Locating Ourselves

It is our opinion that one of the most fundamental principles of Aboriginal research methodology is the necessity for the researcher to locate himself or herself. Identifying, at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates is an Aboriginal way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality (Owens, 2002; Said, 1994; Tierney, 2002). We are of the opinion that neutrality and objectivity do not exist in research, since all research is conducted and observed through human epistemological lenses. Therefore, in this chapter we advocate that location is essential to Indigenous methodologies and Aboriginal research/world view/epistemologies.

As Aboriginal researchers, we write about ourselves and position ourselves at the outset of our work because the only thing we can write about with authority is ourselves (Allen, 1998; Monture-Angus, 1995). When it comes to research by/about Aboriginal peoples, location is an essential part of the research process. The actual research cannot take place without the trust of the community, and one way to gain trust is to locate yourself.

This chapter is written to validate Indigenous world views and knowledge, and those seeking validation of self within the research process will benefit from it. Although this chapter speaks clearly from an Indigenous voice to Indigenous researchers/students, researchers who see their position, history, and/or experiences as pivotal to their research process may benefit from it.
In our experience as Indigenous peoples, the process of telling a story is as much the point as the story itself. We resist colonial models of writing by talking about ourselves first and then relating pieces of our stories and ideas to the research topic. Rather than revealing the lesson or central point in an epiphany within a key statement, we hope that we have woven our ideas in this chapter within and beyond our dialogue and discourse. We rely on the intelligence and imagination of readers to draw their own interpretations and conclusions about the role and purpose of putting ourselves forward in research. As our chapter illustrates, location is more than simply saying you are of Cree or Anishinabe or British ancestry; from Toronto or Alberta or Canada; location is about relationships to land, language, spiritual, cosmological, political, economical, environmental, and social elements in one’s life. We begin by putting ourselves forward, then proceed with a discourse on the purpose of location in Aboriginal research. Our conclusion connects location with contextual validation.

Putting Ourselves Forward

Kathy: As an Anishinabe woman I assert a specific set of experiences based on my cultural, racial, geographical, and political location. My name is Minogiizhgo kwe (Shining Day woman) and I am Anishinabe kwe (Ojibway woman) from Flying Post First Nation. I am born of an Ojibway mother and a British father and grew up in the bush. My mother was “dis-membered” from her Nation because of the patriarchal Indian Act legislation. She has since been re-membered as a result of Bill C-31. I too have been re-membered. Becoming re-membered is also about being re-membered in terms of who I am. Searching and re-searching has been central to my journey of recovery and discovery of my history, culture, and community. Society’s acknowledgment of my existence as an Anishinabe kwe (Ojibway woman) did not come naturally or easily. If Indian policy had fulfilled its goals, my ancestors and I would have been extinguished. The fact that I can say this sets forth the complexities of my political, racial, or cultural location as an Aboriginal woman in Canada. The memories of who I am accompany a position that asserts the survival of my cultural identity and location. My memories are the antithesis of contemporary attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples that permeate popular media in which we are
portrayed as a vanishing race and are relegated to museums and history books. I am remembered and I re-member and this makes my existence visible.

Searching was also central to my experience in the bush. I spent most of my childhood to young adulthood in the bush. The absence of fences, neighbours, and physical boundaries led way for the natural curiosities of a child to grow and be nurtured. My curious nature led me to find my way in the bush. Exploring the woods was my favourite pastime. The wonders that awaited and the possibilities of discoveries made my journeys into uncharted territories even more exciting. I learned to search for food, wood, plants, medicines, and animals. Trees provided markers; streams, rivers, and lakes marked boundaries; plants indicated location, and all this knowledge I developed out of just being in the bush. I believe that growing up in the bush equipped me with an extraordinary set of research skills. My bush socialization has taught me to be conscious of my surroundings, to be observant, to listen and discern my actions from what I see and hear. Elements of the earth, air, water, and sun have taught me to be aware and move through the bush accordingly. My experiences both of being lost in the bush and of knowing the bush really well and learning about its markings have become the roots of my skills as researcher. From these experiences I have also come to understand that, traditionally, Anishinabe people were well-practised researchers whose methodologies were rooted in Aboriginal epistemologies.

