
The Impact of Conducting Research with a First Nation

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ABSTRACT

The Cree of northern Québec have had eight psychological studies conducted in their territory. They ejected all the researchers except one. From the point of view of the Cree, the problem appears to be one of behaviour of researchers and respect for an autonomous group. This issue was investigated by conducting an experiment with a group of James Bay Cree from northern Québec. They were then polled as to their reaction to participating in the research. Insensitively conducted research can put major social stresses on both individuals and the community. Several crucial sources of reactivity were found: rigid protocols, requests for self-disclosure, perceived dishonesty, differential treatment of participants, and lack of redeeming social value of the research. These sources of reactivity suggest guidelines for researchers such as respecting local authority, adapting instruments to the culture, and providing feedback to the participants and the community.

RÉSUMÉ

Huit études psychologiques ont été menées sur le territoire des Cris du nord du Québec. Tous les chercheurs, sauf un, ont été renvoyés par les Cris. Le problème, selon les Cris, provenait du comportement des chercheurs et de leur manque de respect envers un groupe autonome. Cette question a été étudiée grâce à une expérience réalisée avec un groupe de Cris de la Baie James au nord du Québec. Un sondage a ensuite été réalisé afin de connaître la réaction des Cris concernant leur participation. Des recherches menées sans souci de délicatesse peuvent être la cause de stress important tant chez les individus que dans la communauté. Plusieurs sources majeures de réactivité ont été identifiées : des protocoles rigides, des demandes de révélation de soi, des perceptions de malhonnêteté et un traitement inégal envers différents participants, ainsi que l'absence de valeur sociale des recherches. Ces sources de réactivité sont à l'origine des recommandations suggérées pour les chercheurs : respect de l'autorité locale, l'adaptation des outils de recherche à la culture étudiée et l'établissement de la rétroaction destinée aux participants et à la communauté.

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AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE IMPACT OF RESEARCH

The James Bay Cree of Quebec¹ have had a very negative experience in their dealings with behavioural scientists. The Cree have experienced eight psychological studies, but they have ejected all the researchers except one, and put a moratorium on future research in their territory. This reactivity was due in general to the researchers' refusal to accept Cree authority and to the little perceived benefit of this research for the community; for complete details, see Darou, Hum, and Kurtness (1993). Note that although reactivity is often due to the interpretation of the results of research (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997, Darou, 1992), it was not the case in this situation. The Cree were well aware that the research was published and noted that there was an average of four published articles per study. But the interpretation of the results and the publication per se was not an issue. Instead, the reactivity came from direct, face-to-face contact with the researchers.

The Cree are a power to be reckoned with. They have a 400-year history of independence from non-Native control (Cooke, 1981). They have demonstrated this independence today by their heroic battles for territorial control and against the gigantic James Bay hydro project. The reactivity of behavioural research is not unique to the Cree or to First Nations, but it gives us a vivid example of a situation that has occurred in many different cultural groups around the world.

It must be noted that the studies that were so offensive to the Cree were without exception technically well conducted with appropriate instruments and large sample sizes. According to the analysis of Ponterotto and Casas (1991), the valid criticisms of cross-cultural counselling are: lack of conceptual / theoretical frameworks to guide research, disregard for within-group differences, the use of college student populations, reliance on culturally encapsulated psychometric instruments, failure to adequately describe one's sample in terms of socio-economic status, over-reliance on paper-and-pencil measures, overemphasis on process variables while disregarding important psychosocial variables, and lack of adequate sample sizes. The research with the Cree addressed all these concerns; nonetheless the research was so reactive that it caused the Cree to eject some researchers and to halt further research in a geographical area larger than the United Kingdom.

Several hypotheses have been advanced as to why research seems to be so offensive to the Cree and other groups. One reason is the perceived disrespect of researchers for local authorities (Darou et al., 1993). Another is that there exist certain general problems of cross-cultural communication (J. Cram, personal communication, February, 1982). A third is that the basic tenets of research are in conflict with Native values (Trimble & Medicine, 1993). A fourth hypothesis would be that the Native subjects find the experience disagreeable because it is in conflict with their independence and world view (G. Frackleton, personal communication, March 1980).

The purpose of the present article is to examine empirically what it is that has so angered the Cree about psychological research. The problem was studied by actually conducting a typical quasi-experiment with Cree participants, then poll-

ing the participants as to their reactions to taking part in the experiment. Note that the present article examines neither the actual results of the quasi-experiment nor the activity of interpreting and publishing the results. Instead, the focus is restricted to the participants' reactions to their experience of being part of a quasi-experiment.

