Original Research

Asserting an Indigenous theoretical framework in Australian public relations

Treena Clark [1]*, Nancia Guivarra [2], Shannan Dodson [3], and Yatu Widders Hunt [4]

[1] University of Technology Sydney
[2] Stronger Smarter Institute
[3] University of Technology Sydney
[4] Cox Inall Ridgeway
* Correspondence: TreenaAnne.Clark@student.uts.edu.au

Abstract: The Public Relations Institute of Australia defines public relations as the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. In an Indigenous Australian context, public relations should move beyond this simplistic and western-centric definition by including a diversity of cultural dimensions, including the centering of stories and issues that reflect or impact Indigenous Australians, Indigenous knowledges and principles, and motivations for social change. Although minor definitions of Indigenous Australian public relations exist, no theoretical framework has been developed for the Australian profession. This paper responds to this gap in the scholarship by developing an Indigenous Australian public relations framework from the voices of five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who work in public relations/communications. The end result summarizes Indigenous practices in the Australian public relations profession and calls for further literature in the field to continue asserting Indigenous ways of being and doing.

1. Introduction

In the past decade there have been a range of definitions offered for Indigenous Australian public relations in theory and practice. Sakinofsky (2013) describes it as "to, by and for Aboriginal communities and organisations" (p. 1) and Peterson (2016), in drawing from the earlier work of Clark (2011, 2012), outlines it as "communicating to and/or on behalf of Aboriginal people, Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal communities" (p. 1). Although these existing definitions (Clark, 2011, 2012; Peterson, 2016; Sakinofsky, 2013) closely resemble the definition from the Public Relations Institute of Australia ("the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics", 2019), and may provide a surface level of understanding of how Indigenous peoples may 'fit' into public relations, this is not enough. It is essential to recognize that the processes for achieving adequate theoretical and empirical representations of Indigenous standpoints within and across public relations are far more complicated. There are complexities when comparing Western public relations practices to Indigenous Australian public relations; for example, the strong cultural emphasis on relationships, the relationship between activism and public relations, and connections to Indigenous narratives in the media and general public. Whilst there are surface-level descriptions of Indigenous Australian public relations, and applied frameworks and principles in practice (for example, see Cox Inall Ridgeway's five governing principles, 2014), there is no theoretical framework specifically for the Australian public relations profession. By asking the question "What are your experiences and roles working in Indigenous Australian public relations?", this paper responds to this gap in the public relations scholarship by asserting an Indigenous Australian public relations theoretical framework. Importantly, rather than mimicking the limitations inherent within prior public relations literature,

this framework is drawn from the voices and perspectives of five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have worked as consultants, researchers and managers in Indigenous public relations and communications spaces.

2. Indigenous ways of public relations in Australian academia

In recent years, several scholars have called for further research on Indigenous Australian public relations and identified the lack of Indigenous perspectives (Clark, 2011, 2012; Macnamara, 2012; Peterson, 2016; Sakinofsky, 2013; Sison, 2016). Australian based public relations scholar Marianne Sison (2016) argues that "very few Australian PR scholars engage with [I]ndigenous issues in our research and teaching" (p. 36). Jim Macnamara (2012) also advises that "… public relations can find productive new pathways for theory building and practice in … [I]ndigenous studies" (p. 452). Pre-existing research and empirical studies on Indigenous Australian public relations are limited, but does include the works of Clark (2011, 2012) and Peterson (2016), who both explored organizational standpoints from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations.

Clark (2011, 2012) discovered the ideal perceptions of public relations/communications qualifications versus the experience levels of Aboriginal cultural competency knowledge. Interviewing a total of eight CEOs, board members and public relations/communications officers in three Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations, Clark (2011, 2012) found that the majority of the public relations/communications officers in all of the organizations were non-Indigenous, and not all were university educated within public relations and communications. Clark (2011, 2012) uncovered public relations/communications strategies including relationship management (establishing and maintaining relationships and connections), community consultation and engagement, integration of local Indigenous cultural protocols in the public relations strategies, and efforts of Indigenous media exposure. Successfully promoting positive stories was a common challenge for the public relations/communications officers in the organizations. The most used form of communication tactics at the time of the study was corporate newsletters.

Peterson's (2016) study noted negative portrayals of Indigenous peoples in the media. Interviewing seven Indigenous and non-Indigenous public relations/communications officers in six Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations, Peterson's (2016) research similarly explored the communications strategies, tactics, and perspectives working within Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations. In investigating the practice within the organizations, Peterson (2016) discovered a strong link between Indigenous Australian public relations and social change, reactive/ad hoc strategic plans (flexible communications planning, thinking on the spot), a fluid and organic shift of roles within their work (undertaking both marketing and media), and Indigenous protocols and style of public relations. Notably, Peterson (2016) described the Indigenous style of public relations as "culturally sensitive communications" and "more than a PR-like strategy. It is a mode of knowing and doing that informs many of the tactics" (pp. 54-72). From Peterson's (2016) research, it can be concluded that Indigenous ways are not simply a set of public relations strategies, but rather epistemological and ontological foundations for engaging with public relations tactics that respect (and empower) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

Overall, the empirical studies of Clark (2011, 2012) and Peterson (2016) indicate Indigenous Australian public relations as including relationship management, community consultation and engagement, integration of Indigenous cultural elements/Indigenous ways in public relations, media relations for positive media exposure, social change as a theoretical public relations framework/direction, and fluid functions in their work. However, their research only includes the voices of Indigenous employees of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations in capital cities/urban environments, and thus may be argued as limited in its applicability to a broader development towards understanding a potential Indigenous public relations framework.