Today I am an educator, researcher, coordinator, facilitator, designer, developer, and helper. Because of who I am, I have accepted that my location at times can be isolating as I strive to introduce ideas, methods, and practices of different ways of knowing, thinking, being, and doing. In my work I often find myself trail-blazing, cutting through ideologies, attitudes, and structures ingrained in Euro-Western thought that can make the path for Aboriginal self-determination difficult, even impassable. I expose people to new ideas and different ways of thinking, being, and doing. I am a visionary with thoughts and dreams about life as an Anishinabe person. In this chapter I am again challenged to embark on a study, a journey of self-determination in Aboriginal education and Anishinabe pedagogy. Yet, I know that I speak and write truly from my own position, experiences, and perspectives and do not represent the Aboriginal peoples’ voice. The only voice I can represent is my own and this is where I place myself.
Cam: I am a Bill C-31 status Indian from Little Pine First Nation in Saskatchewan. My mother is Cree and my father is of Scottish/British ancestry. My mother was “dis-membered” when she married my father, who is White. The government of Canada no longer considered her an Indian and, under the rules of the Indian Act, her treaty status and band membership were taken away. Although, as her son, I too was dis-membered, my generation has begun the process of re-membering, of reclaiming, and of re-searching our Aboriginal heritage. The following is my process of re-membering.

After spending half of her life in residential school, my mother returned home to her reserve and travelled every day to and from the nearest town north of her home to attend high school. It was at Paynton High School that she met my father, a third-generation farm boy whose grandfather had homesteaded about 10 kilometres north of town. After graduation, my parents both moved to Saskatoon where my mother attended a business college and my father attended a program in commercial construction. They soon married, had two boys, and moved around wherever my father could find work. After working in the construction trade for a few years, my father bought a half share of the family farm and moved us back to the homestead. It was there that my earliest memories were formed: the smell of freshly mown grass, clear days with piercing blue skies, and the sound of caragana pods popping in the hot sun. As a child, I remember trying to avoid the bare white-hot light bulb that hung down from a bent nail above the sink where my mother bathed us, getting dressed in the morning beside the diesel-burning furnace in the middle of our tiny house, and eating canned nuts while listening to the Beatles “Let It Be” album on our eight-track stereo.

I have happy memories of growing up on the farm: doing farm work with my family, playing with the neighbour’s kids, and going to town to pick up the mail. My memories of school are equally happy: making friends, participating in class, and riding the bus. Yet in retrospect, as I remember and discuss my childhood with my colleagues in graduate school, I have realized that what is missing from my memories is as revealing as the memories themselves. Since my brothers and I were the only Aboriginal students in the entire school, I have always wondered why I could recall so few experiences of racism during those early years. As I remember the context of my experience, the answer to my question is unveiled. My family did not live on the reserve and we associated mostly with our White relatives in and around Paynton. We participated
in community associations and events in Paynton: 4-H, softball, curling, library, sports days, auctions, dances, and church. We conducted all of our business in White communities. For all intents and purposes, we lived like White people and because of our connections at many levels (family, business, friends), we were accepted as White.

To be sure, my family suffered many experiences of racism. I remember the way that many of my father’s relatives shunned my mother and spoke of her in a patronizing or demeaning manner. I remember my mother crying when the captain of the Paynton ladies’ softball team pushed her and said, “Go home! We don’t want to play with you!” I remember my brother (whose complexion was visibly darker than my own) being teased and getting his ears pulled until they bled by an older boy on the bus. Yet I retain a certain nostalgia for my early childhood, when I did not yet understand what was going on around me. It wasn’t until I left the comfortable confines of our rural community for the city that I began to experience racism in a more direct way, which had a dramatic effect on me.

For me then, my life experience had left many questions unanswered. Remembering and reflecting on my experiences as an Aboriginal person is Aboriginal re-search. Through the telling and retelling of my story, I am able to reclaim, revise, and rename it so that I come to a new understanding about it.

*Kathy:* What we’ve experienced and seen people do in our communities is that we always introduce ourselves. We say who we are and where we come from. People will ask us who our family is. “Oh, so you’re so and so’s daughter or you’re so and so’s girl.” Sometimes you tell people what your territory is: “This is where I come from,” and you locate that geographically. Sometimes people will ask what it’s like there.

*Cam:* When you’re walking around the First Nations University and you meet someone you don’t know or you’ve never met before, the first question is always “Where are you from?” and you don’t mean “Are you from Saskatoon or Vancouver or Ottawa,” but “Where geographically is your Aboriginal community?” There’s an assumption that we have that community. Some Aboriginal peoples don’t have that land base.