Conducting counselling or psychological research across cultures is not a self-evident process. According to Pedersen (1997), there is an unwillingness among researchers to admit to the practice of imposing majority culture beliefs on minority clients. Counsellors have demonstrated a surprisingly low level of cultural self-awareness and are thus vulnerable to several implicit cultural biases. Some that may apply to the Cree situation include respecting collectivist versus individualist cultural contexts, facing both the negative and positive consequences of encouraging freedom of choice, use of a restricted range of research measures, and ascribing an unnecessary importance to privacy.

According to Lafromboise, Trimble, and Mohatt (1990), it is difficult to integrate counselling and psychology into a First Nations context. There have been a number of problems caused by a few ignorant or malicious non-Natives. Even well-meaning counsellors or researchers may arrive with patronizing attitudes or missionary zeal, both of which undermine estimations of the counsellor's empathy, trustworthiness, and respect for the client. As a result few counsellors are able to work effectively with the First Nations client, and the community may perceive all non-Natives as potentially racist and interfering until they prove themselves otherwise. For example, Darou (1992) reported a shocking finding that in Northern Ontario, First Nations children were being tested with the standard intelligence tests, something that is invalid and inappropriate in the culture. Some authors have suggested that the administration and interpretation of intelligence tests should be banned entirely from First Nations use (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997).

Surprisingly, there is relatively little empirical research on the reactions of participants to cross-cultural research (and no studies were found with Native participants). Yang and Bond (1980) found that if Chinese students were given a test in English, they tended to affirm their "Chinese-ness" more than if they were given the test in Chinese. Collett (1971) used both Arab and English subjects as experimenters on English subjects. He found that the Arab experimenters were more favourably inclined towards the English subjects who displayed Arab-like behaviour.

An approach similar to the present one, only regarding testing, was proposed by Nevo (Nevo, 1985; Nevo & Sfez, 1985). Nevo argued that by measuring the face validity of tests, testers could develop the means to reduce dissatisfaction, reduce feelings of injustice, and improve public relations. The most direct source of such subjective information is clearly the subjects. He found that there was a reasonable degree of validity and reliability to his measures of face validity. In a sense, the present article looks at the face validity of an entire experiment instead of one test, and with an ethical purpose of reducing reactivity in the community.

It is clear that conscientiously preparing for conducting research should reduce reactivity. Trimble and Lee (1981) suggested the following four steps when conducting research:

1. Obtain formal consent and co-operation.
2. Organize an local advisory committee.
3. Prepare culturally sensitive instruments and interviews (this particular suggestion will merit further discussion below).
4. Provide feedback after the project completion and implement community programs.

Casas (1985) gives a recommendation similar to the last one: "Human subjects committees should require that all research that focuses on racial / ethnic minorities be reviewed by a representative group of the respective racial / ethnic minority. . . . Furthermore, the group should also address the utility . . . of the proposed project" (p. 593). Similarly, Chrisjohn and Young (1997) recommend that the participants and people giving local approval insist that they understand the technical and philosophical aspects of the research (alternatively, they should simply conduct the research themselves). Such guidelines were not generally followed by the researchers who were ejected by the Cree.

In a study that looked at volunteers coming into a community, Jones and Popper (1972) found that countries that were more like urban America were more likely to have Peace Corps volunteers who had finished their terms. They also found that country characteristics were better predictors of success than any measured qualities of the volunteers.

In a related study, Kealey (1990) found that the most successful technical advisors to developing countries showed the following characteristics. They had professional commitment, a desire to help, the necessary technical background, caring, the ability to build relationships, initiative, frankness, self-control, flexibility, team skills, low need for upward mobility, high tolerance for ambiguity, social skill and adroitness, some knowledge of the local language, and positive pre-departure expectations.

Indigenous psychology is an approach that should be of value to First Nations. It is defined as "the scientific study of human behaviour that is native, that is not transported from other regions, and that is designed for its people" (Kim & Berry, 1993). Indigenous psychology has six fundamental assumptions as follows: (1) It is rooted in an ecological context, (2) it affirms a need for each culture to develop its own indigenous understanding, (3) it accepts that a particular society can have multiple views of itself, (4) it does not affirm or preclude a particular model, (5) it does not assume a priori that one perspective is inherently superior to another, and (6) it does not assume the existence of psychological universals. Kim and Berry do not believe that insiders must conduct all such research because they may well be blind to their own cultural influences.

