Department of Interior's (DoI) budget, accounting for just .05 percent of the DoI's 2020 Wildland Fire Management budget (DoI, 2020).

A former Partnership Coordinator for the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service provided a possible reason why the DoI does not put more financial support behind the RTRL program: The BIA does not want tribal fire crews who have been trained with BIA monies to be doing work on non-tribal lands, since much of BIA's funding is tied to project accomplishments that occur on tribal territories. Tribes do not get project accomplishments for doing work on US Forest Service lands, so

the US Forest Service gets all of the accomplishments for RTRL projects. He wants to see the US Forest Service and BIA figure out a way to adjust project accomplishments and reports so that BIA funding opportunities are incentivized for providing RTRL trained crews to do work off reservation lands.

Even though most tribal land managers praised the success of RTRL fuel treatment projects in the Southwest, others expressed frustration about the program limiting projects—and the accomplishments that follow—to non-tribal lands. The Natural Resource Director for the Pueblo of Santa Ana explained that there is already enough of a need on tribal trust lands that Tribes should be sufficiently funded by the DoI to meet its trust responsibilities. He went on to state that the way RTRL is set up is unfortunate: federal agencies have thousands of employees, whereas the Santa Ana Natural Resource Department only has a 4-person crew with 140,000 acres to manage. “We have enough need to do work on our lands.” The federal government has a fiduciary responsibility to protect trust lands, and this is why the RTRL program could go to funding work on tribal lands as well.

Other tribal land managers voiced concern about a lack of initiative by the US Forest Service in pursuing RTRL partnerships with regional tribes. The former Natural Resources Director for a New Mexico Pueblo explained that his department has tried to “get some traction” with the US Forest Service to start an RTRL project, but “we just haven’t had a lot of interactions with the Forest Service’s RTRL folks.” The Director reported that when he first spoke with US Forest Service representatives about the RTRL program, they did not make it clear who in the US Forest Service he would have to speak with about initiating a project. We heard a similar account from the former Environmental Director of Picuris Pueblo, who explained that Picuris is looking to develop a fuel treatment project with unspent RTRL funds, but no one from the US Forest Service has stepped forward. He is hoping for more interaction and, ultimately, collaboration with the local Forest Service district about starting an RTRL fuel treatment project. However, he is not sure who he needs to speak with to initiate this type of partnership.

Even though there is room for improvement in the RTRL program, the success of recent fuel treatment partnerships has shown that RTRL funds and projects can be used to cultivate stronger relationships that develop mutual benefits. For example, the success of the Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn illustrates that interagency fuel treatment projects are capable of restoring the health and resiliency of fire adapted ecosystems. These outcomes show that when federal agencies collaborate with tribes on fuel treatment projects, they gain qualified partners who bring leadership, guidance, multi-generational knowledge, and wisdom as the original and continued stewards of the land. A former Partnership Coordinator for the Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service recognized that the RTRL program has historically been a hard sell for agency leadership because it requires them to relinquish power to tribes, but he remains optimistic about the future of the RTRL program, as a new generation of leaders embraces shared stewardship.

In addition, putting fewer resources into fuel treatment projects allows federal land management agencies to maintain their commitment to restoring fire adapted ecosystems to historic conditions (Wildland Fire Leadership Council, 2009) while saving significant financial and personnel resources that can be directed toward other pressing circumstances, such as wildfire suppression efforts. When the US Forest Service partners with tribes on RTRL projects, they are securing access to an external

source of funding (via the BIA) that effectively circumvents the suppression-focused budget directives that currently constrain fuel treatment efforts in the agency (Kolden, 2019). A Natural Resource Director for a New Mexico pueblo acknowledged that RTRL makes it easier to partner with federal agencies, since his department is able to bring in money for projects federal partners want done.