3. Research approach

3.1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's standpoints

A significant characteristic of Indigenous research is the contribution to self-determination, community responsibility, decolonization and autonomy (Foley, 2003; Martin, 2008, 2013; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Nakata, 2002, 2007; Rigney, 1997, 1999; Wilson, 2009). As Indigenous women co-authors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's standpoints and principles were the guiding voice to the methodology within this paper. This approach recognizes the perspectives and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as a form of resistance against the various levels of oppression that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women continually face (Behrendt, 1993; Fredericks, 2004, 2010; Huggins, 1987, 1994; Moreton-Robinson, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2013; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009). In embodying an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's standpoint, Indigenous ways of knowing (epistemology), ways of being and belonging (ontology), and ways of doing (axiology) are integral to the research framework (Martin, 2008, 2013; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Rigney, 1997, 1999).

3.2. Participants

Five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have worked as consultants, researchers and managers in Indigenous public relations and communications spaces, participated in this research. Many of the women participants in this paper are frequently in the public eye, whether it be media interviews, writing opinion pieces, savvy social media users, or regular conference presenters. All participants were issued pseudonyms.

Susan (pseudonym) has university qualifications in journalism and started out in radio and Indigenous affairs reporting. She is based in a large city and moved into public relations as another way to continue storytelling, particularly around creating and maintaining positive narratives for Indigenous peoples.

Debra (pseudonym) studied communications at university and has moved between journalism and communications roles throughout her career. She is now in a dedicated Indigenous communications role and is based in a large city. She chose communications as her career because of its power to create social change, particularly through storytelling.

Stacey (pseudonym) is based in a large city and studied media and communications at university. She briefly worked in print media but chose to focus on communications, public relations and marketing roles. She has only worked in Indigenous spaces, and specializes in Indigenous specific communications, particularly with government clients.

Lily (pseudonym) graduated with a degree in media production practices and initially didn't intend to work in communications. She is based in a large city and has worked in Indigenous organizations and on Indigenous campaigns undertaking digital media, media relations, branding and storytelling strategies.

Nicole (pseudonym) lives in a middle-sized city and studied public relations at university and has worked in numerous community roles, both within public relations and project management roles. She originally chose public relations as a career to promote the importance of education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.

3.3. Method

This paper privileges the voices and lived experiences of the five Indigenous women participants through the utilization of a yarning methodology. Yarning as a methodology is a culturally appropriate and relevant Indigenous research storytelling tool (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Geia, Hayes & Usher, 2013) used to promote and advocate familiarity, collaboration, co-researching, and confidence in storytelling. Under the lead author, collaboration with the research participants was essential in ensuring comfort with the process, and involved all of the women telling their stories their way, reviewing their own transcripts and/or journal papers for context and accuracy, and

determining whether to participate as co-researchers. Under the yarning methodology, "semi-structured" interviews were conducted to gather data and share knowledges based on the following question: "What are your experiences and roles working in Indigenous Australian public relations?". There were also noted conversational cues to spark ideas and follow up questions were formed during sessions.

Gifts were exchanged at the beginning or end of each yarning session, to represent and symbolize social yarning, collaboration, gratitude and Indigenous women's similarity and culture. Specifically, gift cards and a pair of *Haus of Dizzy* Aboriginal flag earrings were presented. All yarning sessions were undertaken one-on-one with the lead author, audio-recorded on an iPhone 7 or Mac laptop and followed similar, but flexible, yarning plans/set of themes to discuss.

The lead author's yarning session followed the same procedure and was recorded by her male, Aboriginal doctoral supervisor. All yarning sessions were transcribed through a transcription program (Otter, 2019) and authenticated by manually listening to the audio. Resulting from the initial audit of each transcript, early themes were noted, followed by the major data analysis in the NVIVO program for thematic analysis. The thematic analysis of key themes followed a six-phase guide (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), where the lead author first became familiar with the data, generated initial codes, searched for emerging themes, reviewed themes, defined themes, and conducted the write-up.

4. Findings: Indigenous themes within public relations theory and practice

The results from the women's perceptions on the practice of Indigenous Australian public relations were identified and categorized into the main themes of: Versatility; Indigenous Philosophy; Indigenous Justice; Indigenous storytelling; Indigenous diplomacy; Interrelatedness; and Narrative empowerment.

4.1. Versatility: Undertaking multiple roles and functions within Indigenous Australian public relations

When defining Indigenous Australian public relations, Lily shared the different roles she experiences and relates to this type of work:

> *Whenever I've worked in a black space, you are the marketing, communications and PR person rolled into one. That is just the common experience, and I hear that from Indigenous comms people all the time. There's generally no separation; it's just all squeezed together, and we're spread too thin. I found that funny coming to [current place of work], because everything is so separated. You've got a marketing team, you've got an internal communications team, an external communications team, a media team. But that's my job all rolled into one, I have to do all of those things, it's such a common experience in the black space. The expectation is that you have to encompass everything.*

Lily's insight into the mixture of public relations/communications/marketing terms used with Indigenous Australian public relations is reflected within the terminology used by all women. For example, in a count of the most used terms when referring to Indigenous Australian public relations, it was found that "communications" was used the most, followed closely by "public relations". Current research reveals that in many areas of Indigenous Australian public relations there are different terminologies and perceptions used to describe the profession and/or its strategies (Clark, 2011, 2012; Peterson, 2016).

