

Improving Indigenous Women's Wellness Through Action Research

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Abstract

This paper describes an action research project undertaken with Indigenous women in the highly urbanised area of north Brisbane. The project was a collaborative effort to move beyond the alarming statistics of Indigenous women's poor health status. It aimed to build a community-based, empowering forum for celebrating and encouraging wellness in a way that was culturally appropriate for Indigenous women. Using a Feminist Participatory Action Research perspective, the authors incorporated the traditional Indigenous method of yarning to work with local Indigenous women Elders and organised two highly successful Women's Wellness Summits. This paper provides evidence that Feminist Participatory Action Research is an appropriate way of working with urban Indigenous women. It allows Indigenous worldviews to be considered, and fosters a cyclical and conversational approach to research practice. This paper also demonstrates that the emerging method of yarning is highly successful in Indigenous research.

Keywords: Women, Indigenous, wellness, health, action research, urban, Australia

Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women – Australia’s Indigenous women or First Nations women – are the most socially and economically disadvantaged population group in Australia. They also have the poorest health status (AIHW, 2011).

The life expectancy of Indigenous women is 9.7 years lower than for other Australians (AIHW, 2011, p. ix). They have increased levels of cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, respiratory disease and kidney disease. For example, Indigenous women are 11 times more likely than other Australians to get coronary heart disease, and 13 times more likely to get rheumatic fever (p. 49).

There is a widespread myth in Australia that most Indigenous women live in regional or remote areas and that this may account for their health disadvantage. However, 75% of all Indigenous Australians live in urban or peri-urban areas (ABS, 2011). They have geographical proximity to health services, so remoteness and poor access cannot explain their health status.

Although the statistics about Indigenous women’s health are alarming, statistics fail to demonstrate how Indigenous women understand their wellness and health status, or how they aim for a higher level of overall wellness. The statistics do not show how Indigenous women manage, function, survive and sometimes thrive, despite their poor health.

In this research with Indigenous Australian women, we aim to move beyond the health statistics to focus on wellness. We seek to work with Indigenous women towards developing an effective wellness program. To do this, we use an action research approach to explore what Indigenous women recognise their wellness to be and what they want to have within a wellness program. In this paper, we argue that Feminist Participatory Action Research is an

appropriate and effective method for engaging with Indigenous women around health and wellness.

Throughout this paper, we use the term Indigenous Australian women in reference to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, except when we refer to Aboriginal women or Torres Strait Islander women specifically or when we use a quote that specifically refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. We acknowledge that both Melissa Walker and Bronwyn Fredericks are Aboriginal women and Debra Anderson is a non-Indigenous Australian woman.

Starting the process

We began the research by reflecting on the evidence about the most appropriate ways of working with Indigenous Australian women. At the start of our research, it was 20 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report (RCIADIC, 1991) was published. The RCIADIC report includes two recommendations (numbers 320 and 330) that specifically identify action research as the preferred approach for conducting research with Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 330 states:

Research into patterns, causes and consequences of Aboriginal [problems] should not be conducted for its own sake. Such research is only justified if it is accepted by Aboriginal people as necessary and as being implemented appropriately. Action research of the type that produces solutions to problems is likely to be seen by Aboriginal people as being most appropriate. (RCIADIC, 1991, Recommendation No. 330)

Recommendation 320 states:

Where research is commissioned or funded, a condition of the research being undertaken should be the active involvement of Aboriginal people in the area which is the subject of the research, the communication of research findings across a wide cross-section of the Aboriginal community in an easily understandable form, and the formulation of proposals for further action by the Aboriginal community and local Aboriginal organisations. (RCIADIC, 1991, Recommendation No. 320)

Our research with Indigenous Australian women was grounded in a commitment to fulfilling the intention of the RCIADIC recommendations quoted above. We recognise that action research offers a way for Indigenous women to be involved in research, and to direct and drive it.

As we developed our research plans, we drew on Rigney's (2001) perspective to recognise that, if research is to make a difference, it needs to be grounded within the political reality of the lives of the people who participate. We also acknowledged Stringer's (1996) statement, that 'those who have previously been designated as "subjects" should participate directly in research processes and that those processes should be applied in ways that benefit all participants directly' (p. 7).