*Kathy:* Yeah, but I don’t think community is reserve. I think that’s kind of a boxed-in definition. I think a reserve is a fabricated and constructed mythology and so when I say, “Where are you from?” I don’t mean,
“What reserve are you from?” I mean in a broader sense, “Where do you come from?”

Cam: So you’re talking physical, spiritual ....

Kathy: Yeah, and geographically too because we’re not all from a reserve and to just make that assumption, I think, is almost to ethnically cleanse ourselves when we think that. Who you are is related to where you are from in terms of place, family, clan, and nation. Yesterday I met another Aboriginal woman and I told her that I was Anishnabe. If somebody doesn’t ask right away when I meet them, then I’ll tell them who I am and where I come from; that I’m not from here, I’m from Ontario. And I think that’s important because then they have a bit more of an idea of the reference point that I have, but also the reference point that I don’t have. In terms of having knowledge of Saskatchewan, right away if they know that I’ve just moved here, they know that I don’t necessarily know some things yet. I think that when we say who we are, it’s almost like knowing who we are is connected to our healing as Indigenous peoples. It’s connected to what we stand for individually and collectively. Who you are speaks to your ancestors. When you say who you are, it acknowledges them. It acknowledges them if you have a name that is your spirit name or saying your name in your language also acknowledges who you are in relation to the creator and the spirit because that’s your spirit name.

Cam: It’s kind of like … because we don’t all look brown and you might not know someone is Aboriginal. I mean you look at someone and you make assumptions based on how they look. When I meet someone who is working in an Aboriginal community, I ask myself, “What stake does this person have in this community?” So when you locate at the outset, I think I can make assumptions about people based on that. I assume that a person has more of a stake in a community because of their connections or ties or family that might be in that community. The things I might say depend on whether I believe I am talking to an insider or an outsider. I will express views that I think might be shared and see whether they are reflected in the person that I’m talking to. It’s a way of connecting. If you locate and that’s reflected back to you, then you have something in common and there’s a connection and you’ve moved beyond a certain boundary, landmark, or hurdle and you’re into
the next stage in a relationship where you ask, “What are some other connections we could make? Are there other people that we know that are in common? Is this someone that should be closer to my circle?”

*Kathy:* How does that benefit us as researchers?

*Cam:* We never make the assumption that our positionality is neutral. We never think to ourselves that we can treat each other the same, that there is some sort of generic Canadian person and that we can all be friends because we are *not* the same. Other people don’t have an Indian Act. White people are not subject to funny looks or funny things that people say. We are not treated the same way.

*Kathy:* I think that as researchers when we put ourselves forward, when I say who I am and where I’m from, we have those exchanges where we identify ourselves. As a researcher in a community, when I’ve done community-based research and I’ve talked to elders or people in the community about seeking answers or searching for something, I let them know who I am and what my intent is because they are suspicious of people extracting knowledge. We are suspicious of people misrepresenting us. We are suspicious of people who take knowledge and use it and we are suspicious of being exploited and used. That knowledge that we give sometimes gets turned around and used against us. So, say, when Statistics Canada comes into the community and they want to enumerate, a lot of communities don’t let that happen because, number one, that’s our knowledge. Also, at times information is used against the community and not for the benefit of the community, but to create policy or create funding guidelines that really marginalize communities. I think when I’ve gone into communities and I locate, there’s an openness from people in the community. I think they’re more willing to talk with me and there’s a bit more of a trust that’s already there.

*Cam:* People make assumptions about who you are about, what your intentions might be, because you are an insider, not an outsider.

*Kathy:* The other thing is that when you locate, they know that the reason you’re collecting information is to make things better, that hopefully there will be an outcome that will be useful to the community in some way.
Cam: Well, I think they make that assumption because they know that you have a personal stake in it, so you’re not likely to use or misuse information for your own personal benefit if there is another personal cost to your family.

Kathy: And I think that saying who we are and where we come from is just something that’s always been done. It’s putting ourselves forward. It is part of your honour and your respect not only for yourself, but for your family, your nation, your clan, your genealogy. It’s respect for who you’re addressing, or who you’re talking to, or who you’re representing. It lets people know your relatedness. It’s like when we were in our research class (in our doctoral program) and people did their presentations, we would often ask them, “So what does this have to do with you? Why are you doing this?” It’s almost connected to your motive. “How are you invested in this research?” and if people have an investment, then they’re going to do the best that they can do, be responsible and accountable.