The benefits of the RTRL program do not end with federal land management agencies. As an RTRL coordinator and forestry worker for Santa Clara Pueblo explained, the RTRL program is a means of keeping their Forestry Department operational that simultaneously provides them with an “opportunity to get involved in projects that protect the lands that we have left.” From this vantage point, the RTRL program can be viewed as a funding vehicle capable of moving the federal government towards meeting its financial obligations to tribal communities, which have been chronically and significantly unmet for decades (United States Commission on Human Rights, 2020).

COLLABORATION BEYOND FUEL TREATMENTS AND FOREST RESTORATION

Collaboration between the US Forest Service and the Tribes & Pueblos of the Southwest are not limited to fuel treatments and forest restoration projects. The Tribal Relations Specialist for the Coconino National Forest (CNF) described how her forest started an internship program with the Kaibab National Forest (KNF) and the Hopi Tribe. The two national forests and sovereign nation shared a fisheries intern, who conducted ichthyological research projects for over a year. She explained that it made sense for the intern to conduct experiments on the CNF because it has more water than the KNF or Hopi Reservation.

This was not the only time we heard US Forest Service leaders emphasizing the importance of increasing the proportion of Indigenous Americans in its ranks. The Regional Stewardship Contracting Coordinator for Region 3 put forward the idea of utilizing regional community colleges as educational and training satellites for the US Forest Service, where these institutions would prepare students for careers as federal land managers and scientists. He specifically mentioned Northern New Mexico College (NNMC) as having the potential to fulfill this role, since the college serves the communities of numerous area pueblos. According to its website (NNMC, 2021), “Northern New Mexico College is a Hispanic and Native American-serving comprehensive institution.” The NNMC offers an environmental science program that “bridges education in traditional practices in agriculture and forestry to modern day environmental monitoring procedures” (NNMCa, 2021). He regards institutions like NNMC as possessing the capacity to prepare Indigenous land practitioners to take on leadership roles in the



agency.

With the US Forest Service taking steps to actively recruit Indigenous people in the Southwest, in addition to tribal forest workers participating in large scale restoration projects on national forest lands, the line that separates federal from tribal forest management has started to blur. Successful land management collaborations between the US Forest Service and the Tribes & Pueblos of the Southwest have shown that it is not only possible for divergent agencies to work together to achieve

a common goal but that collaborations of this nature can lead to valuable intercultural learning opportunities for forestry workers.

Some of our discussions with participants turned toward the prospect of Tribes & Pueblos co-managing National Forest lands with the US Forest Service. A former Partnership Coordinator for the Southwestern Region explained that ten years ago, it would have been impossible for shared stewardship programs to be successful because the US Forest Service believes it is the ultimate authority in forestry. He explained that this was a reason why RTRL was a harder sell for the US Forest Service than it was for Tribes & Pueblos. However, what RTRL has shown is that both federal and tribal land management organizations benefit from collaborating with each other.

MOVING FORWARD WITH COLLABORATIONS

The Pacheco Canyon Prescribed Burn and Greens Peak Restoration Project demonstrated the value of working alongside people with a deep history and connection with the land. Cultural surveys for federal land management projects that take place on ancestral lands remain incomplete without the input of those whose culture is indelibly tied to it. Indeed, it was common for participants from the



Photo: US Forest Service. Discovery Days at V Bar V in Coconino National Forest.

US Forest Service to stress the importance of tribes conducting cultural appraisals on federal lands, especially on lands that are part of a tribe's ancestral domain. For example, the former forest archaeologist for the Apache-Sitgreaves expressed an appreciation for the long history tribes have with the landscape, arguing that the original inhabitants of the land "should be number one on the list of collaborators to help with restoration projects." The traditional knowledge tribal

elders bring to archaeological projects has augmented her formal training in beneficial ways, and she provided an example of learning from tribal elders in the field that led to new discoveries and approaches to looking at landscapes: During her time as an archaeologist at Tonto National Forest, she had spent some time inspecting Apache sites and was finding roasting pits, lithic reduction stations, ground stone sites, resource procurement areas, grave sites, and rough shelters. She made arrangements for the Tonto and San Carlos Apache to look at these sites, including elders. They learned that one of the sites was the last Apache village before General Cook and others moved them off this land and onto reservations. When working on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, there was not a lot of background knowledge about how to recognize Apache sites, so she reached out to the WMAT to do some training for forest archaeologists and para-archaeologists for how to better recognize Apache archaeological sites.