Certain Cree officials believed that most of the psychological research conducted in their territory was of more benefit to the researchers than to the Cree (Darou et al., 1993). LaFromboise, Foster, and James (1996) have argued that research should take a relational stance and seek resolution to ethical dilemmas in the context of dialogue with the community. They also believe that research must be based not only on a *theory of rights* but also a *theory of good*. That is, researchers must take into account the rights of subjects but also good relations with the subjects, local researchers, and the community. They point out even more radically that some research on First Nations has been misinformed or even harmful. Perhaps non-Native researchers are so bound by their own cultural biases (Ponterotto & Casas, 1991) that research on First Nations should only be conducted by First Nations researchers. This radical suggestion would also be verified by polling the subjects.

The present work examined what it was about psychological research that produced such a strong reaction among the Cree. Specifically, it examines how typical psychological research can conflict with Native values when using such research tools as testing, rigid protocols, the use of non-Native researchers, and obtuse research objectives. The overriding objective is to give researchers tools that will allow them to be more respectful in First Nations communities. It must be pointed out that the conclusions about reactivity apply to a group of James Bay Cree men, and only by abstraction to any other First Nations group (Lafromboise, Trimble & Mohatt, 1990; Trimble & Medicine, 1993).

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 13 Cree men between the ages of 18 and 25 ($M = 19.2$ years), with an average education of 7.5 years. Participants were all students in a four-month Cree School Board course on guiding and outfitting. They had spent an average of 6.3 months in their winter hunting camps during the previous year, and had been selected for the course by their home community.

The researchers had virtually no control over the choice of subjects. The Crees were generous enough to offer a group, and the researchers would have been ill advised to ask for a different group. As was seen by the previous researchers, it is unwise for an outsider to thwart Cree authority (Darou et al., 1993). The results would certainly have been different if the group included women, older participants, or less traditional Crees.

Location

The project was conducted at a Cree-run tourist camp on Lake Mistassini in northern Quebec, Canada. It was 45 km by water from the nearest village, the Cree community of Mistassini, and 450 km north of Montreal. Despite its remoteness, the camp is quite luxurious. It caters mainly to tourists who pay about \$500 per day for accommodation and fishing with expert Cree guides.

Instrument

A questionnaire was used to determine the reaction of the participants to being in a psychological quasi-experiment. The questionnaire asked about specific irritants, the effect of the quasi-experiment on Native values identified by Trimble (1981), the importance of Cree versus non-Native researchers, and the participants' ability in Native and non-Native languages. It also asked the participants' reactions to testing in general and their reactions to the specific instruments used in the quasi-experiment. These instruments were the Rosenberg (1979) Self-esteem Scale, the Bogardus (1925) Social Distance Scale, the Levenson (1973) Locus-of-control Scale, Anomia Scale (Srole, 1956), the Work Involvement Questionnaire (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965), the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1978), the Jones-Mohr Listening Test (Jones & Mohr, 1979), and the Empathy and Self-experiencing Scales of Carkhuff (1969) and Gendlin (1967). The latter two scales were administered by rating excerpts of taped mutual-helping dyads produced by the participants. Two of the scales, the Locus-of-control Scale and the Work Involvement Scale were slightly adapted to the Cree situation, for example by substituting "driving a car" with "driving a boat."

Procedure

The researchers conducted a psychological quasi-experiment about the effect of positive and negative feedback on communications skills. The quasi-experiment had several potentially reactive aspects. It had a relatively rigid protocol; it required the participants to do a culturally inappropriate behaviour (self-disclosure); it had non-Native researchers; its redeeming social value was not self-evident; it used masses of psychological tests; and it had a pre/post format. There was also differential treatment with a preferred and a non-preferred condition. The preferred condition involved positive-only feedback of communications exercises, and the non-preferred condition involved mixed positive and negative feedback.

After the experiment was completed, including interpretation with the participants and a preliminary explanation of the main results, the participants were asked about their reaction to the quasi-experiment by means of a structured interview and the questionnaire mentioned above. The participants were thus polled to determine their level of reactivity and to find out what specifically irritated them.

A data-sharing session was held on site with Cree officials after the study was completed, and copies of all documents were given to those officials for approval as the documents became available.

Analysis

All appropriate averages and standard deviations were taken. Unprotected *t*-tests compared differences between the two experimental groups of the quasi-experiment. A traditionalism score was calculated by subtracting the participants'

scores in their ability to speak English or French from their scores in their ability to speak Cree. As a validity check, this score was correlated to the length of time the subjects had spent in their bush camp the previous year. The level of traditionalism was thus, by definition, their relative ability to speak Cree and the length of time spent in the bush camp. The traditionalism score was then correlated to the scores representing Native values and the average reactivity to the tests.

RESULTS

It must be noted that the protocol of the quasi-experiment was virtually impossible to apply. The participants regularly but politely refused to follow instructions, always taking a more informal, common sense approach than that demanded by the protocol. They also borrowed the recording equipment to play music, used the Jones-Mohr Listening Test for evening's entertainment, and administered the spare copies of the Self-Directed Search (SDS) to their friends.

