

**IndigiComms:**

Using Decolonization, Power Studies and Indigenous Methods to Inform Postmodern

Communications Practice & Scholarship

Timothy E. Kenny



COMM 4851

Issues & Ethics in Public Relations

Jane McNichol & Chase Remillard

Mount Royal University

June 28, 2018

**Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Background: Finding My Positionality.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The issues: Decolonization Study within Colonial Spaces .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The Issues: History behind Indigenous Imagining .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>The Issues: Mainstream Media Power.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Implications for Future Scholarship and Practice: Indigenous Methodologies .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Implications for Future Scholarship and Practice: Post-Modern Public Relations .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendix A- Potential Model for Two-Eyed Seeing in IndigiComms Scholarship and Practice.....</b>	<b>30</b>

### **Abstract**

At a Blackfoot Sundance in 2015, I prayed for Creator to help me fit together the oppositions in my life — such as Indigenous studies and public relations/communications scholarship, and my mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry. I believe that prayer lead me here — to this paper.

In it, I grappled with the question on how the study in Indigenous methods, decolonization studies and media histories could inform the future of a postmodern communications scholarship and practice, while at the same time positing that these will be the very tools needed for the future of ethical public relations scholarship and practice.

The primary source of data for this work comes from an auto ethnographical account of confronting research works within deeply entrenched colonial institutions, and reflects some key markers on my journey as I read and researched works within the disciplines of Indigenous studies, Indigenous Methodologies, media histories and postmodern thought in communication studies.

My research spanned across various disciplines such as Francis's (1992) exploration of the history behind mainstream Indigenous imaging, which referenced John Dryden's 1670 play *The Conquest of Granada* as one of the first places the image of the 'noble savage' appeared (p. 7). And I ended my research with post-modern calls to public relations practitioners from Holtzhausen (2002) who claimed that reflexivity could help prevent the formation of metanarratives or dominant discourses in public relations. Further, she also cautioned practitioners to critique their own actions using postmodern theory (pp. 256, 259).

I am not accomplished expert in these fields. I am a scholar. And ethical considerations remind me that this work, and the use of a made-up term like "IndigiComms," is simply a quiet

form of activism — of placing me in the centre of my work using a small ‘i’. I did not need to figure out how to do put these things together, I just needed to find the courage to continue to do what I’ve been doing this whole time — using my voice and my stories. My hopes are that this story can help inform the future of Indigenous communications and public relations scholarship: a discipline lacking in Indigenous Methodologies for research, scholarship and practice.

### **Introduction**

On a dusty, hot, late August afternoon in 2015 I prayed. I prayed for the Creator to help give me strength, courage and a clear path to responsibly hold a position within the opposing worlds I often found myself in, such as the oppositions of being both a student in Indigenous studies and public relations/communication studies — or identifying as the proud descendant of a humble Cree Chief from Calling Lake, Alberta, while admitting I was less proud of my mixed European-settler heritage — or finally being aware in that moment that I was Cree attending Ceremony on adversarial Blackfoot Traditional Territory.

[This image is restricted by copyright and has been removed. See the figure note below for a source URL.]

*Figure 1: <https://treaty7.wordpress.com/#jp-carousel-164>*

I had journeyed to that very southern Alberta plain as an enrolled student in an experiential learning course called Treaty 7 Field School, which to the best of my knowledge is one of the few undergraduate credit courses in this country that informs through ethnographies and histories, and from Traditional Teachings of the land. We were in a classroom for a block-week before boarding a bus to encounter the Traditional Territories of the: Siksika, Blood, Piikani, Stoney Nakota and Tsuu T’ina Nations — to see, feel, hear and experience that land

through the oral histories and traditional teachings of these people that have inhabited this region for thousands of years.

On that afternoon, our class was invited to witness a sacred Blackfoot Sundance (figure 1, p. 3), which is where I found myself praying and weeping. Throughout that week-long journey in the field, not only did I transform an Indigenous man — I transformed as a scholar.

I feel the need to mention this story, because it points to the very real tensions that many Indigenous academics experience — confronting both their own unique histories and positions while training to critically think within colonial and institutional frameworks. Professor Taiakiake Alfred in his work “Warrior Scholarship” unpacked this concept by stating that “universities are not a safe ground . . . [they] reflect the tensions and dynamics of our relationship as Indigenous people interacting with people and institutions in society as a whole” (2004, p. 88).

More importantly, from the minute I said that prayer at that Sundance, it informed how I was going to approach the writing of this thesis, which was meant to embody my five years as a self-identified Indigenous academic in public relations and Indigenous studies.

This work is not a traditional thesis, because I am not a traditional academic. And, like one of my favourite Indigenous authors Thomas King suggests, I am not the Indian, the historian, or the communications scholar you had in mind (King, 2012, p. xi). The primary source of data for this work comes from my own lived experiences of confronting academic works within deeply entrenched colonial institutions. This work also reflects some key markers on my journey as I read and researched works within the disciplines of Indigenous studies, Indigenous Methodologies, media histories and postmodern thought in communication studies.