However, as we learned, the potential for co-management exists beyond Tribes & Pueblos conducting cultural surveys with US Forest Service archaeologists. Several US Forest Service officials acknowledged the possibility of Tribes & Pueblos eventually managing portions of National Forest lands that once were part of their sovereign territorial domains. The Tribal Liaison for the Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) explained that there are extensive unused areas of land within the SFNF that were once under the stewardship of multiple pueblos in the Santa Fe region. Other than limited fuelwood harvesting, most of this land gets no visitation from the public. He speculated that regional pueblos would likely be willing to accept control of these areas and welcome them back into their legal and cultural domains. Because the public does not visit these areas, he thinks that having pueblos administer these lands would not detract from recreation, visitation, or “really thwart our mission in any way.”

Although the capacity for co-management of federal lands has been demonstrated through numerous successful partnerships between the US Forest Service and the Tribes & Pueblos of the Southwest, US Forest Service officials told us that the institutionalization of co-management as a policy directive is currently unviable in the agency. The Tribal Liaison for the Coconino National Forest (CNF) explained that decisionmakers at the CNF are much more open to the idea of ‘shared stewardship’. But no matter how collaborations are referred to, it is clear that the US Forest Service has become more receptive to tribal perspectives, capacities, and expertise. When Tribes & Pueblos have a direct say in the planning and implementation of federal land management projects, it enhances the US Forest Service’s capacity to develop as an *intercultural and participatory management* agency, which Eloy et al. (2019) define as the “equitable participation of different stakeholders in the process of planning and decision making based on the promotion of respect and mutual understanding among stakeholders, with different knowledge, needs and worldviews.”

Just before the publication of this report (summer 2022), the RTRL Coordinator for the Pueblo of Tesuque updated us on a recent collaboration with the US Forest Service that could be a sign of things to come. Following the success of the Pacheco Canyon prescribed burn, the Pueblo of Tesuque committed to a ‘nonparticipating funding agreement’ with Santa Fe National Forest’s Espanola Ranger District. The agreement is designed to document cross boundary prescribed burning collaborations, build upon the existing partnership, and provide prescribed fire training for both Tesuque and US Forest Service personnel. In January 2022, the two partners added to the gains made in previous years by conducting a 554-acre prescribed burn in Pacheco Canyon. What distinguished this particular collaboration from previous efforts was that 111 of these acres took place on Tesuque lands, making this the first time US Forest Service personnel have participated in prescribed burns within the Pueblo’s territorial domain.

INTERCULTURAL GROWTH WITHIN THE US FOREST SERVICE

To understand why intercultural growth is important to the US Forest Service, it is necessary to understand the extent to which the US Forest Service takes seriously its relations with tribal communities. According to the most recent edition of its Tribal Relations Strategic Plan (USFS, 2018), the US Forest Service acknowledges that tribes possess “indelible ties to the Nation’s forests and grasslands” and that these ties affect “current knowledge, perspectives, and resources that will help the Forest Service as we focus on the future of our mission.” The same report goes on to state that

the US Forest Service is committed to seeking “opportunities to partner with Tribes in work across boundaries and leverage resources to accomplish together what we could not each do on our own.” Based on these statements, it seems evident that the US Forest Service values the knowledge of its tribal partners, to such an extent, in fact, that the agency is open to letting tribal knowledge influence its organizational aims. Moreover, the US Forest Service not only appears interested in developing partnerships with tribal organizations but in pursuing partnerships that take place “across boundaries”.