Cam: This reminds me of a quantitative research course in which my professor taught us never to pick a topic that’s too close to your heart, the logic being that you’ll be so caught up in it that you’d never finish your thesis. I never took his advice, but the assumption there is that it is possible for a person to conduct research that is completely unrelated to you personally, that you’re not interested in, that you have no experience or connection with whatsoever. That you could come in as an objective scientist, take a topic, study it, and make a valid representation or some valid generalizations about the subject based on the data that you collect. I think that’s not possible because if you have no stake in a subject, I don’t see how you can do an adequate job of researching that topic.

Kathy: We’re saying that if you want to do ethical research that accurately represents who it is for and who it represents, then you have to be positioned in it and connected to it.

Cam: I believe that it is unethical to do research in which you have no stake whatsoever—no interest, no personal connection with, no reason other than your training as a scientist. You need to have some reason for doing it. When you explain your methodology, you need to be able to answer the question “Why are you doing research?” and you don’t
have to be able to say that you’re carrying on your father’s research as you promised him on his deathbed, but you have to at least have an interest in the topic.

*Kathy:* Well, what happens if you have no connection? Some of the anthropological accounts of Aboriginal ceremony or society or culture that we read in articles or books are inaccurate representations and racially biased.

*Cam:* Why are they inaccurate?

*Kathy:* I think it’s because they don’t have a cultural lens upon which to base their research, or the kind of authority of knowledge to study Aboriginal peoples.

*Cam:* I think that if a researcher studies any question in which they have no stake, then they really don’t care what the answer to the question is. They collect the data without any understanding of its context and without any personal connection or stake in the data. They make no attempt to guess what the stories collected in a study might mean to the people who tell them. For example, the creation stories are often dismissed as some sort of superstitious myth. Both the research and the researcher lose respect and validity. There are lurking variables that are not accounted for. The data are skewed.

*Kathy:* Part of the point of Indigenous research methodology is to take ownership of our own language, so taking language from mainstream research and plopping it in here is not what we should be doing. We need to speak from our own position and in our own voice. Sometimes we recreate language.

*Cam:* When we locate, we are saying, “This is just my view.” It’s not the view of the Anishnabe nation because I’m not Anishnabe. It’s not the view of the Coastal nations. It’s not the view of a 100 percent, full-blooded Cree. It’s not the view of women. It’s just my view and this is who I am. This is my mother. This is my father. These are my ancestors. This is where I grew up geographically. This was my experience as I grew up. And based on all of those things, this is what I think. You might say that any part of my experience accounts for my opinion and that is the whole point—that who I am mitigates what I say. I might
make any number of seemingly radical statements and the reason I might say any one of those things is based in part on my personal experience. We locate because what you remember about what anyone says depends in large part on who is doing the talking.

*Kathy and Cam:* Our dialogue voiced our expressions about location as a research methodology. Through our dialogue we hoped to model and convey some initial ideas upon which to base further discussions. We both spoke about remembering, community, ownership, representation, and connection.

The section that follows expands on the ideas we discussed and challenges us to unlearn colonial research agendas and processes. Today we must be creative in revising research methodologies to make our research more Indigenous and counter-colonial. Through their work, authors such as Tuhiwai Smith (1999); Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, and MacKay (1998); Deloria (1998); and Monture-Angus (1995) have encouraged us to turn around, to look back, and to rethink the language, terms, and methods we employ in research. In our discourse on the significance of location in research we found a recurrent use of the prefix *re-* . Accordingly, we have employed the prefix *re-* to divide issues into different sections as we examine the purpose of location in Indigenous research, thus serving the larger purpose of rehumanizing research, which is to foster a knowledge creation process that takes into account the underlying and often hidden factors of the researcher and producer of knowledge.

**The Purpose of Location in Aboriginal Research**

It means revealing our identity to others; who we are, where we come from, our experiences that have shaped those things, and our intentions for the work we plan to do. Hence, “location” in Indigenous research, as in life, is a critical starting point. (Sinclair, 2003, p. 122)

There are a number of reasons why location is essential to Aboriginal research methodology. First, researching Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal peoples without the consent of the Aboriginal community is unethical. Aboriginal peoples have been misrepresented and exploited for countless generations as the subjects of academic, “scientific” studies conducted by non-Aboriginals. As a result, Aboriginal communities
today are no longer content to be passive objects of “scientific” study, but demand to know who is doing the research and for what purposes. Many Aboriginal communities have appointed research units to govern research inquiries and projects related to their community. In doing community-based research, for example, the Aboriginal community and cultural protocols demand to know three basic things: (1) Who is doing the research?; (2) How is the research being done?; and (3) What purpose does the research serve to the community? When it comes to Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal knowledge, researchers today must be prepared to explain who they are and what interest they have in the proposed research before they are allowed to proceed.