In Clark's (2012) research, it was noted that one of the participants explained Indigenous Australian public relations as "[involving] multiple staff undertaking the public relations in all levels of the organisation" (p. 22). While, Peterson (2016) identified that participants "described their PR-like activities by predominantly using the terms 'communications', 'marketing' or 'media relations'" (p. 55).

Outside of Indigenous public relations, Fitch (2016) and Cassidy and Fitch (2013) discuss the versatility of roles in the fashion public relations industry and the disregard of public relations versatility from the standpoint of the dominant paradigm of public relations (the excellence theory).

The excellence theory conveys how organizations can conduct excellence and quality public relations in all levels of an organization (Grunig & Grunig, 2008; Vercic & Zerfass, 2016), and specifically calls for public relations as a stand-alone profession, and not integrated with other disciplines such as marketing. The difficulty of the excellence theory is its specific application to organizational contexts and rigid depiction of public relations. In an Indigenous Australian public relations context, versatility of roles can be viewed as a result of less staff in an organization and/or cultural values transferable to several positions.

4.2. Indigenous philosophy: Understanding the lived experiences of Indigeneity and cultural knowledges

In terms of the lived experience of being Indigenous, Lily, detailed being an Indigenous person working in Indigenous Australian public relations:

When you're a comms person in an Indigenous organization, or working in the black space, and you're black yourself, it's more than a job, it's personal. Your perspective, lived experience and historical context goes into the comms, it's not going to be the same as if it was a white person. You often are personally affected by the issues you are addressing and speaking about, you have experienced it with your own families and communities. Separating emotion and objectivity can be really difficult.

Colonization impacts all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and this includes the approach of work through the lens of Indigeneity. In identifying the Indigenous ways of being and doing in their work, the majority of women elaborated on Indigenous approaches, values and protocols. Debra discussed the Indigenous protocols and values that her organization incorporates:

In our work at [name removed], we would never develop a campaign without community or without the right people in the room. I guess a more traditional approach is to develop something and then go and test it. So, we actually commit to embedding Aboriginal perspectives into every step of that project, not just through our own Indigenous path but through the right people. … Community is always at the center. Indigenous voices will be embedded in every single step of this project.

Susan, similarly, mentioned following protocols in her storytelling work:

I'm retelling or facilitating people's stories in a way that they see themselves, because I understand them culturally. And two, because I always follow the right protocols in getting those stories and stuck to them. Talking to the right people from the right Country and the right storyteller owners for those particular stories, and getting it from the horse's mouth, basically.

Indigenous perspectives in public relations and communications could be considered as paving the way in socio-cultural and human centric theories. Debra explained how non-Indigenous public relations and communications professionals are co-opting Indigenous style methodologies:

I think now we're seeing in the broader PR industry that they say things like, "Oh, we've got to focus on human-centered design and co-design" and we're like, "Yeah. We've been doing this for a while, 60,000 years or so." So, it's kind of funny when we go to big conferences or we hear other guest speakers and they're talking about it like it's a new concept and we're sitting there going, "How else would you do it? Of course, you'd do it that way."

Stacey noted how a human-centered approach is used within her work:

I always take a human centered approach. I talk to people first, to better understand what messages they are connecting with.

Within public relations theory, socio-cultural standpoints aim to find and encourage alternative views, particularly against the dominant organizational paradigms (see excellence theory above), and to contribute to society (Edwards, 2018; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Ihlen, van Ruler & Fredriksson, 2009; Ledingham, 2003; L'Etang, 2008). Indigenous Australian public relations evidently provides inspiration for alternative insight in public relations and how the profession can contribute positively to society.

4.3. Indigenous justice: Utilising public relations as a vehicle for social change and activism

Peterson (2016) recognized in her research that "[a] key finding was seeing participants' PR-like work as a vehicle for driving social change due to their aspirations to give voice to the needs of ATSI communities" (p. 94). This was reiterated by a number of the co-authors/participants, especially in their motivations of studying/entering public relations and perceptions of Indigenous Australian public relations.

Stacey described creating change as one of the reasons to establish her own communications consultancy:

I wanted to share positive stories. I saw great things happening in my community and knew that other Australians weren't hearing about them.

Nicole chose her career of public relations because of its perceived ability to create change:

I've always wanted to do something that gives back. Obviously as an Aboriginal person. But I saw that public relations has the power for that … I wanted to work in government, to create change. So that was my viewpoint. I knew what public relations could do, but I knew that I was different because I was Aboriginal.

Debra elaborated on how Indigenous Australian public relations can facilitate change and positive outcomes:

… people don't realise how big a role communications and PR play in building movements and sustaining energy and getting people on board and addressing inequality, because it's just like, 'Guys, we can do so much more. This is bigger than all of us.'