Moreover, this work is not anchored in any one discipline because I am not. I am a self-identified Indigenous person with each foot planted in two very different worlds. This concept is best described by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall as Two-Eyed Seeing:

to see from your one eye with the best or the strengths in the Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing ... and learn to see from your other eye with the best or the strengths in the mainstream (Western or Eurocentric) knowledges and ways of knowing... but most importantly, learn to see with both these eyes together, for the benefit of all. (Integrative Science, 2017)

By the same token, Hovey, Delormier, McComber, Lésveque & Martin (2017) stated that Two-Eyed Seeing also “involves a dynamic, changing, interactive, and relational process which generates new ideas, understandings and information” (p. 1278). Like me, Two-Eyed Seeing does not belong to any one discipline, instead it provides a different perspective or way of doing things that covers all aspects of my life from social, economic, environmental, physical and spiritual, to name a few (p. 1278). Thus, this work is not only a reflection my recent understanding and application of Two-Eyed Seeing, but also a potential pathway for the future of scholarship in communication studies and theory: a discipline lacking in Indigenous methodologies such as autoethnography (Tillman, 2009, p. 94).

It is 2018, and throughout Canada there currently many movements towards Indigenising and decolonising entrenched colonial institutions, towards continued resistance of economic resource extraction on Traditional Indigenous Lands, towards co-developing and introducing policies and frameworks for the future of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations and finally towards painful conciliation work that will make space for a true mutual, shared understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

It should be no surprise then that I claim that this important work will further require Indigenous-identified communicators, and Indigenous-identified public relations specialists to bridge the oppositions, gaps and divides that have always existed.

Thus, it is my hope that my story, my journey through academic research, leading up to and for this thesis, will help plant the seeds and set the stones for future Indigenous communicators to embark on their own unique, brave scholarship in a field historically rooted in the crafting, representing and marketing of the mainstream Indigenous image.

More practically, and more importantly, this work will also ask in what ways can research and study into various Indigenous Methods, colonial media history, and postmodern studies inform the future of the communications and public relations scholarship and practice. In fact, I assert that these are but some of the necessary lenses needed to create future pathways in communications and public relations, and where these disciplines intersect could best inform the profession to be more responsive to the growing social changes in this country.

### **Background: Finding My Positionality**

In my experience, nearly every time an Indigenous person gets up to speak in front of an audience, they share a part of who they are, their traditional name, where they originate from and their positionality in relation to the discussion. Additionally, whenever I meet another Indigenous person, they inevitably ask me the same sorts of questions. It is important to Indigenous people to position ourselves before we speak, and in this case, it is important for me to position myself.

As a human, I am the proud Great Grandson of Cree Chief, John Baptiste Gambler. I don't have a traditional name given to me by my Elders. I am the only son, and the oldest of

three children. I was raised in low-income housing projects of Edmonton, Alberta by my loving single mother and the Alberta welfare system. I was an odd, imaginative, cognitively-aware child who picked up speaking before walking, and my mother tried at every turn to nurture my gifts and to provide me with every advantage that she could, including a formalized education in the public-school system.

However, because I was raised off the reserve in the city, one should not imply that I was spared the realities of post-traumatic stress disorder that often follows survivors of the residential schooling system. My Mother and some of her brothers were survivors of those places, and the wounds were much deeper than physical. I grew up around addiction, trauma and loss despite my Mother's best efforts to shield us from those things. Furthermore, I grew up without our Cree language — the primary connection to the stories and teachings of our land.

Accordingly, I was raised to preference my non-Indigenous identity over my Indigenous ancestry, and I inevitably faced my first real challenge with Indigenous identity at the start of this academic journey. To become a formal student of the Aboriginal Education Program (AEP) at Mount Royal University (MRU), a wholistic and Indigenous-centric academic upgrading program that would help me gain admission into my chosen program of public relations at MRU — I had to self-identify my Indigenous ancestry

I remember sitting in the senior administrator's office, an Indigenous man himself, and asking him to tell me which box — First Nations, Métis or Inuit I would need to check. He responded with a caring chuckle, along with some pros and cons between claiming Métis and First Nations non-status self-identity, and finally with the advice that my identity was unique to me — he couldn't choose it for me. (T. McMillan, personal communication, February 2012). For many years prior, I had built up blocks around self-identifying on any official form — I never



felt Indigenous enough to claim that identity, even though my Maternal Great Grandfather was the first and only Hereditary Chief of our family's First Nation. Yet, I never passed as white enough to fly under the radar of the colonial institutions I was forced to navigate.