Perhaps it is accurate to state that at this current juncture, the possibility for co-management exists in both the institutional discourse of the US Forest Service as well as in the collaborative land management projects it has participated in with Tribes & Pueblos. Whether the US Forest Service is open to relinquishing more territorial control to its tribal partners remains to be seen. And while the details of coordinating such a power sharing agreement would likely take years, if not decades, to finalize, it is clear that the Tribes & Pueblos of the Southwest are actively working to see this period of history through. As the Tribal Liaison for the Santa Fe National Forest put it:

You have to admire their sense of conviction and willingness to wait. But they are not just waiting for it to happen, they are doing what it takes to get there within the constricts of Western society, Western government.

CONCLUSION

This general technical report reveals challenges and opportunities in tribal relations between Tribes & Pueblos and the US Forest Service Southwest Region. Our approach draws on one-on-one in-depth interviews with tribal land managers and US Forest Service tribal liaisons. Rather than administering large impersonal online surveys, or surveys via telephone, we followed the guidance from tribal members who stressed the importance of face-to-face communication. Fortunately, we were able to engage most participants in person during 2019 and early 2020 prior to the United States declaring COVID-19 a national emergency. We were able to gather a rich body of information from both Tribes & Pueblos and US Forest Service tribal liaisons that describe the complexities of relationships and collaborations across the Southwest Region. More specifically, we now return to the question of how well the US Forest Service Tribal Relations Program of the Southwest Region is meeting its mission and programmatic aims:

- Provide tribes equal opportunity and access to Forest Service programs.
- Eliminate barriers to tribal participation.
- Improve overall knowledge of tribes and tribal cultures.
- Develop partnerships and accomplish common goals in accordance with the Forest Service mission and regional priorities.

Our research reveals that there is no one single answer to how well the US Forest Service Tribal Relations program is meeting its programmatic aims. Rather, the participants in this study identify the complex ways in which these programmatic aims overlap and reinforce each other to create a network of relationships for the tribal relations program that ebbs and flows from challenges to

opportunities. For example, while some tribes may perceive and experience equal opportunity to access Forest Service programs, other tribes may perceive and experience exclusion. Relatedly, a single tribe or pueblo may perceive and experience complete access to a Forest Service program at one point in time while experiencing exclusion from Forest Service programs at another point in time. Therefore, while challenges and barriers will likely persist, we identify key takeaways that may help to improve the programmatic aims of tribal relations in the Southwest with implications to other regions across the country:

1) Participants identified in-person communication as the most effective way in which to improve outreach and relationship building.

From the beginning of this study, tribal land managers stated the importance of in-person communication. The use of emails and postal mail do little to improve outreach and relationship building, particularly when tribal members are concerned about the planning and development of US Forest Service projects. In addition, while US Forest Service multiple-use mandates and policies may conflict with tribal-use, in-person communication works as a mechanism to validate concerns between both entities and opens a path for collaboration on other projects in the future. While tribal land managers may continue to perceive the US Forest Service as doing a good job of listening but failing to address concerns, in-person communication demonstrates both a desire for understanding and opportunities to express challenges in order to establish meaningful engagement and collaboration. For example, tribal land managers reported becoming overwhelmed by the amount of information sent to them from the US Forest Service and other land management agencies. In-person communication, or setting up virtual “face-to-face” meetings during pandemic conditions is an opportunity to clarify how projects may directly or indirectly impact different tribes at different moments in time.

2) The Regional Forester Intertribal Roundtable is perceived as an example of meaningful tribal consultation.

Participants praised the success of the Regional Forester Intertribal Roundtable as an opportunity for tribal leadership to collectively work through concerns and establish meaningful collaborations with the US Forest Service. The roundtable is perceived as an inclusive and transparent space where participants can disagree about policies and procedures while at the same time move forward on important land management projects together. During our assessment, we found that favorable assessments of US Forest Service communication and outreach efforts were based on the perception of meaningful consultation at the Regional Forester Intertribal Roundtable.