We built the project on the understanding that the research would begin by working with a group, community or organisation to define the problems, situations and issues relevant to the participants. The work would then involve the group, community or organisation in working towards change, finding solutions or developing answers (Glesne, 1990; Stringer, 1996).

This research began in 2011, when the three authors of this paper started to work with Andrea Sanders from Diabetes Australia Queensland to think about ways to focus on the wellness of

Indigenous Australian women in place of the usual focus on sickness and poor health. We began to think about ways that action research could be used to encourage Indigenous women to focus on wellness. From the outset, we agreed to undertake this research in Brisbane, Queensland, a city with over one million people and an Indigenous population of 50,000 (ABS, 2011).

Drawing on previous work

Our commitment to action research was supported by the increasing acceptance in the literature of research that involves Indigenous women as both researchers and participants (for example, Acklin et al., 1995; Daylight & Johnstone, 1986; Fredericks, 2003, 2008; Harrison, 1991; Huggins & Huggins, 1996; Kirk et al., 2000). This work provides legitimation to Indigenous women's voices in texts and to reports authored by them as Indigenous women. The research techniques being used by Indigenous women include yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010), story-telling (Reinhardz, 1992) and autobiography (Huggins & Huggins, 1996). These works stand in contrast to Brady's (1998) concern that 'outside [of] autobiography the stories of Indigenous Australia only receive legitimation when written in texts edited or authored by non-Indigenous academics' (p. 1).

Of particular relevance to this research was the work of Kirk and her colleagues (Kirk et al., 2000) who examined cancer amongst Indigenous women. Kirk's project involved semi-structured interviews, case history interviews and group discussions, all conducted under the framework of Feminist Participatory Action Research. The research explored participants' personal experiences, their understandings of breast cancer and their views of care and health services. Through a culturally-safe approach, Kirk's research team and the participants were able to undertake a form of transformation through the research. The project can be linked to developments in policy and programs for Indigenous women.

A feminist approach to action research

We adopted a feminist approach to action research throughout this project – in the broadest possible sense. We agreed that the combination of feminist theories and action research would allow us to raise questions about gender, the nature of the research, and the relationships between the participants and researchers (Glesne, 1999, p. 9). We found links between community-based action research and feminist participatory research in other work, and found frequent discussions of the oppression and exploitation experienced by women (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Fredericks, 2008; Glesne, 1999; Lather, 1991; Rienharz, 1992). These works also address the ways that the varied experiences of women – including the multiple identities of race, class, culture, ethnicity, sexual preference, age, disability and geographic location – can be considered within the research process.

According to Sarantakos (1998), feminist research has the following characteristics:

... it puts gender in the centre of inquiry; making women visible and representing women's perspectives ... it places emphasis on women's experiences, which are considered a significant indicator of reality and offer more validity than does method ... it discloses distortions related to such experiences. It sees gender as the nucleus of women's lives, shaping of consciousness, skills, institutions and distribution of power and privilege. It is preoccupied with social construction of 'knowing and being known'. It is politically value laden and critical, and as such it is not methodic, but clearly dialectical. This implies that it is an imaginative and creative process which engages oppressive social structures. It is not solely about women but primarily for women, taking up an emancipationist stance, it entails an anti-positivist orientation. It is supposed to use multiple methodologies and paradigms. (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 63)

These characteristics of feminist research were a comfortable fit with the framework for the research that we were developing. We adopted a Feminist Participatory Action Research perspective (Lather, 1991; Mies, 1983; Nielsen, 1990; Rienharz, 1992), which we adapted to fit within the context of urban Indigenous Australian women. This perspective allowed us to explore issues of gender, race and Western domination (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Rigney, 2001; Smith, 1999) within the community partnerships that developed through the research.

Beginning the dialogue

Our commitment to a Feminist Participatory Action Research perspective meant that we sought to work with Indigenous Australian women through processes that were familiar and comfortable for the women involved. We drew on the practice of yarning – a conversational practice that involves the telling and sharing of stories.