Recent research conducted for this paper uncovered Younging's (2018) work, where I was able to see the importance of initially positioning myself first as an Indigenous person within the institution. This was a crucial act because it connected me to a culture that is diverse; that still exists as an ongoing continuum tracing back to our ancestors; that has not been assimilated into mainstream Canadian society; that my own culture contains national and cultural paradigms fundamentally unaltered by the process of colonization; that my people are currently engaged in the process of cultural reclamation and resurgence led by significant Indigenous youth participation; finally that natural cultural changes to our people do not imply that our culture has been acquiesced to mainstream Canadian society, altered, or undermined (pp. 20-21).

As an academic I am a: mixed-race, Indigenous, queer, cis-gendered male scholar of communications, public relations and Indigenous studies. Further, I'm not an expert in the fields I'm researching. I'm simply a scholar who has gained a deeper understanding of my positionality. Accordingly, I had to learn how to utilize these different lenses during my academic pursuits. However, it took me nearly five years to understand how to wield these tools properly.

More importantly, my complex subject positions demanded that I undertake scholarship in a unique way. I coined the term 'IndigiComms' for this work deliberately, because on one end I both accept and acknowledge my Indigenous position, and on the other end I accept that I chose to study communications. However, to weave and thread it all together through Two-Eyed

Seeing, I would need to be emerged in a constant state of self-reflection, or as this work will later discuss, I had to conduct my studies using reflexivity.

Similarly, Angela Wilson's chapter in *Indigenizing the Academy* stated that as Indigenous academics "our task is to challenge the academy as an agent of colonialism and carve a place for our own traditions as legitimate subjects of scholarly study, but on our own terms" (2012, p. 73). The struggle for me was that I was removed from my culture long before I existed. So, I had the unique task of embarking on scholarship that would not only challenge colonial institutions, but also find a way back to my communities — a process I'm still engaged in.

I firmly believe that because I could not fit into any neat and tidy category for others, including those of race and gender, I was consequently bullied, humiliated and taunted by the established institutions all my life, and by those who would uphold its very values.

In fact, I distinctly remember encountering covert resistance early on in post-secondary. One of my academic advisors kept subtly suggesting I blend my public relations major with a minor in business, English or marketing instead of declaring my intent to pursue an Indigenous studies minor. This was the first time I sensed that my path was not a common one, and that I likely would have to carve out my own path, with minimal institutional support.

### **The issues: Decolonization Study within Colonial Spaces**

While enrolled in AEP, I took a class called Native Studies: Contemporary Aboriginal Issues. That class marked the first time I had set foot in a classroom in over 20 years, and it marked the first time I encountered Canadian history — my history — our history from an Indigenous perspective. It was shocking, angering, and educational, and more importantly it became personal. Thankfully my Indigenous educator at the time, one of the few in the

institution, thoughtfully provided us with ways to channel through the anger and shock using journaling activities, open-discussions and thoughtful presentation of extra Indigenous media sources like videos, podcasts, websites and so much more. That same teacher was the first one to describe my strong physical, mental, emotional and spiritual responses as a journey of decolonization.

Wilson (2012) stated that this process of decolonization also “moves [Indigenous people] beyond mere survival and becomes a means of restoring health and prosperity to our people by returning to traditions and ways of life that have been systematically suppressed” (p. 71).

To no surprise, I leapt fearlessly into all my Indigenous studies classes, including that Treaty 7 Field School. I continued to respond to theories, histories, ethnographies, maps, and oral histories brought into those classrooms. Equally important, I connected deeply with the First Nations centre at MRU, The Iniskim Centre, which brought me Traditional Teachings. I attended Traditional Ceremonies like Smudging, Face-Painting and Pipe Ceremonies, and I took teachings about and on the land in places like Tipis, Sweat Lodges and Pow-Wows.

Undoubtedly, the discipline of Indigenous studies provided me with a safe-haven to explore my decolonization journey and to cement my positions within intersections of history, anthropology, sociology and decolonial theory. A recurring theme in all those classes was the use of consistent journaling to respond to the academic material being covered in the class. I took full liberty of those safe spaces to vent, synthesize and explore the depths of myself and my academic journey. I even asked tough questions of myself, my experiences, my instructors and my institution in those journals and swear words, exclamation points, gleanings, tears and wine stains often fueled these journal entries. I was brutally honest and personal, almost to a fault, in

those works as I struggled to find a solid place to position myself. I did not grasp that the task at hand was not only to study decolonial theory, but also to practice the use of Indigenous Methods.

On the other hand, Indigenous studies was not exactly the perfect discipline either. In my senior-level Indigenous Literatures class I discovered the work of Indigenous academic, Kim TallBear, who stated that the Indigenous studies discipline would not understand how “sometimes [she] would [have to] go home with the enemy, [to] turn him or her into an ally” (p. 75). Further, she claimed it was her interdisciplinary approach that might provide “the space and resources to get work done on behalf of [her] cause without the ever-present pressure of being marginal and powerless actor in a big bad academic world” (p. 76).

I took her words deeply to heart, because after I left those intense Indigenous studies classes I often felt lost with my new-found awareness of the myriad of power dynamics, stereotypes and shaky subject positions. For example, in my communications studies discipline, Indigenous content was little to non-existent. There were no bridges for me to grasp onto or make deeper connections. So, where it was lacking — I was then forced to create it.