Debra continued, linking her public relations and communications work with activism:

I guess through the work that I do, I like to think that I'm empowering change. I wouldn't say the work we do is hard because we work with all parties, so it's not like we would say we are fighting against the system, but we are working with the system to try to improve outcomes for everyone. I think that could be seen as a new form of activism as well.

Public relations scholars Edwards and Hodges (2011) highlight numerous international and national scholars (such as Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Heath, 2006; Holtzhausen, 2000; McKie & Munshi, 2007) who have "argued for the importance of public relations as a discipline that fundamentally changes the way in which society functions and have explored its potential to take more of an active role in bringing about change" (p. 3). Adi's (2019) *Protest Public Relations: Communicating Dissent and Activism* provides a wealth of information and varying insight on the role of activism within public relations from numerous scholars. In Australian public relations, discourse from non-Indigenous perspectives on the role of activism within public relations are varied (Ali, Boddy, O'Leary & Ewart, 2016; Demetrious, 2013; Message, 2019; Robertson & Crawford, 2019; Wolf, 2018), and provide insight and validation into the link between activism and Indigenous Australian public relations.

4.4. Indigenous storytelling: Becoming and being a storyteller

Storytelling from an Indigenous standpoint is a way to pass on stories, lessons, and values to the next generation, and is a shared process that is important not only for individuals and their families, but also wider communities (Bodkin-Andrews, et al., 2016). Nicole and Debra described Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as "naturals at communicating and storytelling, and public relations" and "the original storytellers", respectively. In western public relations, Elmer (2011, p. 47) declares that "[p]ublic relations is storytelling" and Kent (2015, p. 15) states "[s]torytelling is a staple of public relations, from crisis, to branding, to identity, to reputation". Susan described herself as a storyteller:

I call myself a storyteller, because I feel like that's more appropriate for what I do. I don't care what the medium is, I'll just tell a story.

Susan and Debra both explained how they undertake storytelling, either for Indigenous or non-Indigenous audiences. Susan described a process for targeting non-Indigenous audiences:

…what you've got to do is you can't just hit them over the head with this, because they don't listen. You've got to creep up to them and then you hit them over the head. I really liked that approach. I like to think fishing line when I'm drawing things in. Reeling people in softly, softly, softly and hit them over the head once you've got them there listening to your every word.   That's, I suppose, the way to do it… Otherwise barriers just get put up.

Debra shared how storytelling in her work can be used to alleviate issues within Indigenous communities:

… rather than coming at it as, 'Here's a massive problem and here's how we're going to fix it', we actually look at where pockets of excellence are and how do we amplify excellence, so let's go find stories of resilience and good practice.

Similarly, Stacey emphasized storytelling in her work and business establishment:

My business has always been about sharing the positive stories coming out of our community and promoting the importance of Indigenous values across different sectors. I do a lot of work with Aboriginal businesses on their brand narratives. Many Aboriginal business owners go into business to create change, to promote culture, to create economic freedom, it's important to share these stories with their customers.

4.5. Indigenous diplomacy: Communicating between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds

Several of the women discussed being brokers, translators, and diplomats in their role. Debra explained what being a diplomat entails in her role:

I think where I feel like I can contribute the most is working in a more diplomatic role, which is bringing all parties together, trying to broker solutions that work for everyone and sort of influence things from the inside.

Stacey emphasized being a translator between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous world, particularly in terms of communicating messages:

I find that a lot of professional Aboriginal people end up in a translator role. Especially if they are working in a non-Indigenous environment on Aboriginal programs. They need to take the language of their workplace and any jargon that's used, and translate this for the way that Aboriginal people speak to each other, and then they often have to translate this back to their non-Indigenous colleagues ... part of my role

is to remove this additional workload by creating communication strategies that speak to Aboriginal people.

Lily outlined communicating messages and organizational narratives with publics/stakeholders:

You have to tell the story of the work in a way that makes it digestible for people to understand why it's important. Due to the instability in funding for most Indigenous organizations, your narrative is often linked with selling the organization as well as educating or promoting your work. You're communicating messages to help create trust and validity of what the organization's doing. It's often not just about delivering a message, but also raising the profile and helping to secure funding.

Public relations theory discusses and explores similarities with diplomacy (Macnamara, 2012). For instance, Macnamara (2012) claims that public relations "has the opportunity to borrow public diplomacy and new diplomacy concepts and principles in a transdisciplinary approach that will yield a substantially enriched paradigm for PR that is more effective, more societally-orientated, more ethical, and ultimately more publicly accepted" (p. 322).

4.6. Interrelatedness: Establishing and maintaining relationships and dialogue

Debra emphasized two-way communication within her work, expanding on it in an Indigenous sense and linking it with brokering and diplomacy:

I think one of the things that we try to embed more so from an Indigenous point of view when we talk about co-design or two-way communication isn't just having the PR people being the broker but actually looking for opportunities to bring everyone together, so have the police in the room with this family and actually facilitate robust conversation and design stuff together.

Stacey linked the natural connections that most Indigenous peoples have with one another, and how that relates to appropriately communicating messages with the right people:

Messages are often lost in translation. Marketing for Aboriginal programs and events often go through non-Indigenous communications teams. The people writing the messages may have never met an Aboriginal person before, and so it's extremely difficult for them to know whether words and messages are connecting with their audience. In some cases, words can trigger the opposite response.