Yarning takes place naturally amongst Indigenous women and men, and is becoming increasingly accepted as a research technique (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Dulwich Centre, 2010; Franks & Curr, 1996; Fredericks et.al., 2011; Towney, 2005). Yarning follows language protocols and results in the acquisition of new meaning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). In this way, yarning is an ideal way of gathering information and creating conversations that are culturally ascribed and cooperative. Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) were the first scholars to discuss yarning in depth. They characterise yarning as 'an Indigenous cultural form of conversation' (p. 37) and identify different forms of yarning, each with a different intention. Whilst the terms 'yarn' and 'yarning' are used by Indigenous people daily, a yarn is always more than simply pleasantries in casual conversation or a light correspondence between people (Fredericks et al., 2011). Dean (2010) describes yarning as a formal research methodology that has the ability to centre Indigenous knowledge systems and

permit partnerships with Indigenous communities. Yarning stands in stark contrast to much of the previous research conducted in Indigenous communities, which has been conducted through Westernised paradigms and ignored the value of culturally appropriate methods.

In the yarns conducted as part of our research, the women who participated followed cultural protocol and recognised both existing relationships and expected outcomes (Fredericks et al., 2011). Through the yarning, the women participating in our research related with each other and determined the accountability between them (Martin, 2008). Through the strength of their existing relationships and the process of yarning, the women become both strong contributors to the research design, and crucial donors of information (providing information and advice both to each other and to the project as a whole) (Dean, 2010). The yarning process enabled the women to become active participants who were directing the research. The research became centred around their values and the community needs and concerns that they identified.

The 'participatory' aspect of our research (Wadsworth, 1997) helped to empower the women who participated. As women became involved in our research, they also developed their capacity for community development, empowerment, and action to support social justice. We found that the yarning process was an important vehicle in supporting this empowerment.

Pushing for a women's gathering

As our research developed, the Indigenous women participants developed a vision for a large Indigenous women's gathering. They were led by local women Elders who we had been referred to us through the consultation, negotiation and agreement phases with Indigenous organisations in North Brisbane. Once we made our final representation to several Indigenous organisations about

this research, including the Moreton Regional Elders Group, we were then asked to work specifically with a small group of Indigenous Elder women. From this point, Indigenous men were only involved if we needed support from the broader Indigenous community organisations (of which they were members and board members) or specifically as Indigenous men living in North Brisbane. The women Elders advised us when this was appropriate, who would do this and in what time frame.

In the yarning process, women Elders talked about the ways that local Indigenous women in the past had done business together, held gatherings, been physically and socially connected and reaffirmed spiritual connections through ceremony on Country. Indigenous women have gathered together in this way for thousands of years, including in areas like Brisbane that are now heavily urbanised and big cities. However, the Indigenous women acknowledged that it is now difficult for Indigenous women to gather, particularly in a city like Brisbane, because they live in different suburbs, work and/or have large family responsibilities.

Through these series of yarns held in a small hall in North Brisbane from March 2011 through to December 2011, the women talked about how their sense of self was, and still is, connected to a collective and connected to all aspects of life, kin, community, Country, culture and spirituality. They recognised that Indigenous women's ways of being, doing and understanding are held by the Elders and passed down through the generations of Indigenous women. Some participants described the way that they missed being with other Indigenous women and longed to be with other Indigenous women, in the sense of longing for one's kin, community and Country. The participants also talked about issues associated with gaining government support for gatherings, and mobility problems such as public transport. The women defined their own problems, situations and issues relevant to the participants. They began to bring forth answers, solutions, and a way forward (Glesne, 1990; Stringer 1996).

Participants' conversations about an Indigenous women's gathering developed into the Indigenous Women's Wellness Summit – a one-day event designed to celebrate wellness. They wanted to put into action their ideas about ways to enable self empowerment of women through the construction and application of their knowledge (Reason et al., 2006; Rigney, 2001; Smith, 1999).

The action research involved Bronwyn Fredericks and Melissa Walker meeting with the North Brisbane Murri Network, a group of some 20 plus organisations and also making representation to other Indigenous organisations in the region.

We then began working with the Bunyabilla Indigenous Corporation Inc to apply for funding and develop the Wellness Summit. Bunyabilla received funding through the Queensland Health Smoke Free Program, Diabetes Australia Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and CQUniversity Australia. The funding allowed the Wellness Summit to be independent of our ongoing, university-based research project about Indigenous women's wellness. Although the Summit grew out of the research project, it was owned by the local community and developed in partnership.