Second, location helps to offset existing unbalanced scholarship about Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal scholars echo that it is no longer acceptable to have non-Aboriginal researchers publishing voyeuristic accounts of Aboriginal peoples in the absence of community sanctioning (Gilchrist, 1997; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). If location were a more widely used component of Aboriginal research methodology, readers would be more easily able to distinguish between authors who have a vested interest in the research and those who do not.

Third, Fixico (1998) asserts that one of the roles of ethical Aboriginal research is to eradicate ethnocentrism in the writing of Aboriginal history and representation. We believe that research conducted from a “neutral” or “objective” location is Eurocentric and is, therefore, unethical. Ethnocentric writing can be avoided, however, if the writer reveals his or her epistemological location at the outset through a brief introductory autobiography.

Finally, when we talk about research in Aboriginal circles we are not just talking about the goal and the finish; we are talking about everything that happens in between. Between the beginning and the end of any given research project is process. Aboriginal research methodologies are as much about process as they are about product. It is in the process of conducting research that the researcher engages the community to share knowledge, recreation, and work. As Tuhiwai Smith (1999) says, “Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviors as an integral part of methodology” (p. 15). The final product is always secondary to the community benefiting from the process, and in order for this process to happen, the researchers must locate themselves. The actual research is in the research process, which cannot take place without the trust of the community, and one way to gain trust is to locate yourself.
If research about Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal knowledge is to be useful to Aboriginal communities, location is critical for a multitude of reasons, which we discuss here under headings that we call the “Re’s.” “Re” means to redo; to look twice, and is the teaching of respect in the West direction of the Medicine Wheel. In our dialogue and through our process of considering knowledge creation and research, we found ourselves inadvertently returning to the notions of respectful representations, revising, reclaiming, renaming, remembering, reconnecting, recovering, and researching. All of these ideas are associated with looking again to uncover, unlearn, recover, and relearn how and why location is a fundamental principle of Indigenous research. Since much of our knowledge, experiences, stories, histories, and lives have been disrespected and misrepresented, it seems only natural to begin our “Re’s” with respectful representations.

Respectful Representations

Representation is important as a concept because it gives the impression of “the truth.” When I read texts, for example, I frequently orientate myself to a text world in which the center of academic knowledge is either in Britain, the United States or Western Europe; in which words such as “we,” “us,” “our,” “I” actually exclude me ... they still do not entirely account for the experiences of indigenous peoples. (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 35)

To look twice is to practise respect. Respect calls upon us to consider how we are represented by others, the expectations that others have of us, and how we represent ourselves. As Aboriginal scholars, we have both been highly dismayed by the realization that our experience as Aboriginal peoples is poorly represented in the academy. There are few places that accurately reflect Aboriginal reality, where we can see and say, “This represents who I am.” Thus far, Aboriginal peoples have been represented in curricula, research, and scholarship (if at all) as a savage, noble, stoic, and, most disturbingly, a dying race. Images and representations of Aboriginal peoples that predominate in media, popular culture, and research studies portray us not as we are, but as non-Aboriginals think we are. To various degrees, we all struggle to free ourselves from the colonial beliefs and values that have been ingrained in us. Throughout the world such “neutral” and “objective” research
has been used to justify the oppression and genocide of the Other for the good of humankind. Gilchrist (1997) explains that:

> [t]he fact that much research does not confront ideologies of oppression prevents the application to research of critical knowledge regarding traditional culture, colonial history and racist structure. This results in research which does not use appropriate concepts as variables and defines one’s culture using the cultural beliefs of another. (Gilchrist, 1997, p. 76)

This lack of accurate representations of Aboriginal peoples in almost every facet of popular culture leads us (Aboriginal peoples) to seek validation in one another. This is a two-edged sword; while Aboriginal peoples are extremely proud of Aboriginal individuals who become famous in sports, politics, or the media, generalized representations of Aboriginal role models can negate the reality of oppression. A minority of Aboriginal peoples who have successfully negotiated Western culture are too often held up as proof that the problems of oppression, racism, and inequity can be easily overcome or, worse, that the roots of these problems lie not within institutions or systems of governance but within Aboriginal peoples themselves.