Nicole shared her approach in establishing community and family connections and relationships:

You want to interview someone for your newspaper, or for the media. You have family connections already. You go there, you already have the protocols kind of down pat. … it depends on what task you're doing. So yeah, events, you would be the one who would approach them, and generally you'd expect that you'd have a relationship with the Aunty or Uncle who's just say doing Welcome to Country. So, I'm thinking of [name removed], when I used to work there. So, you give them a call, you know, and that's it. But if you didn't know them, maybe you'd have someone introduce you.

Debra discussed engagement methods and establishing and maintaining relationships in her work:

… we don't even have the same method of engaging with people because that's their decision whether they give us permission to come and how they would like to be engaged with. … we'll often contact peer leaders in communities or people we know and say, 'What's the appropriate channel?', whether that's contacting a Land Council, an Elder, a family and then giving people choice about how we talk to them, whether that's through focus groups, conversations, yarning circles, one-on-one.

Within an Indigenous Australian public relations context there is a crossover between the Western theories in public relations, particularly relationship management theory (which "balances the interests of organizations and publics through the management of organization–public relationships" Ledingham, 2009, p. 181), and the two-way symmetrical theory (which emphasizes high ethical research and communication between an organization and its publics/stakeholders to obtain mutual understanding and interests, Macnamara, 2012). Similarly, for instance, Clark (2011, 2012) found that the Indigenous values of listening and engaging with community and forming and maintaining relationships closely align with the two-way symmetrical model. Although these examples confirm a certain applicability to Indigenous Australian public relations, it may be argued that two-way and relationship management are fundamentally superficial to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009). Two-way symmetry and relationship management can certainly be evident within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organizations and communities, however, the appropriateness and success from non-Indigenous peoples, groups, and organizations to Indigenous publics have yet to be fully and specifically determined.

4.7. Narrative empowerment: Advancing positive stories in the media and public

A strong and frequent theme involved combatting the negative narratives around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and promoting positive stories encompassing Indigenous self-determination. Susan, in reflecting on her work as a former journalist, described only wanting to write positive stories about Indigenous peoples and shared her approach to storytelling and what she prioritizes:

For me, these days, even when I was a journalist, I use to call myself an advocacy journalist, because I didn't want to do stories that bought into deficit narratives. I don't think that was even a term at that time, but it was a personal vent. That was my personal philosophy, and for those other reasons, I found it too sensitive for myself and my personality.

Stacey explained her desire to share positive stories and contribute to increasing a positive Indigenous narrative:

These days I work mainly on strategy. Promoting a respect for Aboriginal values at a leadership level means that space opens up across the company or department and we can embed positive narratives throughout.

Lily shared how she mainly has positive experiences with the media, because she works with media who are either Indigenous focused or progressive:

I've largely had positive experiences because I've only generally dealt with media that's probably seen as more 'liberal' or 'progressive'. I often deal with Indigenous media, like, NITV or Koori Mail, and that is a positive experience because they're so keen on the story. And they're keen on reporting on positive stories, not just deficit stories as the mainstream media often does. The reality is the narrative the mainstream media is familiar with and wanting to portray (for shock value, which equals ratings) – is negative reporting on Indigenous people. They want to create drama and friction.

Susan shared a media relations tactic of utilizing the connections non-Indigenous peoples have with non-Indigenous media:

The other thing that I know now, is that it's really hard to sell your own story, it sounds like you're boasting all the time. So, you hire a company to sell your story for you. That's the way it's done.

Clark (2011, 2012) and Peterson (2016) strongly discussed the role of the media and reporting within Indigenous Australian public relations. They particularly stressed the pre-existing negative narratives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the media and the need to recognize Indigenous self-determination relating to more positive and empowered stories. Peterson noted that one participant emphasized community events as a way to counteract negative portrayals and promote 'positive reconciliation' in the media and public (2016). To progress positive narratives and stories within the media, the roles of Indigenous and non-Indigenous journalists' need to be transparent and the utilization of texts and handbooks on ethical media reporting with Indigenous peoples are essential (Leach, James, McManus & Thompson, 2012; Media Diversity Australia, 2018; Waller, 2010). This is summarized in an account of decolonizing journalism, whereby Sweet, Dudgeon, McCallum, and Ricketson (2014), state that decolonizing the profession "would result in increased awareness of institutionalized racism and concerted efforts to ensure greater representation of Indigenous peoples — whether in newsrooms and media management, or as sources in stories, including and beyond those directly related to Indigenous affairs" (p. 626).

5. Discussion: Asserting an Indigenous Australian public relations theoretical framework

Indigenous perspectives and standpoints in the academic domain of Australian public relations are limited and the two studies outlined in the literature review (Clark, 2011, 2012; Peterson, 2016) provided only minor insights into the nature of Indigenous Australian public relations. These studies indicated that Indigenous public relations include relationship management, community consultation and engagement, integration of Indigenous cultural elements/Indigenous ways (in the public relations across media relations, social change and/or activism), and fluid functions and tasks in their work. The media relations commonality from both studies identified the potential for positive relationships between public relations and the media, particularly in the promotion of positive stories and redressing negative narratives of Indigenous Australia (Clark, 2011, 2012; Peterson, 2016).