The first Wellness Summit was organised by a small group of Indigenous women, including Melissa Walker, Bronwyn Fredericks and Kyly Mills. Other Indigenous women¹, also helped in the final stages of the planning. A further 15 Indigenous women volunteered to make the Summit a success on the day. We could not have managed without their assistance and freshness to the whole idea of what was trying to be achieved. Indigenous women were engaged across the generations in making the Summit

¹ Natahlia Buitendyk, Synthia Hunt, Patrice Harald and Alyse Mills all worked as volunteers. We name these women with permission for their significant contributions in the planning process and support of the Summit.

happen and while we dislike the word 'subjects' for a range of reasons, in regards to action research the 'subjects' were not only participating in the research processes but controlling and directing them to make it benefit all participants. From this perspective, Stringer's (1996) work is extremely useful.

Melissa Walker was the driving force for the group that was entrusted to organise the event on behalf of the local Indigenous women. They agreed that the Wellness Summit should challenge the dominant Western focus on the extent of disease and illness amongst Indigenous women, and focus instead on ways that Indigenous women can work towards wellness as an everyday reality. The event was designed to celebrate wellness by empowering Indigenous women and providing health information in an inviting and safe environment.

The first North Brisbane Indigenous Women's Wellness Summit was held on 9 March 2012 to coincide with International Women's Day. The event was promoted as Women's Business: it was a women-only event, with no men allowed. Creating a women-only space was in-keeping with Indigenous cultural protocols and allowed for a sense of trust and the creation of a safe and relaxed place for Indigenous women to share with each other. Through the program, we encouraged women to consider how they wanted to strive for wellness. The Summit helped to embrace Indigenous women's wellness by demonstrating values that are conducive to their wellbeing - such as sharing, giving, reciprocity, respect and active engagement with other Indigenous women, community, kin, Elders and significant others.

The Summit included stalls and displays by organisations and government departments, which were asked to send only women workers. Stallholders were reminded that they would be within an Indigenous women's event that would be dominated by Indigenous women's ways and activities. While no non-Indigenous volunteers helped at the first Summit, many of the

workers on stalls were non-Indigenous women. They shared in the day with Indigenous women as representatives of their organisations and government departments, and few participated in the activities. Although they were invited to participate in activities like lucky door prizes, some opted not to do so. We were saddened by this opting out of the opportunity to engage with Indigenous women as individuals rather than as workers.

All of the women who attended the event, including the stallholders shared lunch together. The sharing of food brought a way to communicate that extended beyond the service-provider and participant relationship. The lunch was special: it was cut and prepared in the large hall, and cooked in a large oven on wheels that was positioned in the hall. One of the Elders said that, in this way, all of the love, goodwill and sense of Indigenous women's essence was within the room and hence within the food. The food was bound in love, goodwill and sense of spirit. The cooked food was shared on tables within the hall, with young women serving the Elders first. We all ate lunch and cleaned up together. It was a particularly lovely part of the day.

The North Brisbane Indigenous Women's Wellness Summit was the first of its kind for women in North Brisbane. The event helped to reposition Indigenous women as activists who work with other Indigenous women. It offered an opportunity to assert power as Indigenous women within an Indigenous women's arena. The Indigenous women who participated in this process envisioned the North Brisbane Indigenous Women's Wellness Summit and then made a commitment to make it happen. They supported each other in a collective framework and reached their vision.

A second gathering

The Feminist Participatory Action Research perspective implies cycles of participation, with each stage of data gathering

informing later cycles. We used the information gathered through all the dialogue – including the women’s evaluation of the Wellness Summit, their qualitative feedback and our analysis of the event to interpret and discuss future action. Women’s understandings of knowing and doing were intertwined through the process (Stringer, 2007).

The Elders who participated in the research spent a lot of time talking about the success of the first North Brisbane Indigenous Women’s Wellness Summit in the days after the Summit. Melissa and Bronwyn and a number of other Indigenous women were involved in this process. It was a debrief, but it was also the start of the process of critique, analysis and working out what we needed to improve and change in our planning process and the delivery of the Summit. We began to discuss and celebrate what worked really well and needed to be kept for next time. We talked about the tensions with respect to differences of opinion. We shared our reflections in being Indigenous women together and the wonderful fulfilment this brings to us and brought to us at the Summit. We discussed with honesty the difficulties with the site, stallholders and funding and asked ourselves with bluntness, did we in fact include a range of Indigenous women with diverse backgrounds?² This process was bound within, whether we honoured all Indigenous women who were involved and Indigenous women’s ways? We agreed that all of this information along with the Summit registration details, evaluation sheets, photos and other materials needed to be brought to a meeting to begin the process of adjusting a model.