Other academics have commented similarly about their own experiences in academia. University of British Columbia scholar Nicole Cardinal discussed in her interview with the *Globe and Mail* that in spaces like Indigenous centres she “saw herself reflected in her peers, staff and instructors, but that connection disappeared as she crossed campus to attend her other classes and left behind the Longhouse's warm cocoon,” and that when she felt she wasn’t reflected she could easily disappear amongst the dominant majority (Hamilton, 2017).

Academics Timmins and Stoicheff (2016) commented that situations like Cardinal’s and mine may have also occurred in institutions, because “faculty members feel they do not have the

background to undertake this; and in some cases, when non-Indigenous faculty do believe they have the background, their Indigenous colleagues disagree” (Timmins & Stoicheff, 2016).

So, without any real Indigenous content in my main discipline, it was up to me to keep inserting my synthesis of various Indigenous issues and realities using speeches, presentations, communications plans and research papers to make my voice heard.

I hadn’t realized that to continue forward I would have to both gain and lose my newfound Indigenous identity. Loss of identity and positionality within the institutions and within research is also not unique to my own case, it can be verified by other scholars and activists such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, quoted in Butler’s (2018) work, who stated that “Indigenous peoples are no longer in charge of what is imagined about them, and this means that they can no longer freely imagine themselves as they once were and as they might become.” (p. 4). With a loss of power over imagining how who I was, and what should an Indigenous academic look, sound or write like, the journey to this thesis was no short of a miracle. To put together the pieces and understand the present and the future of Indigenous public relations scholarship and practice, I would have to look to the past for some help.

### **The Issues: History behind Indigenous Imagining**

What I needed to understand my unique voice in academia, was a solid look at the history of power over the image of the Indigenous person, over me, in mainstream society. I first discovered the work of Francis (1992) in my senior level First Nations history class. Francis explored the various roots of the Indigenous image starting as far back as English dramatist John Dryden’s 1670 play *The Conquest of Granada*— where the innate goodness of man occurs when he is in an equilibrium to a state in nature “free as nature first made man . . . base laws of

servitude began . . . in the woods the noble savage ran” (p. 7). He also stated that it was no surprise then that the first settlers defined themselves in relation to the standard of virtue and manliness they held for Indigenous peoples, and it’s this form of othering where the first Indigenous images began (p. 8).

Francis’s work also explored historical visual roots of the Indigenous image by referencing Benjamin West’s 1771 work the “Death of General Wolfe,” a huge canvas that depicted General James Wolfe dying in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. Wolfe in Christ-like imagery, and held in the arms of his fellow officers, contrasts the noble savage image of an Iroquois Chief in Traditional Regalia looking on in contemplative pose as “a muscular sage — a symbol of the natural virtue of the New World, a virtue for which Wolfe might been seen to have sacrificed his life” (1992, p. 13). Hence, only in relation to the settler was the Indigenous image ever first truly viewed. Consequently, West’s work became the enduring icon of North American Indigeneity and of England’s defeat of the French in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham —one reproduced and sold on mugs, tea trays and wall hangings (p. 13).



Figure 2: *The Death of General Wolfe* B. West – [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Death\\_of\\_General\\_Wolfe\\_B.West,1770.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Death_of_General_Wolfe_B.West,1770.jpg)

What I also found most striking within Francis's (1992) work, were the references to early Canadian advertising for the railway and settlement into the west. His deconstructions of these historical references included the claim that while the "marketing images of Indians were positive: bravery, physical prowess, natural virtue — qualities [Indians] were thought to have in the past before settler contact . . . [such] advertisement[s] did not feature Indians in suits, dresses, or highlight life on the reserve or the other side of the tracks (p. 176).

[This image is restricted by copyright and has been removed. See the figure note below for a source URL.]

*Figure 3: Indian Day Banff Canadian Pacific Railways - <http://retrographik.com/indian-days-banff-canadian-pacific-railway-poster/>*

But most important to me within Francis's work was the claim that during these early contact points of exploration and settlement it was crucial that "whites set themselves a task of inventing a new identity for themselves as Canadian. The image of the 'Other', the Indian, was integral to this process of self-identification" (p. 8). I needed to read this to understand why and how my people and I were presented in the way we were, without our permission, along with who and what controlled those images historically and in the present.

### **The Issues: Mainstream Media Power**

As a scholar of a media-related discipline, of course I was drawn to researching works that exposed the power dynamics behind crafting and presenting the Indigenous image for media consumption. I discovered Harding's (2006) research which compared media headlines between four flashpoints in the late 1800s to the early 1990s. Not only did the findings support this 'other versus them' opposition, like Francis's work, Harding also found too that little is done to insert the Indigenous point-of-view as the stories were often addressed "exclusively to a settler audience" (p. 208). Additionally, Harding's research also found that hegemonic discourse has

remained constant and that even in the 1990s “aboriginal issues were framed much as they were 130 years earlier . . . [to] protect dominant interests and signify Aboriginal people as a threat to such interests” (p. 224).

