

# Review of: "In the Spirit of Dr. Betty Bastien: Conceptualizing Ontological Responsibilities through the lens of Blackfoot Resilience"

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Oki. Neesto Joseph Gladstone. Neesto Kainaiquan, Piikaniquan ki Nimiipuu.

While this is a very interesting paper, it needs a lot of work. But it's a good start. There are major flaws in method definition and data reporting. The paper can be improved by correcting method vernacular and removing the attempt to propose theory. It can stand on its own as a true autoethnography advocating for academic justice by asserting Indigenous wisdom.

## INTRODUCTIONS

In the spirit of Lindstrom and Weasel Head, I'm not starting this review in the typical format for writing paper reviews. Rather, I'm initiating a conversation with the authors, which is a Native way of "academic" conduct (Doucette, Gladstone, & Carter, 2021). For readers not familiar with this style, we begin with framing the author's (speaker's) place and context. This informs readers about the author's credibility for telling the story. The West demonstrates this through post-nominals, especially health sciences via their "alphabet soup."

Native people rely on more than a litany of alphabetic credentials such as Ph.D., M.S., M.A. and the assorted certifications following an author's name. Natives want to know where authors come from. Native people demonstrate their credibility through story. Place and history reveal how authors use their alphabetic credentials to enhance their wisdom, as well as how they use their history and place to inform their formal education.

Lindstrom and Weasel Head carve out a space in broader academia for this Native way of thinking. I will strive to remain in this space in this review, which I begin with my story.

I'm a business professor at Washington State University. My work explores the relationship among IWOK and Western ways of knowing as it applies to business and economic development education, specifically for tribal communities and its students.

While a Native myself, I'm an urban Native. My parents independently moved from their home reservations and met in the city. So I have the experience of being raised and educated in the city but with strong life long ties to my parents' homes,

including time living on both reservations. I was also blessed to live in a city surrounded by local tribes and a very active urban Indian population.

Place is more than physical. Intellect is a form of place. Our understanding of our world, physical and metaphysical, is grounded in our academic place. We learn about our world from our personal experiences –what we ourselves see, hear, feel, etc.– and vicariously through our teachers, be they our family, nuclear and extended, and our professors. Professors across many disciplines early in our academic lives, and very like-minded professors in our advanced studies.

I studied management science in a business college and my top-tier academy discusses management. Thus, unlike Lindstrom who is academically raised in the education field and whose thinking defaults to this science, I being academically trained in a business management PhD program means that my default thinking is about management, specifically organization management, particularly Native and Indigenous organizations.

So, my concept of place with strong Native and academic identity and lifestyle informs my review of Lindstrom and Weasel Head's paper and how I interpret it.

As a management scholar with a pragmatic bias (Gladstone, 2024, 2020; Peirce, 1878), I'll read and interpret this paper from that place. Starting with the paper's title.

Note that while I strive to remain conversational in this review, Western-influenced academic formality will slide in, such as referencing the authors in the third person. Even though it's intended as constructive, I know my writing style can sound callous and harsh, which is not my intent. But because I have not yet personally met the authors and others are "looking in" from the outside, I'm not fully comfortable making critiques in casual language.

## REVIEW

Unless specifically mentioned otherwise, this being an online document, I can only reference to paragraphs rather than page numbers. So I'll annotate specific locations as  $\mathbb{P}$ . For example, paragraph one of the manuscript is referenced as  $\mathbb{P}1$ .

Also, much of this review will be written as I read along. So there will be obvious stream-of-consciousness. I may later find answers to my questions below. But sharing my thoughts as I read along places the authors into my way of thinking as I process the story (argument) in their paper.

So. First. The title. What is an ontological responsibility? How does Blackfoot resilience conceptualize this? Since this is the title of the paper, that's what I'm going to look for in it. I'm evaluating this way because of my place as an academic. I hope the authors find this standpoint useful.

On  $\mathbb{P}2$ , Mr. Weasel Head says that he aims to use his research skills to "help expose Indigenous realities while also making Indigenous experiences easily accessible to Western society."