We argue though that this paper moves beyond the prior works of Clark (2011, 2012) and Peterson (2016) by providing more concrete foundations for developing an Indigenous Australian public relations theoretical framework. To begin with, we define Indigenous Australian public relations as:

> *The deliberate act of establishing and maintaining relationships between stakeholders, incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols and values and/or communicating for social change and self-determination with and/or on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.*

By moving beyond the simplistic Western-epistemic definitions of public relations (Public Relations Institute of Australia, 2019), this new definition demonstrates the importance of centering Indigenous cultural practices, relationships, and self-determination/agency within Indigenous public relations. This paper has expanded upon existing research by sharing the perspectives, narratives and standpoints from five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in public relations and communications. The paper centered on their lived experiences within the public relations discipline and posed the question "What are your experiences and roles working in Indigenous Australian public relations?" From this, the paper identified seven key themes from the data, themes that can be argued to theoretically guide future Indigenous Australian public relations research and practice and contribute back to Indigenous communities by promoting Indigenous self-determination. The following Indigenous Australian public relations theoretical framework is outlined with its respective call to actions for both non-Indigenous public relations professionals and researchers:

Figure 1. Indigenous Australian public relations theoretical framework

5.1. Versatility: Undertaking multiple roles and functions within Indigenous Australian public relations

Public relations is not the only term used in this field; communications is used interchangeably, and multiple roles such as marketing are utilized within public relations. The public relations academy needs to continue to consider the relevancy and/or implications of more diverse and versatile roles out in practice, and what this means for the profession. This is especially the case for cultural organizations, and organizations that don't align with dominant Western paradigms.

5.2. Indigenous philosophy: Understanding the lived experiences of Indigeneity and cultural knowledges

Discuss with each Indigenous group the best method and set of ethics to work within their organization or community. Start the initial process by exploring ethical research documents such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012) and the National Health and Medical Research Council's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). Also consult closely with local Indigenous representatives and organizations to become aware of localized protocols and cultural practices.

5.3. Indigenous justice: Utilizing public relations as a vehicle for social change and activism

Consider the actions of your public relations approaches as benefiting Indigenous peoples and communities. The public relations academy needs to continue considering the relevancy and/or implications of utilizing public relations for social change and activism, and how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities can provide rich knowledges in this area of public relations.

5.4. Indigenous storytelling: Being a storyteller

Take on the approach of storytelling in your public relations practice. The public relations academy needs to continue considering the relevancy of more in-depth storytelling within public relations, and how the public relations academy can build on storytelling theory from Indigenous knowledges.

5.5. Indigenous diplomacy: Communicating between two worlds

Consider the limitations of public relations theories and methods when communicating between Indigenous and western audiences. The public relations academy needs to continue to explore the relevancy and/or implications of diplomacy in public relations, particularly in cross-cultural communications.

5.6. Interrelatedness: Establishing and maintaining relationships and dialogue

Ensure that communication is two-way and consistent with the protocols of the Indigenous community and group you are working with. When working with Indigenous peoples, communities and organizations, first establish two-way communication, followed by the Indigenous protocols provided to you.

5.7. Narrative empowerment: Advancing positive stories in the media and public

Consider in your work how public relations can help in framing positive narratives for Indigenous peoples and communities, both in the media and the general public. Take on a social justice approach, where you are working towards limiting the negative narratives and stories of Indigenous peoples and communities. See handbooks on Indigenous ethics and protocols within journalism/media for more insight into this approach (Leach et al., 2012; Media Diversity Australia, 2018; Waller, 2010).

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper contributes towards the development of a more substantial understanding of Indigenous Australian public relations by centering the voices of five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in public relations and communications. Resulting from the standpoints of Indigenous women, this paper has developed an Indigenous Australian public relations definition and theoretical framework for Indigenous and non-Indigenous public relations practitioners and academics to utilize and share within the profession. However, while research in the field of Indigenous Australian public relations is increasing, it is critical to recognize that further work is needed. For instance, there is a gap in scholarship on the role public relations can play in framing positive narratives (with the media and through the public relations activities of events, publications, community engagement, and speeches) and also the relevancy of the Indigenous public sphere and its relation to public relations. Research on activist and protest practices in public relations exists (Adi, 2019), yet there is a lack of knowledge on the power of public relations for Indigenous individuals and activists (the public relations activities Indigenous individuals and activists undertake).

Lack of scholarship also exists on the perspectives on Indigenous feminism and Indigenous women's issues in Australian public relations - women's standpoints in Australian public relations are emerging, but almost solely from non-Indigenous narratives and research (see the works of Kate Fitch and Marianne Sison). The intersection between gender and Indigeneity is a critical issue within the wider Indigenous studies setting (Behrendt, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 2003), and thus should also be carefully considered within public relations. Finally, a prevalent element from the literature review research involved an urban based approach, which only minimally represents the contextual complexities of Indigenous Australian public relations. Therefore, research on Indigenous Australian public relations in rural and remote areas of Australia is also needed. There is richness in Indigenous Australian public relations, and this paper calls for further research and literature from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to continue privileging and/or asserting Indigenous ways of being and doing in public relations.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

Adi, A. (Ed.) (2019). *Protest public relations: Communicating dissent and activism.* Abington, England: Routledge.