I read more recent research by Brady and Kelly (2017), which cited anthropology scholar Elizabeth Bird’s claims that the negative stereotype of the ‘Noble Savage,’ was used for the past 200 years in mainstream mediums like television, which still "prioritize[s] non-Indigenous peoples as the target audiences . . . lead[ing] to stereotypical representations that do not relate the experiences of most Indigenous audiences" (p 14). Moreover, their work also found that "Indigenous people [were] drastically underrepresented not just in news media but all media,” which further perpetuated the conflict between Aboriginal peoples in Canada or an ‘us versus them’ opposition (p. 140).

If the Indigenous image is then locked and controlled by hegemonic interests, how can I, how can Indigenous scholars even see themselves in what they encounter every day?

Last summer while thinking about how I was going to start to conduct research into this paper, I came upon a surprise that had been under my nose and in easy reach this whole time. Chair of MRU’s journalism program, Brad Clark, conducted quantitative research to compare the ways that Indigenous and non-Indigenous mainstream television outlets handled and framed Indigenous stories. He cited evidence that supports Francis’s historical findings that "minorities are miscast by mainstream media in five patterns: invisible, stereotypes, problem people, adornments and whitewashed" (2014, p. 43). I had a brief opportunity to discuss his work with him and about my excitement to find an esteemed non-Indigenous academic ally in my own community. I began to think that there was hope.

It was also last year that a dear friend, a collector of books who worked in a local



bookstore, found out about some of my research interests. She gifted me a copy of Anderson and Robertson's (2011) book *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Newspapers*. The authors conducted significant study into Canadian media history and uncovered three base perceptions which colonial media have placed on Indigenous people: the notion that Indigenous people were morally depraved using frames of sexual depravity, alcoholism and savage violence; the notion that Indigenous people were racially inferior; and the notion that Indigenous people were cast into an unprogressive or non-evolving past existing only to exist out of linear time dimensions. (p. 7). Throughout their investigation of news coverage from 1869 to 2005, the notions became prevalent through study of Canadian media history.

Personally, I have experienced these images being shoved down my throat by mainstream media and others, but more significantly I have witnessed, first-hand, these stereotypes come to life in my own family. However, what was lacking at the time was the context to why I was seeing this. I didn't have the knowledge of residential school history, nor was intergenerational survivor a term being used or talked about in my family.

Through the course of my academic study, even more discoveries kept pointing back to my own experiences. For example, I discovered that my own funding and the funding of other Indigenous scholars in post-secondary studies could be tied to the notions of power and the image. Cree scholar Cassandra Wajuntah (2014) shared in her contribution to the book *Reconciliation and the Way Forward* that often the goal of government-funded Indigenous post-secondary programs were to increase the employability of Status Indians and make them more contributing members of the economy, "not the altruistic goal of attempting to right colonial wrongs such as residential school policy or recognizing treaty rights to post-secondary education" (pp. 154-155). Again, what prevailed was the image that Indigenous people were

inferior and somehow unable to carry their weight in mainstream society. I tried my best not to wear these things too heavily, but I must admit the burden was heavy. I had to look for and find strength in the works of other allies and Indigenous academics to lessen the load.

### **Implications for Future Scholarship and Practice: Indigenous Methodologies**

Knee-deep in that previously mentioned senior Indigenous Literatures class, we studied the important work of Vine Deloria Jr. His seminal work, *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969), hinted at various Indigenous Methods. Deloria Jr's work showed that the use of Indigenous irony, satire, laughter and humor could provide deeper glimpses into Indigenous culture than years of research, also that these tactics have been strategically used as decolonial methods to oppose common stereotypes about us and that any movements around Indigenous issues are nearly impossible without humor (pp. 146-147). In fact, throughout my years of study, anytime my Indigenous MRU community gathered in classrooms, Traditional Ceremony, the Iniskim Centre or elsewhere, there was always laughter, jokes and teasing. I wished I had kept a tape recorder on me during those moments to capture the deep bonding and healing that took place because of laughter. Furthermore, to tease or joke with one and other mercilessly meant you were part of the family, and if you were part of family then you were not alone on your journey.

Help also came forth in that same Indigenous Literatures class, so that I could fully grasp that autoethnography and oral traditions were legitimate ways to express scholarship and research. After reading TallBear's chapter, I had the honour of introducing her before she spoke at the university a few months later. We had a brief discussion afterwards where I asked her for advice on putting all my worlds together in scholarship, and for advice on my own decolonization process. What she shared was that I had to learn use the master's tools to

dismantle the house; or in other words, learn the tools of colonization well and take full advantage of every opportunity that colonialism afforded me in the institution, so I could come back and do the real work of decolonizing the institution (K. TallBear, personal communication, March 24, 2017).