Feminist Participatory Action Research offered us the capacity to ask these questions and more and to alter the model for future Summits (Lather, 1991; Mies, 1983; Rienharz, 1992). After this the group began to re-vision and look for further funding options,

² For example were all Indigenous women from one Nation/ Tribal affiliation or all Christian or all heterosexual or all married with children or all young or older or Elders?.

and Bunyabilla Indigenous Corporation Inc was successful in seeking additional funding. The Elders then worked closely with Melissa Walker to direct the planning for a second Summit. Younger women played a specific role in serving the Elders, making sure their needs were met, and learning from the Elders as the planning progressed. The group had an ongoing commitment to open and transparent communication, collaboration, and a sharing of the strengths offered by each woman. The collaborative process and Melissa's leadership were crucial to the successful planning and facilitation of the second Summit.

The project team spent considerable time working out what how to build on the first Summit (April-May). The process of reflecting on participants' feedback and listening to the women opened up the space for more meaningful relationships between the researchers and the participants, and in some cases deeper relationships between Indigenous women community members. The process was based on reciprocity, and it built trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, respect for each other, and relevance for the process. It also developed the capacity of researchers and participants for inter-cultural and cross-cultural work.

We reflected on what we had discussed in terms of the venue, food, stalls and transport. We also focused on ways to ensure that the venue was once again culturally welcoming and dominated by Indigenous women. Our goal was to create another Indigenous women's gathering, where women could share in a large space, where small intimate conversations could occur, where children could play and be safe, and where health assessments could also take place with some privacy. We knew from the first Summit that Indigenous women liked to be in a large hall where they could be together yet away from the dominant culture's interpretation, subjectivity or judgment.

As we reflected on our roles as facilitators and researchers within the action research process (Bryant, 1996; Chavez et al., 2008), we decided to move away from the 'main speaker' focus of the first Summit towards an approach that focused on the sharing of Indigenous women's stories and some presentations focused around social and emotional wellbeing, healing and self-esteem. We felt that this approach would encourage collaborative action learning. We also devoted more time to art and craft activities, to allow the women more time for networking and informal conversations while they were listening to presentations and having their health assessments. We included a session on smoking in both the first and second Summits as funding was provided by the Queensland Health Smoke Free Program along with Diabetes Australia Queensland, Bunyabilla Indigenous Corporation Inc, Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and CQUniversity Australia.

A dynamic group of more than 150 Indigenous Australian women came together to celebrate 'wellness' at the second North Brisbane Indigenous Women's Wellness Summit held on Friday 22 June 2012. Held once again at the Strathpine Community Centre, the second Summit aimed to celebrate wellness by empowering Indigenous women and providing health information in an inviting and safe women's-only environment. To achieve this, all the Summit literature specified that it was a Women's Business event. This meant that all the stall holders (including government and non-government organisations), health practitioners, community health workers, speakers, caterers and cleaners were to be women.

A combination of health information stalls, Indigenous guest speakers, cooking tucka (food) demonstrations, onsite health checks and Indigenous arts and crafts made for an exciting and inspiring day. A diverse group of government and non-government organisations held stalls supplying health information (some of these stalls were the same as those at the

first Summit). The event provided an overwhelming atmosphere of community energy and women's strength. Most importantly, the second Summit continued our efforts to shift from the 'disease-based' paradigm to a focus on 'wellness'. We believe that this 'wellness' dynamic will provide a platform for the continuing path to good health for these women.

This Summit embraced Indigenous women's wellness by demonstrating values conducive to Indigenous individual and collective wellbeing – including sharing, giving, reciprocity, respect and active engagement with other Indigenous women. Aunty Faye Gundy performed the Welcome to Country, and guest speakers Aunty Honor Cleary and Aunty Selena Seymour captivated the audience through their inspirational words and desire to create strong, proud and well Indigenous women for the future.³ Bronwyn Fredericks participated in personal and professional ways – as a researcher, a leader, an activist and an Aunty. Melissa Walker, who was the main organiser of the Summit, was showcased as a Registered Nurse, a mother, a PhD student whose work is based on the Summits, and a junior Elder. Bronwyn and Melissa acknowledge the learning they received through working with the Elders and the respect afforded to them through younger Indigenous women. Feminist Participatory Action Research allowed for the diversity of women to be involved but also for Indigenous women's cultural processes to be embedded. This was demonstrated through the generational respect, acknowledgement and the flow and structure of the day in both Summits.