How is this important to both Indigenous and Western people? Why? I'm curious. There are at least two ways how this is important: decolonizing Western thought prescribing how to seek and understand truth, or Indigenizing formal intellectual thought. The authors are clear for the latter.

¶4 states that identity is about “conducting self.” As a management scholar, my default thinking is *behavior*. Is this what the authors mean? One's identity influences one's behavior. In the case of Native people, the collective is integral to one's identity. The authors clearly and accurately note this. In the context of management, behavior is primarily about worker behavior, notably worker performance –motivation.

What about educational behavior? Behavior related to learning? Motivation to learn? What are the ties connecting Indigenous thinking to learner motivation? The start of this exploration occurs on ¶12, so I'll address that when I get to there in this review.

¶6 mentions “teaching and learning..” Teaching and learning what? Lifeskills? The Three-R's? Agriculture? Epistemology? Native American thought is very pragmatic (Gladstone, 2024, 2020; Lokensgard, 2003 ;Pratt, 2002). Learning is tied to usefulness. Later in this paragraph I see that learning is tied to resilience. That's interesting. How is learning tied to resilience? My first thought is Angela Duckworth's concept of Grit (2016), which is long-term perseverance in achieving goals despite setbacks I'm going to look for that as I read along.

¶7, Indigenous epistemology. In light of the concept of resilience, I find knowledge as a source of continuous transformation enlightening. Indigenous people are not just resilient, they are adaptive. One, in this case a group, can only exist in a place by adapting to it. How does one survive the open plains with it's harsh winters and summers? How does one survive along the northwest coast with its long, dark, wet winters? How does one survive the southwest desert with its long dry summers? I only mention weather. There are flora and fauna specific to these regions. Indigenous people adapt their lives to survive. And they adapt when new things are introduced. Horses. Wool. Steel. Fords. iPhones. Etc.

¶8. I encourage you to refer to my work on transplanar wisdom (Gladstone, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2020, 2024). Transplanar wisdom (TPW) summarizes the variety of informal descriptions of Native American spirituality. There are connected three planes, animacy, temporality, and place. None is greater than the other. I call this transplanar wisdom because Native American philosophy generally describes wisdom emanating from these three sources that people connect together to understand and operate within their world. Your comment that embodied knowledge encoded within DNA complements TPW.

¶9. Your section about ontological responsibility immediately brings to mind Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and Social Hope* (1999). He argues that philosophical thought can and should be more than simple navel gazing, and philosophers need to take responsibility to advance their thinking for practical social justice. This thinking leads to...

¶10. Dr. Lindstrom writes that her life's was impacted by Betty's influence. But what about other's lives? This brings me back to Rorty's call that we use our philosophical thought to make the world a better place.

After working my way through the rest of the paper after the methods section (below), Betty's impact on academic

resilience is this article's strength and contribution and it should focus here rather than diverging where it did.

¶11. How does Blackstock highlight distinctions between first Nations and Western ontology?

Also, ontological responsibilities and actionable accountabilities connect Bastien to Rorty. This could be an exemplar for Blackstock's distinctions.

¶12. I'm having a problem agreeing with the idea of transformational and transformative education. But first, Maslow, in his story about his time with the Blood Tribe (1967), shares the idea that Indigenous education is premised by what Dr. Lindstrom calls ongoing transformative education. That is, if I correctly understand what transformative education is.

Regarding transformative and transformational education, based on what I read in ¶12, I don't really see a big difference between the styles. I read that transformative education is a Western style of formal adult education, and transformational education is a Native style of adult education that considers life beyond formal education. As an academic let alone philosophical argument, this distinction doesn't make sense to me.

The best I can make of this is that Western, transformative, education transforms one's knowledge about things. Native transformational education transforms one's being —essence— about life.

Am I correct?

If so, then wouldn't this be similar to comparing vocational to liberal arts education? Vocational ed focuses exclusively on the fundamental knowledge and skills to perform a trade. Liberal arts is far more holistic, building one's mind for seeing, appreciating, and drawing on many sources of broad knowledge to function within a dynamic changing world world. University education is transformational. Students leave as people vastly different than they were four or more years prior when they entered. Beside simply time spent maturing into adults, university students had to learn humanities, STEM, social sciences outside their chosen major. They also had the extracurricular life experience that goes with university life. So they are transformed as much in Western educational institutions as they are via Native education. As much as I understand your distinction.

