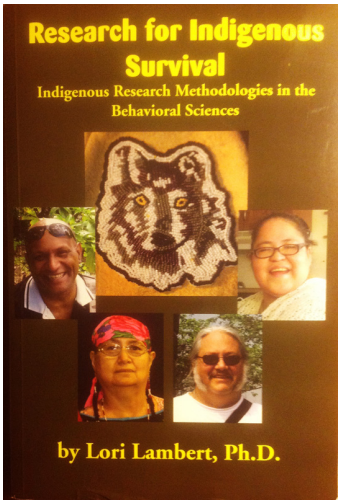
Book Review:
Research for Indigenous Survival:
Indigenous Research Methodologies in the Behavioral Sciences

Lori Lambert, Ph.D., © 2014 Salish Kootenai College Press, Pablo Montana, USA, ISBN 978-1-934594-12-4

Book Review by Wilson Manyfingers



I come to reading this book with my eyes wide open, interested in the research strategies of peoples whose experiences with colonization command them to investigate paths to survival. I have ancestors among the Cree, Anishinabe, and the Dené so my interest in this book has been especially urged along since some of the entries come from these regions. But I am surprised to discover that the main contributions of Aboriginals in Queensland, Australia, and Cree country are really about the terrible experiences with colonizers and relocations and changes in diet as a result. Reading these stories of trauma, stress, and discontent I arrive at a place where I think the stories must be told, but I want to know, *how research leads to survival?*

Eduardo Duran, the noted clinical psychologist who is well experienced working among American Indian populations offers the book's preface. He gives credit to the importance of "the deep imprint of internalized oppression and identification with the oppressor" (xii) that in some instances indigenous contributors to this book reflect in their words. They are clearly hurt by the sustained adverse effects of colonization. Duran and the author/editor of this book argue persuasively in favor of decolonizing research (meaning changing the researchers), and the author Lori Lambert does offer a prescription so I am moved to read on.

Like Duran, I think that indigenous researchers must take a step back and become the ones who ask research questions and then turn to the epistemology of their culture or society to undertake investigations for the benefit of their people. Both Duran and Lambert are offering a gentle nudge to student researchers at the Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation (USA) to certainly learn Western approaches to research. But, as Duran writes, they want native researchers to "turn to traditional indigenous epistemologies" rooted in metaphors that have served as "the driving force behind Indigenous research for millennia" (xii). One friendly nudge urges indigenous researchers to turn to creation stories since "they remind us of who we are and of our belonging" (30). Using stories of human beings and animals and animals and spirits serve as "our primary means of relating to each other" (30). According to Lambert, oral histories and stories are data. She goes on to explain, "Stories as data are important and one key to collecting these data is hearing the stories" (30). She also sug-

gests engaging the people in the society as ones who are participants in the research. Along with this prescription, locating the researcher in place is also offered. And I can pretty much accept these initial prescriptions.

Here is where I begin to get lost: how does the researcher retrieve the epistemology on which one bases the conduct of an investigation? And, much of the book deals with the consequences of "outside researchers" not really understanding the community or the society as a whole as they go about collecting data and then offering their analysis and conclusions without consulting the people. This is merely picking up where Linda Smith (Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. London Zed Books, 1999) left off. There is no doubt that there are consequences, but the book seems to have two parallel commentaries that do not resolve each other.

I searched the book for an epistemological framework that was either specific to Salish and Kootenai, Cree, aboriginals in Queensland, or a generalized indigenous science that might lead to an investigative strategy for survival. I couldn't find one. The book then leaves me with a mission to find an epistemological framework that may well be embedded in origin stories or other stories and oral histories as is frequently suggested "in the people"—the community. This seems to be a shortcoming of the book that should be repaired or perhaps will be repaired by Salish Kootenai student researchers. Dr. Lambert offers ten themes at the back of the book that may lead the reader to investigate potential solutions to the dilemma I think this book poses: how to understand and characterize a particular indigenous epistemology (the theory of a people's knowledge) and how to understand and explain a particular ontology (understanding a people's being and categories of relations).

Dr. Lambert's seventh theme calls for a researcher to "do the work with an understanding of the community's epistemology and ontology" (213).

Other themes include those that demand of the community more than the researcher, such as theme #3: "The researcher must contribute to community empowerment and self-determination" (209). I would agree with this thematic suggestion, but wouldn't the researcher be motivated to conduct an investigation if the community, the leaders of the community, or a family in the community initiates the research question? Research, it seems to me, empowers and promotes self-decision-making if and only if the people have the question that needs answering. If they don't have a question then where does the impetuous for investigations begin? Usually a community or leaders have a problem they want to solve (e.g., building a road without damaging a water way and plant and animal life, or building a structure from available materials that will benefit the society.) Isn't the essential point of investigation to answer questions and explain phenomena? If the community is the originator of the epistemology and ontology as well as "the question" then it would seem Dr. Lambert's theme #9 takes care of itself: "The researcher must disseminate the data in ways that the community can understand" (215).

The premise of the book is to encourage indigenous research and that is one of its strengths. But, I think its weakness is that it presumes the researcher is "outside the community" when in fact the researcher must be from within the community—of the community. It makes no difference if the researcher is an indigenous person. If the researcher's epistemological framework is not the same as the community then the research will be a distortion of that community. One of the

contributors to the book, from Alaska, asserts there is no word for "research" in his language. That is well taken. But, it is very likely that each indigenous society has a tradition of solving problems, explaining reality, contributing new ways to benefit individuals, families, and whole communities in terms of their social, economic, and cultural well being. Asking others to respect what is not defined (epistemology, ontology—traditional knowledge) is absurd. How can they respect something they do not understand?

This is a useful book as a starter of a discussion. I would urge reading it from that perspective. But, the reader should be prepared to become a serious investigator into the topic of "Research for Survival". It would seem to me that Dr. Lambert has begun a discussion that needs more elaboration by student researchers to discover the language of their traditional knowledge and then figure out how to organize that knowledge so it is useful in the 21st century. Clearly, both Dr. Duran and Dr. Lambert want to know. Salish Kootenai researchers and researchers in every indigenous community will need to define what is meant by this book. Get and read this book and then do more work on the topic. Lambert's book is useful for emerging researchers, but she will need to investigate the epistemologies that can ground researchers seeking to conduct research for indigenous peoples' survival.

About the author
Wilson Manyfingers is a freelance writer interested in problems of knowledge and relations between peoples.

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