TallBear's work and words spurred further exploration in other Indigenous methods, which yielded Wilson & Restoule's (2010) auto ethnographical work that claimed, "Indigenous approaches are based on Indigenous knowledge and ethics that determine the means of access to knowledge, the selection and use of "theoretical" approaches, and determine in addition the tools (methods) for conducting research" (p. 31). In a moving and satirical part of their work, the authors asked a Traditional Elder what his notions were of traditional research. After laughing at them, followed by a back and forth about the notion of tradition and questioning, he replied "I can't offer you what you're asking for, but I can tell you about myself." (p. 42).

So then could all this study in Indigenous Methods help inform me and future for a postmodern, decolonial approach to public relations? I believe so, because it was my research into Indigenous Methods that helped me decide to craft an autoethnography for my capstone thesis. More surprising I uncovered some connections between Indigenous methods and post-modern theory in communications.

### **Implications for Future Scholarship and Practice: Post-Modern Public Relations**

In my second-year of communication theory studies I read Mickey's (1997) work "Post Modern View of Public Relations: Sign and Reality." Mickey helped dissect how powerful the role of media and public relations is, especially towards manipulation of signs, images and symbols in culture (p. 271). Mickey also used Baudrillard's critical theory in postmodernism to

illuminate that “we live in a hyperreality of simulations . . . images, spectacles and the play of signs replace the logic of production and class conflict and key constituents of contemporary capitalist societies” (p. 273). This theory of simulacra could also be applied to prominent mainstream media images of Indigenous people as filtered, fragmented, and re-elaborated images using a whole series of industrial procedures into a completed finished iconic product (p. 273). Furthermore, advertising done with such images represented conformity in decoding —where the audience is left to decode the image through conforming to the code or standards by which the image is encoded (p. 276). To synthesize this concept, I kept imagining Francis’s work in uncovering historical Indigenous images, and how the hegemonic coding of those images during a time of intense western settlement of Canada helped cement a simulacrum where I was left unable to find myself in those images — because it was not real.

Similarly, Logan’s (2016) use of critical race theory to deconstruct a public relations campaign exposed the truth that “in many ways, public relations emerged as a form of early neoliberal economic discourse intended to serve the needs of the elite” (p. 95). Critical race theory also showed up in Clark’s (2014) comparative analysis of the Indigenous and mainstream news coverage where he asserted that “mainstream media, news organizations are actually, helping to preserve cultural hegemony” (p. 45).

Conveniently, Clark also pointed me back to another communication theorist from my theory class. Clark used Goffman’s media framing theory, to prove his hypothesis that mainstream media portrayed distinct Indigenous stereotypes, with less frames of context in comparison to Indigenous media outlets. A process achieved by selecting “some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment

recommendation" (2014, p. 45). Clark further pointed in the direction of my favourite theorist, Foucault, who stated that "domination of the media discourse by powerful corporate elites . . . [is a] product of society's discursive regimes" (p. 45).

But it would take research for this paper to uncover the work that would make it all fit together. Kovach (2010) referred to the Indigenous Method of reflexivity, "a researcher's own self-reflection in meaning-making process" (p. 32). Kovach also claimed that "decolonizing methodologies demand a critical reflexive lens that acknowledges the politics of representation within Indigenous research" (p. 33). Kovach's work helped me tremendously, because for the first time in five years, I felt legitimized for conducting scholarship the way I had been all this time. Not only could I approach the work of this thesis not only with theory, but with the most important tool I had in my arsenal — my voice.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Scholarship, research and practice in this way do not come without ethical responsibilities or considerations. In fact, the first time I read Alfred's work "Warrior Scholarship," which called for scholars to not only honour and defend Traditional Indigenous Knowledge, but to defy juridical unity and fight for political independence and subvert the pretensions of coopted Indigenous scholars, imperial and civil servants (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004, p. 96). On reading this, I nearly threw my copy of his chapter across the room because it poked at me in the ways no other work has done since. My greatest fear has always been that my own communities would see me as an apple — red on the outside white on the inside. However, on a recent reread I finally was able to move past my emotion to Alfred's calls for ethical 'Warrior Scholarship.' I do consider myself some sort of 'Warrior Scholar' — I have the battle

scars to prove it from going up against lateral violence and covert racism that permeated every space outside the Iniskim Centre and my Indigenous studies classes. I do not believe that I can be coopted because these institutions have never known or figured out where to put me. While I'm not a radical activist marching the halls, I have found a way to stay true to my spirit and my ancestors in more strategic and quieter ways.

As stated earlier in this work, I am not a self-proclaimed expert or theorist of IndigiComms. My use of a term that does not exist is simply my way of putting myself and my story in the centre of all the things I've looked at over five years. The small 'i' is a deliberate visual cue or sign or symbol to represent placing myself in the middle of Indigenous studies and public relations and communications study. It is my small and quiet form of 'Warrior Scholarship.'