Ali, H. M., Boddy, J., O'Leary, P., & Ewart, J. (2016). Exploring the use of public relations in organising activism: Implications for addressing gender-based violence in the developing world. *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, 17*(2), 46–61.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. (2012). *Guidelines for ethical research in Australian Indigenous studies*. Retrieved from http://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethical-research-australian-indigenous-studies

Behrendt, L. (1993). Aboriginal women and the white lies of the feminist movement: Implications for Aboriginal women in rights discourse. *Australian Feminist Law Journal, 1*(1), 27-44. doi:10.1080/13200968.1993.11077108

Bessarab, D., & Ng'andu, B. (2010). Yarning about yarning as a legitimate method in Indigenous research. *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies, 3*(1), 37-50.

Bodkin-Andrews, G., Bodkin, F., Andrews, G., & Whittaker, A. (2016). Mudjil'dya'djurali Dabuwa'wurrata (how the white waratah became red): D'harawal storytelling and Welcome to Country "controversies". *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples, 12*(5), 480-497.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Cassidy, L., & Fitch, K. (2013). Beyond the catwalk: Fashion public Relations and social media in Australia. *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, 14*(1-2).

Clark, T. (2011). *Aboriginal public relations: An exploration of the balance of Aboriginal cultural competency and public relations.* (Unpublished Honours Thesis). University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia.

Clark, T. (2012). Aboriginal public relations: An exploration of the balance of Aboriginal cultural competency and public relations. In M. D. Sison & M. Sheehan (Eds.), *Aboriginal public relations: An exploration of the balance of Aboriginal cultural competency and public relations* (pp. 20-24). Melbourne, Australia: World Public Relations Forum Public Relations Institute of Australia.

Cox Inall Ridgeway. (2014). *About us.* Retrieved from http://www.coxinallridgeway.com.au/about-us/

Demetrious, K. (2013). *Public relations, activism, and social change: Speaking up.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Edwards, L. (2018). *Understanding public relations: Theory, culture and society*. Singapore: Sage Publications.

Edwards, L., & Hodges, C. E. (2011). Introduction: Implications of a (radical) socio-cultural 'turn' in public relations scholarship. In L. Edwards & E. Hodges, (Eds.), *Public relations, society and culture: Theoretical and empirical explorations* (pp. 1-14). Abington, England: Routledge.

Elmer, P. (2011). Public relations and storytelling. In L. Edwards & E. Hodges, (Eds.), *Public relations, society and culture: Theoretical and empirical explorations* (pp. 47-60). Abington, England: Routledge.

Fitch, K. (2016). Feminism and public relations. In J. L'Etang, D. McKie, N. Snow, & J. Xifra (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of critical public relations* (pp. 54-64). Abingdon, England: Routledge.

Foley, D. (2003). Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous standpoint theory. *Social Alternatives, 22*(1), 44-52.

Fredericks, B. L. (2004). A reconstituted social environment. Feminism and the plight of Aboriginal women in Australia. *Newtopia Magazine, 3*(18). Retrieved from https://eprints.qut.edu.au/13431/1/13431.pdf

Fredericks, B. L. (2010). Reempowering ourselves: Australian Aboriginal women. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 35*(3), 546-550. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1086/648511

Geia, L. K., Hayes, B., & Usher, K. (2013). Yarning/Aboriginal storytelling: Towards an understanding of an Indigenous perspective and its implications for research practice. *Contemporary Nurse, 46*(1), 13-7. doi:10.5172/conu.2013.46.1.13.

Grunig, J. E., & Grunig, L. A. (2008). Excellence theory in public relations: Past, present, and future. In A. Zerfaß, O. Amsterdamska & K. Sriramesh (Eds), P*ublic relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations* (pp. 327-347). Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer.

Huggins, J. (1987). Black women and women's liberation. *Hecate, 13*(1), 77.

Huggins, J. (1994). A contemporary view of Aboriginal women's relationship to the white women's movement. In N. Grieve & A. Burns (Eds.), *Australian women and contemporary feminist thought* (pp. 70-79). Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.

Ihlen, Ø., & van Ruler, B. (2009). Introduction: Applying social theory to public relations. In Ø. Ihlen, B. van Ruler & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory: Key figures and concepts* (pp. 1-20). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ihlen, Ø., van Ruler, B., & Fredriksson, M. (Eds.) (2009). *Public relations and social theory: Key figures and concepts*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kenny, J. (2016). Excellence theory and its critics: A literature review critiquing Grunig's strategic management of public relations paradigm. *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, 17*(2). Retrieved from https://novaojs.newcastle.edu.au/apprj/index.php/apprj/article/view/80.

Kent, M. L. (2015). The power of storytelling in public relations: Introducing the 20 master plots. *Public Relations Review, 41*(4), 480-489. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.05.011

Leach, V., James, R., McManus, A., & Thompson, S. C. (2012). *Aboriginal health and the mainstream news media: a toolkit for journalists.* Retrieved from https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/resources/25525/

Ledingham, J. A. (2003). Explicating relationship management as a general theory of public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 15*(2), 181-198. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1502_4

L'Etang, J. (2008). *Public relations: Concepts, practice and critique.* London, England: Sage Publications.