3) Greater investments in US Forest Service Tribal Liaisons at the forest level are needed to engage the diverse perspectives of tribes across the Southwest Region.

Both tribal land managers and US Forest Service tribal liaisons described the value of each forest having a representative who is focused on meeting the agency’s fiduciary responsibilities of developing government-to-government partnerships with tribes. US Forest Service employees who are assigned tribal liaison responsibilities as an additional duty do not have the time or resources to participate in meaningful engagement and build trust with the large number of tribes in the Region. In addition to hiring a full cadre of US Forest Service tribal liaisons, professional training in multicultural interpersonal communication and conflict management are mechanisms that can be

employed to build a purposeful tribal relations program that emphasizes outreach and relationship building with the diversity of tribes in the Region.

4) The use of reclaimed sewage water for snowmaking on the San Francisco Peaks functions as a barrier to building trust with tribes.

Tribal land managers and US Forest Service tribal liaisons explained how snowmaking activities at the Snowbowl Ski Resort on the Coconino National Forest damage trust for managing sacred sites. Participants often identified Snowbowl as the primary barrier for developing initial consultations. The “desecration” of San Francisco Peaks serves as a constant reminder that land-use conflict between tribes and the US Government is ongoing. Nonetheless, meaningful lines of communication and outreach can be established by building partnerships for other projects and leaving the door open for tribes to reengage at their convenience. In fact, tribal land managers credit US Forest Service employees with their continued efforts in establishing meaningful relationships and collaborations beyond Snowbowl.

5) Tribal perceptions of exclusion from US Forest Service programs can be mediated by assisting tribes in identifying existing funds.

Forest restoration projects such as 4 FRI or CFLRP provide access to funding for tribes across the Southwest. However, tribal land managers reported feeling excluded from large forest restoration projects and were unaware of existing funding mechanisms that they are eligible for. Moreover, tribal land managers reported US Forest Service employees lacking a sense of urgency to include tribes in large forest planning processes. Alternatively, US Forest Service employees reported multiple projects that include tribal partnerships, as well as additional funding mechanisms open to tribes. Thus, a significant gap exists between perceptions of inclusion and exclusion of Tribes & Pueblos and US Forest Service funded projects.

6) Using the Reserve Treaty Rights Lands (RTRL) program can function as a mechanism to incentivize collaborative agreements between the US Forest Service and tribes.

Tribal land managers reported several successful collaborations as a result of the BIA funded RTRL program. Specifically, the RTRL program has assisted tribal and federal land management agencies in addressing the glut of fuel loads on forest floors across the Southwest. However, tribal land managers reported a lack of initiative from the US Forest Service in pursuing RTRL partnerships with regional tribes. We found that the RTRL program can work to cultivate stronger relationships that benefit the US Forest Service and tribal lands. Moreover, RTRL is an underused program that can function as a mechanism to develop collaborations for shared stewardship using an all-hands all-lands approach.

7) The co-management of forest lands is a long-term goal.

Tribal land managers and US Forest Service representatives acknowledge that co-management of land currently managed by the US Forest Service is perhaps idealistic at the moment. Nonetheless, they also reported that the US Forest Service has made a very conscious effort to establish partnerships with tribes. The agency has gradually moved toward learning from tribal knowledge and including tribes in the planning process as well as in the implementation of projects. Both tribal land managers and US Forest Service employees reported that the move toward actively pursuing collaborative projects creates better outcomes in forest management across the Southwest.

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THE LIMITS OF PARTICIPATION

The *Fire Article* and *Tribal Relations Report* have been presented to illustrate the capacity of cultural research products to accommodate a plurality of voices in its outcomes. They do so through the implementation of a grounded and descriptive research approach that respects and assimilates the knowledge practices participants employ in the cultural spaces to which they belong. Whether or not these products have met this ideal in a meaningful way now depends on the outcomes of your own appraisal.