In general, the participants rated the quasi-experiment positively. In response to the question, "What did you think of the project?," seven participants responded with statements such as, "I liked it," three responded negatively or neutrally with statements such as "I answered only a few because I didn't really understand," and three participants did not answer at all.

In response to the question, "Do you think tests are any good?," all 13 participants responded positively. The participants rated the tests overall as generally appropriate (i.e., a mean of 1.3 on a 4-point scale). All participants rated the following tests as fully appropriate: the Levenson Locus-of-Control Scale, the Work Involvement Scale, and the Jones-Mohr Listening Test. All participants except one rated the SDS as fully appropriate despite the fact that it took four hours to complete on both administrations. The most negatively rated instruments were the Empathy and Self-Experiencing Scales (i.e., the mutual-helping dyads). The participants rated these at 1.8 (i.e., somewhat appropriate).

The participants also rated the experiment fairly positively on the Native values ($M = 1.8$ on a scale of 4, i.e. just above "somewhat positive," $SD = 1.0$). Participants rated the experiment highest on "independence" ($M = 1.3$, $SD = 0.8$) and "reciprocity" ($M = 1.5$, $SD = 1.0$). They rated it lowest on "honesty" ($M = 2.1$, $SD = 1.2$) and "social responsibility" ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 1.1$). In addition, there were group differences. The group that received the positive-only feedback rated the experiment significantly lower on the values of "honesty" and "social responsibility" than did the other treatment group, $t(12) = 2.91$, $p < .05$; and $t(12) = 2.32$, $p < .02$ respectively.

Ten of thirteen participants felt that research would be better conducted by a Cree. Three participants said studies should not be conducted at all.

As for acculturation, the traditionalism score (i.e. the language rating) correlated significantly with the number of months spent in the bush camp, $r(11) = .77$, $p < .001$. In a statistically non-significant trend, the more traditional participants were more accepting of tests.

DISCUSSION

The surprising result of this project was that most participants saw the experiment as a pleasant activity. And despite authoritative statements to the contrary, administering and interpreting psychological tests was not a direct problem. The participants apparently saw the SDS as a worthwhile activity in its own right, and they saw the Jones-Mohr Listening Test as downright entertaining. They enjoyed reading firsthand accounts of early non-Native visitors to their area, such as Pierre Radisson and Henry Hudson, that the researchers had collected as part of the background work. They were also interested to learn that one of the Cree staff had worked as a research assistant for an archaeologist studying Cree settlements going back 2,000 years.

On the other hand, they would have clearly preferred a Cree researcher. According to the course instructor (a Cree), this was not because the students had difficulties with non-Natives. The students were probably quite open to non-Natives who were respectful and shared their beliefs, interests, and values (Casas, 1985). They would prefer a Cree researcher because they would expect a Cree to conduct more relevant research, and to return financial resources to the Cree community. The Cree like having some non-Cree in their communities for the experience of learning to deal with the majority culture. For example, officials said they wanted no more than 80% Cree teachers in their schools, so that children could practice dealing with Non-Natives (Robert Jimiken, personal communication, August 1982). Three participants said that research should not be conducted at all. All three were from one of the villages that rejected psychological research, and the participants offered no additional information even when prompted. The point remains a mystery, a situation that is not unusual for outside researchers among the Crees; there were conceivably valid reasons that they did not wish to communicate to a non-Native outsider.

The subjective reports about research methodology often mention how important it is to be flexible (e.g., Ivey, 1977; Korner, 1959; Trimble, 1981). In the present study, the need for flexibility was demonstrated by the participants' decisions not to follow the protocol. It was also shown by the fact that two of the most accepted instruments were the ones that the researchers had adapted to the situation of Cree guides (the Locus-of-control Scale and the Work Involvement Scale).

Another area of potential reactivity was the mutual-helping dyads. The participants rated these activities lower than any other instrument, although they still rated them within the acceptable range. Even though they were conducted with great discretion, the dyads probably were perceived as a threat to composure and thus ran counter to Cree values (Trimble, 1981).

Of the seven values measured, the participants rated the experiment lowest in social responsibility. They felt, justifiably, that researchers generally stand to gain more from an experiment than do the participants. The Cree are well aware that researchers get professional status by publishing. The Cree officials knew that the psychological studies in their area had produced an average of four publications each.