### **Recommendations for Indigenous Public Relations Scholarship and Practice**

Reflexivity had been a part of my own path this whole time. I just did not want to admit it. I thought of it as strictly journaling or some form of egomaniacal scholarship. However, Holtzhausen (2002) claimed that reflexivity could help prevent the formation of metanarratives or dominant discourses in public relations, while also cautioning practitioners to critique their own actions using postmodern theory: a call that has not been lost on me (pp. 256, 259). The future of a profession rooted in words, stories, signs and meaning simply demands some sort of ethical reflexive approach.

Holtzhausen also advocated for more diversity and reflexivity in public relations theory and practice, and that the lack thereof threatens both these things with "future redundancy" (p. 256). I also point back to the work of Atkin (2013) who called for more qualitative dimensions

for public relations message design, along with the use of interpersonal networks to distribute campaign resources and a greater diversity of pathways, products, incentives, channels beyond conventional public communication campaigns (pp. 9,15). Further, I believe the institutions need to find and hire more ‘Warrior Scholars’ to help remind young fledglings in public relations of the need to fight for a more inclusive industry. Moreover, that any perceived barriers to Indigenous learners need to be dismantled immediately through stronger affirmative action initiatives. ‘Warrior Scholars’ cannot be birthed in the numbers needed as long as the barriers to entry remain.

Logan (2016) further suggested that "incorporating critical race theory also allows public relations to become a mechanism to balance the pursuit of profit with a commitment to greater social good" (p. 98). Logan’s findings also stressed the need for the four pillars of critical race theory for theoretical framework to analyze public relations campaign by 1) placing race at the centre of analysis, 2) acknowledging dominant groups, 3) valuing voices and lived experiences of racial minorities, 4) maintaining a commitment to human liberation and racial equality (p. 98).

By the same token, Mickey’s work in postmodern thought suggested that we need to also look at language and culture, and that the questioning and critique of language was necessary to understand ourselves and our culture, because “language is key creator of other social worlds” (p. 274). Because I value the worth of word and language, I was happy to find very recent work by Youngings (2018) which gave some very clear principles that scholars, editors, authors, publishers and journalists can benefit from, especially around Indigenous Method of working from the basis of some sort of relationship as excellence in decolonial scholarship (p. x).

In fact, I used some of the Youngings guidelines for this work, especially about capitalizing Indigenous Ceremony to preface that Indigenous Traditional Knowledge has an

equal place, and in my opinion even above ethnocentric western knowledge (pp. 77-81). I further suggest that every communications, journalism or media program in this country needs to make this a mandatory text to help Indigenous peoples take back control over our own narratives and stories in mainstream media because “stories are important for carrying Indigenous cultures and ensuring their survival,” and that story work can an important role to play in Indigenous relational practices (Brady & Kelly, 2017, p. 138).

More meaningful to me, deeper recommendations towards de-colonial and post-modern futures of communication and media studies came from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action (CTA). Specific to this discipline, CTA #86 called upon Canadian journalism and media schools to require education for all students on the history of Indigenous peoples, the legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the numbered Treaties, Aboriginal law and Indigenous-Crown relations” (2015). The profession and the institutions must do more work in addressing these calls, specifically the ones that pertain to media and reconciliation because it applies to both scholarship and practice in these areas.

Finally, the roots of this call to action can be traced to UNDRIP’s work around Article 16, which should root any future for ‘IndigiComms’ scholarship and practice:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-Indigenous media without discrimination.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect Indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect Indigenous



cultural diversity. (2007)

### **Conclusion**

I grappled with these things for many years, and I am hoping that I can finally lay them to rest for a while. It was not easy trying to make sense of all the things I've been exposed to. While I do not think my efforts here have been in vain and I am not sure that classic scholars in communication would find this work of value, but I do not really care about that at this moment. Accordingly, I do think that I have managed to almost pose more questions than I have answered.

What I do know now is that after I prayed for Creator's help during that Sundance almost three summers ago, I was sent on a high-speed, no-holds-barred trajectory. I have been gifted the most extraordinary academic experience one could get. I learned, I made connections and most importantly I practiced Two-Eyed Seeing by using my own voice and experience.

Further research will be needed in these growing areas where Indigenous Methods and Traditional Indigenous Knowledge meets a discipline concerned with engagement, ethics and corporate social responsibility. As this country grapples with mutual understanding, co-development and Indigenization of once hostile institutions, Indigenous public relations professionals will need to be on the front lines.

Consequently, and to conclude my research study, I crafted a visual that could represent a potential Two-Eyed Seeing model for this discipline, to view areas where my work has found some intersections in hopes it could help inform future research into these uncharted waters (appendix A). It did not feel right to just jam it in the middle of the discussion, because it is a concept in constant action without boundaries. I placed it at the end, so it can have its own voice

too.