In the previous section, I touched on how making room for participants in the review process can present significant challenges to the timely production of research. I would like to close this dissertation by exploring another challenge I encountered in my attempt at implementing a participatory research strategy. Initially, I had intended this dissertation to unfold as a philosophically informed empirical research project. The plan was to apply Wittgenstein's language philosophy to instances of linguistic practice that emerged during the review process for the *Fire Article*, specifically, the email correspondences I had with journal and participant reviewers. I wanted to explore the implications of the peer review process through an empirical analysis of appraisal in practice.

In the fall of 2021, I began drafting a manuscript to meet this aim. By January, I had completed an initial analysis of an email correspondence I had engaged in with a participant about an excerpt he/she appeared in from an early draft of the *Fire Article*. The analysis centered on a misapplication of the participant's language use that occurred because I (as a cultural outsider) was unfamiliar with consequential aspects of the

participant's cultural practices. I wanted to show—empirically—how participatory research practices can provide cultural researchers with access to insider cultural knowledge using non-immersive research methods.

Upon initial review, the participant was supportive of the analysis and gave me permission to use it in the dissertation as well as a related research article that I was drafting. However, there was one issue with the analysis that the participant wanted some clarification on. For reasons that I cannot disclose because of personal and institutional protocols that mandate a respect for participants to have a say in how they are represented in research, the participant ended up pulling his/her support and requested that I not use the analysis in either the dissertation or article.

Although I cannot get into specifics, I will state that at the crux of the issue was a concern that the empirical analysis went beyond the topic specifications that were laid out in the informed consent letter and applied during the interview. Indeed, the scope of the *Fire Article* and *Tribal Relations Report* is limited to land management collaboration between the USDA Forest Service and the Tribes and Pueblos of the Southwest, not to language habits employed by participants during interviews and email correspondences that took place during the review process.

Obviously, I respected the participant's decision, but this meant I had to completely restructure my dissertation from a philosophically informed empirical analysis to the critical analysis that you have just read through. In addition to the month it took me to research and compose the empirical analysis section of the dissertation, I spent another three weeks corresponding with the participant (who was extremely busy at the time with professional obligations) over an analysis that would ultimately have to be scrapped.

Considering it took me another month to develop a new direction for the dissertation, the entire episode set me back close to three months.

I do not mention this to garner sympathy from the reader but to illustrate the limits of participant appraisal in cultural research settings. I knew that the empirical analysis I sent to the participant for review exceeded the topical scope of the *Fire Article* and *Tribal Relation Report*. I also knew that it was risky to ask a participant to evaluate language practices that stem from a form of life that is foreign to his/her own. The reason I thought it would be possible for the participant to relate to and provide meaningful appraisal of the empirical analysis was because, like the *Fire Article* and *Tribal Relations Report*, its findings were presented using the descriptive analytic approach laid out in Sections 1 and 4 above.

Ultimately, the participant rejected the empirical analysis not because he/she was unable to comprehend the concepts embedded therein but because he/she was uncomfortable evaluating language practices that surpassed his/her domain of subject matter expertise. My experience showed me that if research outcomes are to be appraised in accordance with the language practices of participants, the researcher must employ an analytic procedure that is not only useable to participants but must also address topics with which participants are familiar.

Relying solely on the epistemologies of researchers and reviewers undermines the descriptive potential of research findings, since the interpretations of participants (local subject-matter experts) are excluded. So long as the cultural researcher possesses the time and resources that are necessary to include participants in the review process, the payoff is clearly warranted, at least from methodological orientations that are grounded and relativistic. When appraisal accommodates the dispositions of researchers, reviewers, *and*

participants, cultural research becomes a practice of negotiation, one concerned with understanding how different subject-matter experts make sense of the incidents that are described in research outcomes.

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