The second Summit saw an increase in volunteer support, with many individuals helping to clean, work in the children's corner

³ We name these Elders with their permission for their significant contributions to our knowledge as speakers

and perform health checks and helping with the final planning and on the day.⁴

The process of planning and organising the second event helped to build relationships amongst the volunteers on personal, cultural and community levels. For example, it was wonderful to watch Indigenous and non-Indigenous nursing students working together and sharing the broader Indigenous women's community. The Indigenous young women were keen to be involved on both a professional and community level.

The second Summit once again involved a group of Elders who provided advice with the organisational aspects of the day. These included Aunty Honor Cleary, Aunty Faye Gundy and Aunty Selena Seymour. Through their interaction, we were able to fulfil the needs and values of the community. The wisdom offered by Elder Indigenous women was clear throughout the process. The tradition of respecting Elders and listening to them was upheld throughout the research cycles. The Elders played an important role with all the women, regardless of whether they were participants, volunteers or stall holders.

As part of the Feminist Participation Action Research process, we invited participants to evaluate the Summit in two ways – through evaluation questionnaires and by directly asking for verbal feedback. Participants indicated that they had looked forward to the Summit, enjoyed themselves and left feeling re-invigorated and strong after the day. They felt supported during the event, reported a sense of wellness when they left, and looked forward to the next Summit. Many of the women spoke of how the event was organised by other Indigenous women for them as Indigenous

⁴ This included Crystal Williams, who will soon be registered as a medical doctor and a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous nursing students. Kyla Mills, Natahlia Buitendyk, Patrice Harald, and Synthia Hunt again assisted in the planning and on the day. Their assistance and support was crucial.

women. They felt a sense of ownership and joy in this aspect and believed in the research that was being held alongside the Summits.

The Summit produced an overarching eagerness from attendees to make this a regular occurrence, with suggestions even pointing towards the need for 'portability' so that other communities can reap its benefits. Ultimately, it is through ongoing research and ground-level community activism that we can empower Indigenous women through wellness. This will ensure that Indigenous women continue to be strong, proud and well, both now and for future generations. We now see the Summits as a sustainable women's activity that will help to create an ongoing focus on wellness that underpins and maintains Indigenous wellbeing.

Conclusion

This project provides evidence that Feminist Participatory Action Research is an appropriate way of working alongside Indigenous Australian women on the topic of wellness. Existing research in public health tends to capture the poor statistics of Indigenous women's health. In contrast, this project acknowledges the notion of Indigenous women's 'wellness', and works to create an environment where wellness is fostered and women are empowered. For Indigenous women, 'wellness' extends beyond the disease continuum to include all aspects of lived wellbeing. It is both an individual and collective concept. The two North Brisbane Indigenous Women's Wellness Summits organised through this project allowed for Indigenous women's wellbeing and wellness to be explored and developed.

The Summits offered an opportunity for formal and informal collaborations between experienced and inexperienced researchers, nurses and student nurses, and senior Elders and new/junior Elders. The Summits provided a women's-only

environment with Indigenous women's interests at the heart of the event. Indigenous women could share and experience with other Indigenous women within a culturally safe environment (Coffin, 2007; Fredericks & Thompson, 2010; Ramsden, 2002).

This work provides further evidence that Feminist Participatory Action Research is relevant to Indigenous communities. We believe that it is a 'natural fit' for Indigenous research and Indigenous researchers. It allows Indigenous worldviews to be considered, and fosters a cyclical and conversational approach to research practice. Through cycles of research and action, events such as the Summits can lead to successful interventions and transformation (Lather, 1991; Smith, 1999).

This work also provides further evidence that yarning is an appropriate method for working with Indigenous women in an urban context. Because yarning is a common form of communication that is undertaken daily by Indigenous women, it is a powerful form of information sharing and knowledge building. To achieve accurate, in-depth and respectful research with Indigenous communities, it is essential to incorporate a familiar and culturally appropriate style of information sharing, such as yarning.

The combination of Feminist Participatory Action Research processes, yarning methods, and leadership from the Elders made this an exciting project and offered a synergy seldom seen in academic research.

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