Macnamara, J. (2012). *Public relations: Theories, practices, critiques*. Frenchs Forest, Australia: Pearson Australia.

Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education, 8*(3). Retrieved from http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/viewFile/335/553

Martin, K. (2008). *Please knock before you enter: Aboriginal regulation of outsiders and the implications for researchers.* Teneriffe, Australia: Post Pressed.

Martin, K. (2013). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for indigenous and indigenist research. *Journal of Australian Studies, 27*(76), 203-214.

Media Diversity Australia. (2018). *Reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues.* Retrieved from https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org/indigenous/

Message, K. (2019). Archiving activism and/as activist PR: Occupy wall street and the politics of influence. In A. Adi (Ed.), *Protest public relations: Communicating dissent and activism* (pp. 170-184). Abington, England: Routledge.

Moreton-Robinson, A. (1998). When the object speaks, a postcolonial encounter: Anthropological representations and Aboriginal women's self-presentations. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 19*(3), 275-298. doi:10.1080/0159630980190302.

Moreton-Robinson, A. (2000). Duggaibah, or 'place of whiteness': Australian feminist and race. In J. Docker & G. Fischer (Eds.), *Race, colour and identity in Australia and New Zealand* (pp. 240-255). Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press.

Moreton-Robinson, A. (2003). Tiddas talkin' up to the white woman: When Huggins et al took on Bell. In M. Grossman (Ed.), *Blacklines: Contemporary critical writing by Indigenous Australians* (pp. 66). Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Publishing.

Moreton-Robinson, A. (2013). Towards an Australian Indigenous women's standpoint theory. *Australian Feminist Studies, 28*(78), 331-347. doi:10.1080/08164649.2013.876664.

Moreton-Robinson, A., & Walter, M. (2009). Indigenous methodologies in social research. In M. Walter (Ed.), *Social research methods* (pp. 2-18). Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.

Nakata, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and the cultural interface: Underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems. *IFLA Journal, 28*(5-6), 281-291. doi:10.1177/034003520202800513

Nakata, M. (2007). The cultural interface. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 36*(1), 7-14. doi:10.1017/S1326011100004646

National Health and Medical Research Council. (2007). *National statement on ethical conduct in human research*. Retrieved from https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2007-updated-2018

Peterson, N. (2016). *Perceptions of public relations in Australian Aboriginal Community-Controlled non-profit organisations*. (Master's dissertation). Murdoch University, Perth, Australia.

Public Relations Institute of Australia. (2019). *What is it?* Retrieved from http://www.pria.com.au/public-relations/what-is-it/.

Otter. (2019). *Otter voice notes*. Retrieved from https://otter.ai/

Rigney, L. I. (1997). Internationalism of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander anti-colonial cultural critique of research methodologies: A guide to indigenist research methodology and its principles. *Research and Development in Higher Education: Advancing International Perspectives, 20*, 629-636.

Rigney, L. I. (1999). Internationalization of an Indigenous anticolonial cultural critique of research methodologies: A guide to Indigenist research methodology and its principles. *Wicazo SA Review, 14*(2), 109-121. doi:10.2307/1409555.

Robertson, E., & Crawford, R. (2019). Activist nation: Australia and the 1916 conscription referendum. In A. Adi (Ed.), *Protest public relations: Communicating dissent and activism* (pp. 29-43). Abington, England: Routledge.

Sakinofsky, P. (2013, 17 November). *2x4 Aboriginal PR skills: to, by and for Aboriginal communities and organisations*. Paper presented at the 2013 Public Relations Institute of Australia National Conference Research Colloquium, Adelaide, South Australia.

Sison, M. (2016). Diversity and inclusion in Australian public relations: Towards a multiple perspectives approach, *Media International Australia, 160*(1), 32-42. doi:10.1177/1329878X16651140

Sweet, M., Dudgeon, P., McCallum, K., & Ricketson, M. (2014). Decolonising practices: Can journalism learn from health care to improve Indigenous health outcomes? *Medical Journal of Australia, 200*(11), 626-627. doi:10.5694/mja14.00528.

Synnott, G. (2012). World Public Relations Forum 2012: Research colloquium conference proceedings. In M. D. Sison & M. Sheehan (Eds.), *Public relations and social change in Indigenous communities* (pp. 124-127). Melbourne, Australia: World Public Relations Forum Public Relations Institute of Australia.

Turnbull, N. (2010). *An insider's view on public relations: How PR works - but often doesn't.* Melbourne, Australia: N.S. & J.S. Turnbull Pty.

Vercic, D., & Zerfass, A. (2016). A comparative excellence framework for communication management. *Journal of Communication Management, 20*(4), 270-288. doi:10.1108/JCOM-11-2015-0087

Waller, L. (2010). Indigenous research ethics: New modes of information gathering and storytelling in Journalism. *Australian Journalism Review, 32*(2), 19-31.

Wilson, S. (2009). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods.* Halifax, Canada: Fernwood Publishing.

Wolf, K. (2018). Power struggles: A sociological approach to activist communication. *Public Relations Review, 44*(2), 308-316.