I finish this work where I started because Indigenous concepts of time are not linear, they are cyclic. I only hope that instead of writing a masterpiece, I showed how I made sense of informing the future of interdisciplinary Indigenous public relations and communications scholarship. I did this so that future scholars like me would feel empowered to create their own pathways through the maze as I did. More importantly, I did this because Creator granted me the experience. I hope I have made my ancestors proud.

Meegwetch, Hiy-Hiy.

## References

- Anderson, M. C., & Robertson, C. L. (2011). *Seeing Red: A history of Natives in Canadian newspapers*. Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press.
- Atkin C. K., & Rice, R. E. (2013). Theory and principles of public communication campaigns. In *Public Communication Campaigns* (5th ed. pp. 3-16). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brady, M. J., & Kelly, J. M. H. (2017). *We Interrupt this program: Indigenous media tactics in Canadian culture*. Vancouver, Canada: UBC Press.

- Butler, M. L. (2018). "Guardians of the Indian image": Controlling representations of Indigenous cultures in television. *The American Indian Quarterly* 42(1), 1-42. University of Nebraska Press. Retrieved May 17, 2018, from Project MUSE database.
- Clark, B. (2014). Framing Canada's Aboriginal peoples: A comparative analysis of Indigenous and mainstream television news. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 34(2), 41-64.
- Deloria, V., Jr. (1969). Indian humor, In *Custer died for your sins: An Indian manifesto*. (5th Canadian Ed. pp. 146-167). Toronto, Canada: Collier-Macmillan
- Francis, D. (1992). *The Imaginary Indian: The image of the Indian in Canadian culture*. Vancouver, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Hamilton, W. (2017, October 18). Indigenous ideals at university. *Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/canadian-university-report/indigenous-ideals-at-university/article36637429/>
- Harding, R. (2006). Historical representations of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian news media. *Discourse and Society* 17(2), 205-235. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0957926506058059>
- Holtzhausen, D. (2002). Towards a postmodern research agenda for public relations. *Public Relations Review* 28(2002), 251-264. [https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(02\)00131-5](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(02)00131-5)
- Hovey, R., Delormier, T., McComber, A., Lévesque, L., & Martin, D. (2017). Enhancing Indigenous health promotion research through two-eyed seeing: A hermeneutic relational Process. *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(9), 1278–1287. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049732317697948>
- Integrative Science. (2017). Two-Eyed Seeing – Elder Albert Marshall's guiding principle for inter-cultural collaboration. Retrieved June 25, 2017 from

[http://www.integrativescience.ca/uploads/files/Two-Eyed%20Seeing-A-Marshall-Thinkers%20Lodge2017\(1\).pdf](http://www.integrativescience.ca/uploads/files/Two-Eyed%20Seeing-A-Marshall-Thinkers%20Lodge2017(1).pdf)

King, T. (2012). *The Inconvenient Indian: A curious account of Native people in North America*. Toronto, Canada: Doubleday Canada.

Kovach, M. (2012). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Logan, N. (2016). The Starbucks race together initiative: Analyzing a public relations campaign with critical race theory. *Public Relations Inquiry* 5(1), 93-113. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2046147X15626969>.

Mickey, T. J. (1997). A postmodern view of public relations: Sign and reality. *Public Relations Review*, 23(3), 271-284.

Mihesuah, D. A., & Wilson, A. C. (Eds.). (2004) *Indigenizing the academy: Transforming scholarship and empowering communities*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press

Moreton-Robinson, A., & TallBear, K. (2016). Dear Indigenous studies it's not me it's you: Why I left and what needs to change. In J. P. Shepard et al. (Eds.), *Critical Indigenous studies: Engagements in first world locations*. (1st ed., pp. 69-82). Tuscon, University of Arizona Press.

Tillman, L. (2009). Speaking into silences: Autoethnography, communication, and Applied Research. *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 37(1), 94-97. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00909880802592649>

Timmons, V., & Stoicheff, P. (2016, December). *Post-secondary education in Canada: A response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. [Policy brief].  
Retrieved online from <https://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/documents/research>

/policy-briefs/PolicyBrief-Post%20Secondary%20Education%20in%20Canada.pdf

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Calls to action*. Retrieved from

[http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

United Nations. (2007). *United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples*

[UNDRIP]. Retrieved from [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

Wajuntah, C. J. O. (2014). "It's like two sides of an eagle's feathers. Both are needed to

fly". In S. Rogers et al (Eds.), *Reconciliation & the way forward: Collected essays and personal reflections*. (pp. 149-160). Ottawa, Canada: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Wilson, D. D., & Restoule, J. (2010). Tobacco ties: The relationship of the sacred to

research. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 33(1), 29-45,156. Retrieved from <http://libproxy.mtroyal.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.mtroyal.ca/docview/864885295?accountid=1343>

Younging, G. (2018). *Elements of Indigenous style: A guide for writing by and about Indigenous peoples*. Edmonton, Canada: Brush Education

**Appendix A-** Potential Model for Two-Eyed Seeing in IndigiComms Scholarship and Practice