The participants in the two treatment groups rated the experiment differently in terms of values. Participants in the preferred treatment group rated the experiment more negatively in terms of honesty and social responsibility. These participants probably felt that it was dishonest and socially irresponsible to treat the two groups differently. The fact that this opinion was expressed by the preferred treatment group is probably similar to the situation where a Native child who wins one race will intentionally lose the next race so someone else can win.

There was also a non-significant trend where more traditional participants rated the tests as more acceptable. This trend is in the expected direction. Remote Native people tend to be psychologically stronger and more open to new experiences because they experience less acculturative stress than do Natives with greater non-Native contact (Berry, 1976).

The participants used one test for entertainment. Such incidents are rare but not unknown. Floyd Ludman (personal communication, August, 1987) reported an incident with an Attawapiskat Cree elder. He used a researcher's flash cards in a word game based on punning the card's image. His audience found this very amusing.

CONCLUSION

Several sources of reactivity were found. These include rigid protocol, differential treatment, non-Native researchers, threats to composure, lack of inherent social value for the participants and over-publishing. In addition to these evident sources of reactivity, researchers need to show sensitivity about the simple workload on participants that are unfamiliar with testing and are working in their second language. In general, tests themselves were not found to be reactive, but their acceptance can be greatly improved by tailoring them to the participants.

The participants found several positive aspects to psychological research. They appreciated a personal approach (Honigmann, 1979), versus the distant, uninvolved approach of experimental psychologists. They also appreciated research that was of value to the Crees and not just to the researcher. The Self-Directed Search and its interpretation, for example, was an activity with inherent relevance to the participants. Pleasant, entertaining activities, such as the Jones-Mohr Listening Test, also reduced the reactivity of research. Finally, the data-sharing session was important and beneficial. It demonstrated to community members that the researchers felt some responsibility towards them.

On the basis of the experience of the James Bay Cree, accepting that it may not be applicable to research with First Nations in the rest of the country, we offer the following:

1. It is in one's best interest to be patient and accepting. You are being observed and you are perhaps being tested. The community must decide if you should be accepted, if you a threat to them or even if they consider you a racist.
2. Flexibility is an important value. You can never completely understand the cultural context, so you must be prepared to deal successfully with the inevitable adaptations of your plans.

3. You have an excellent opportunity to enrich your professional experience. In addition, enjoying yourself will probably increase your chances of being accepted.
4. You will invariably make cultural gaffs. Try to recuperate from them gracefully. The Cree often assign an informal cultural guide to newcomers. If you notice someone knowledgeable taking you under their arm, accept the help and listen intently for the subtle advice.
5. The Cree seem to be irritated by White people who pretend to be Native people. In addition they may want to profit from your non-Native ethnicity for some learning experience in the community.
6. It can be useful to learn about the specific culture, the history, and the language. Even minimal use of the language will suggest that you have some sensitivity. You can actually add something to the community by investigating the history, because communities rarely have access to the information available from university libraries, particularly old universities such as McGill University.
7. Training in cross-cultural communication and research is very important, although it may be difficult to obtain in some programs.
8. It is entirely inappropriate to conduct research unless you have been invited in and you have a clear and relevant purpose.
9. Trimble and Lee's (1981) procedure of obtaining consent, organizing an advisory committee, preparing culturally sensitive instruments, and providing feedback, is strongly recommended.
10. It must be understood that outside researchers put a great deal of strain on the community in terms of time, space, finances and other sometimes scarce resources. It is important that your research put something valuable back into the community, financial resources included.
11. Consider using non-experimental paradigms.
12. Many problems can be avoided by sharing the results with the participants, making use of a questionnaire such as the one used here, debriefing all parties, and clearing publication with local authorities.
13. And last, and of great importance, it is ill advised to mess with Native politics. You are out of your league and you have the potential of doing enormous harm. Do not burn your bridges.

In conclusion, the situation of the Cree against the researchers demonstrates the importance of being extremely cautious regarding the impact of research among First Nations groups. Other cultures have certainly experienced similar reactions. In all these cases, additional pressures have been put on communities that may already be experiencing high levels of acculturative stress.

The work described here demonstrated that researchers can lessen negative impact of their work by simply polling and debriefing participants and other interested parties after the research. The procedure is straight forward, uncomplicated, and does not compromise the research results. The questionnaire used in the present article is not meant to be unique: future researchers should feel free to

develop their own questionnaire for their own situations. The authors recommend that debriefing of the participants and the local authorities be adopted as standard procedure in all experimental research with First Nations. It is our mission as counsellors to help communities in need, not to inadvertently make the situation worse.

Note

¹ Cree officials have asked that the words "subject" and "study" not be used. "Subject" is seen as dehumanizing, and "study" has become an emotion-laden word in the Cree region. As a result, these words have been replaced.

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