This thinking goes back to my preamble above: we think based on the schools we learn within.

Additionally, ¶14, not all Eurocentric thinking is about economic transaction and resource extraction. Especially today. There are a number of Eurocentric humanities thought that considers care for place and concern for capitalist centered values. George Orwell, for example.

Vine Deloria, Jr. eloquently wrote "the business of Western Europeans was business" (1979:10). Much of Western capitalism doesn't have governors throttling back desires for wealth, both monetary and power. Native people extracted resources in order to survive and thrive in their respective places. Lands were modified for agriculture and shelter. That's economy. This is the distinction between Native and Western philosophies in economics (Gladstone, 2017, 2024).

But to get back to the ideas about transformational and transformative learning. I don't see a strong convincing distinction clearly articulated here. Especially since the root "transform" is used in both concepts.

After reading further into the paper, I noticed it left behind the discussion about transformative and transformational education. So I remain hanging here.

¶14 (cont.). I read the Ermine quote as Aboriginal education having a two-part responsibility: uphold a worldview of wholeness and disseminate that worldview to benefit humanity. This, too, is shared by Rorty. It's a good responsibility to have.

¶15 is preceded by the section header: Advancing Blackfoot resilience as an ontological responsibility. Given that Ermine say that Aboriginal education must uphold and disseminate wholeness, I'm going to look for that process in this section.

Also, in 15, you have two problem statements. The first about indigenous, post-secondary students continuing to experience, profound barriers and higher education advancement. The other about school-leaving, low-academic achievement, and racial discrimination experiences. I assume that the second problem is in context of the first problem. That is, low end, academic achievement, and racial discrimination in attempts to advance through higher education. I'm curious about the relationship—influences—of discrimination on school-leaving and low-academic achievement in higher education advancement. Are there differences across communities? This isn't a question for this specific paper, but is a good question to explore.

¶16. I assume TRC is Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I'm familiar with this through my work, however I wonder how many other readers know what the TRC is, let alone it's abbreviation.

Also, in ¶16, you speak about an inability to bridge a conceptual and philosophical divide separating Indigenous and Settler societies. You state that this disconnect is related to deficit perspectives held by a vast majority of Canadians. I assume these are the settlers you mentioned in the previous sentence. Also, what do you mean by deficit perspectives? Is this tied to ¶17 that follows? You do mention *perceived inherent deficiencies* in that paragraph, but only as perceptions. but only as perceptions. Please list examples of these perceptions. For example, I've met many white Montanans who say that they lock their car as they drive through reservation towns because they perceive tribal people as unclean and unsafe.

## Research Methods

I spent some time going over this section. This being an open review I debated how to be critical while not sounding like a jerk. But, I just have to rip off that band-aid and say that you have a number of problems here: inappropriately named method, data collection and reporting, and modeling. But I'm going to start by saying that ¶18 should be preceded by the header "Methods". The last sentence of the paragraph should include the parenthetical, "(Figure 1)". Figure 1 needs the caption "Fig. 1: Cultural Model", or better yet, the specific cultural depicted in the figure. However, this figure and its related section needs to be pulled from the paper.

Okay. Next.

## Interviewing is not autoethnography

You state your paper is an autoethnography, and it started that way. However you interviewed people individually and in focus groups. This isn't autoethnography, this is interview method. Autoethnography is autobiographical, which you have done in part in this paper. However, when you go beyond your own experiences and start seeking wisdom from *informants*, qualitatively speaking, people you interview, you are no longer doing autoethnography or ethnography of any kind. Autoethnography is a research form using the researcher's/author's personal experience as data. Drawing on others' experiences no longer makes the study "auto." Autobiography and biography are same contexts.

However, ethnography is an observation method. There is a classic Indian Country joke that goes: what comprises an average American Indian family? Mom, dad, some kids and an anthropologist.

Your story about your experiences as a doctoral candidate supported by Betty is an autoethnography. It fits nicely with your thesis that academic scholars need to be active advocates for justice. This story aligns well with Rorty's call for same.

Interviewing is a completely different data collection method than is autoethnography. Rather than interpreting personal experience to ground and support your thesis, you rely on others' experiences. There are two qualitative forms of interviewing and you did both, individual interviews and focus groups.

Your goal in this paper is conceptualizing ontological responsibility. That's generally a domain of academia. Skipping ¶'s 18 and 19 and dropping Figure 1, you have accomplished this in your story. You've successfully said that as Native (Indigenous) academics we have to advance Native ontologies within our academies. Your autoethnography up to your interview section completed the paper. You can strengthen that with more examples of Native scholars who have shown resilience as they worked through the academic system to advance Indigenous thought. I'm working on a similar project as of this writing.

In ¶20, you say that "from a Blackfoot perspective, my research reclaims..." By dropping ¶18,19 and Fig. 1, you can simply insert *ongoing* before research and maintain your thesis. Likewise all following references to the research your mention can be salvaged by replacing "the research finding" with "my ongoing research".

## Interviews

You have a very good argument based on your autoethnography alone. As I said above, it would be stronger by adding other Native scholars reflections. Inserting the two paragraphs about interviews and the figure basically invalidates your paper, especially when you say "while it is not possible to provide a detailed overview of the results of the study, here, broad findings are captured..." That's fatal flaw.

Academic research is grounded in proving your ideas. Proving our ideas have merit, that is, what we say is true, is hard. That's what makes our line of work as academics challenging, albeit a fun challenge.

Quantitative scholars operate in a domain called validity. They use assorted statistical methods and formulas to

demonstrate that what they find as truth is actual truth, not some random fluke in their data set.

Qualitative, especially narrative researchers, those who use stories as data, and interviews and focus groups are simply a collection of stories, also seek validity in our data. We simply call our form of validity *credibility*.

Your data set lacks credibility, especially when you openly say “it is not possible to provide a detailed overview of the results of the study.” Anybody reading the paper can challenge you by saying you made up your data.

Keep in mind, I’m playing devil’s advocate. There are many reviewers out there who are sincere in their accusations of academic impropriety.

You also have a credibility flaw in your data set. You say that you’re looking at resilience from a distinct First Nations perspective, but you fail to control for your non-Indigenous post-secondary students. How can they have a distinct First Nations perspective if they are not First Nations?

Dropping your interview section entirely will save you.

Also, dropping this section gives you great opportunity for a second, more rigorous paper that extends your stream about Blackfoot resilience. And second papers are always a good thing.

Since I encourage a separate paper for your interviews and theory coming from it, I’m leaving further comment for a separate conversation.

## Figure

I don’t understand your figure. It’s bi-directional, meaning that influences are in constant flux. And the flux operates on two axes. I don’t know what it’s attempting to illustrate. And your boxes conflict with your bi-directional arrows. That is, your illustration states that how things were plus what has happened (past plus past), results in how things are. But none of the relationships make sense, especially since you claim that two pasts add to a present.

Blackfoot resilience supposedly flows across this additive relationship. However your two forms of past being additive conflict with this bi-directional flow.

You then add ceremony and values, each being bi-directional in the Y-axis. Are you saying that the increase and decrease in ceremony influences both pasts and the present? Likewise with values.

In short, and not to be mean, but your figure doesn’t explain anything. I think I know where you want to go with it, but I can only guess. It needs to be removed, especially since it greatly distracts from your very good autoethnography about academic advocacy.

## SUMMARY

Your paper is a good start as a reflection and demonstration of Blackfoot ontological resilience in academics. However jumping from an autoethnography to an interview paper and attempt to propose theory (your figure) mid-stride hurts it. You essentially have two separate papers and they need to be broken apart so that each has greater credibility. The latter interview-based paper is very weak. You make assertions without supporting data and the figure doesn't illustrate anything, especially since you don't explicitly propose the theory behind the figure.

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