There are inappropriate expectations placed upon us from both inside and outside of the Aboriginal community. We ourselves perpetuate the notion that one person can be a positive role model for the whole Aboriginal race. At times we replicate, reinforce, and support misrepresentations of Aboriginal peoples through the use of stereotypical images. As we mirror and model ourselves after one another in search of our true identity, we form a framework for how we think we should be.

Further, unlike White researchers, we are conscious that putting our individual representations into “writing can be dangerous because sometimes we reveal ourselves in ways which get misappropriated and used against us” (Smith, 1999, p. 36). We are asked about our opinions as if they represent the opinions of all Aboriginal peoples in Canada. As students, as staff, and simply as individuals we are always expected to be the Aboriginal voice and the Aboriginal expert. We are expected to carry the flag of diversity, of tolerance, and of Aboriginal achievement.

When we self-locate, we represent our own truths. We represent our own reality. In Indigenous circles one rarely sees an Indigenous
person speaking on behalf of another nation or another person. Instead, we generally hear people stating up front that they are expressing only their own experiences and opinions. They represent only themselves because, as the old cliché goes, you do not know another person’s journey unless you have travelled in his or her moccasins. You cannot speak about or represent something that is not yours. To do so would be perceived in Indigenous communities as arrogant, audacious, and disrespectful. Stating at the outset that you speak only for yourself also means who you do not represent or speak for. In terms of representation, location as a research methodology is ethical. As an anti-oppressive methodology, location brings ownership and responsibility to the forefront. When researchers own who or what they represent, they also reveal what they do not represent.

The concept of representation is significant because it leaves an imprint of what is true. Location brings to the forefront both our commonalities and our distinctiveness, distinguishing us from one another and avoiding the “pan-Indian myth” that Aboriginal peoples are all the same, one race, and one people. We are not all the same. We say Aboriginal peoples as a plural in order to denote our diversity. There are many facets that make us who we are. To be accurate, our representations must take into account cultural and colonial histories and contexts. We must consider who we are relationally, interracially, intergenerationally, geographically, physically, spiritually, politically, socially, and economically. Being an Aboriginal person today is not easy, and it is no simple task to represent ourselves respectfully. We need a hologram to illustrate the multiplexity, multidimensionality, and interconnection of all aspects of our Aboriginal realities.

Locating oneself is as lively and active as Aboriginal reality today. Each time we locate ourselves, our representations change and, depending on the context in which we locate, we may or may not emphasize certain aspects of our realities. Yet, as we locate, we must still account for the relative aspects of who we are and thus represent ourselves accordingly and distinctly. Location will not simply be about your name or where you are from, but will reflect more of a dynamic and transformative representation. For example, Kathy has received two Anishinabe names and walked with two different clans thus far in her life. At one point in her life she located using her first name and clan and now locates using the second name and clan. Life changes transform our locations and thus our locations become dynamic. An Indigenous scholar, knowing that location is transformative, is
challenged in academia and in written research because academia is dominantly based in written text and print. Indigenous knowledge and culture is dynamic—ever flowing, adaptable, and fluid. In a truly transformative research process, opinions, thoughts, ideas, and theories are in a constant flux. Yet writing on paper is one-dimensional, permanent, and fixed, a snapshot of a single moment in time. Thus, to Indigenous scholars, location becomes a crucial means of contextualizing their lens and reference points in a given time. Location is transformed as our lenses, perceptions, understandings, and knowledge are transformed.

Representations are either broadened or limited by world view, socialization, internalization, and perceptual lenses. It is impossible to represent all Aboriginal peoples in research, and respectful researchers should not try to do so. It is better to locate relevant and distinct aspects of oneself rather than to make broad general statements. Location forms the basis of representation and is integral to writing and representing oneself with respect. When we look twice, we create our own checks and balances regarding respectful representation.

Re-Vising

You must understand that for people like us, there are no such things as models. We are called upon to constantly create our models .... Colonialism means that we must always rethink everything. (Sembene, as cited in hooks, 1992, p. 2)

Any illumination of past, present, and future First Nations conditions demands a complete deconstruction of the history and application of colonial and racist ideology and, most importantly, of the impact (personal and political) of racism. That is, we need to know how we got into the mess we’re in. Historical written texts about Aboriginal peoples reveal more about the ideological perspective and position of the authors (patriarchy, paternalism, racism, White supremacy, fear, ignorance, and ethnocentrism) than they do about their subjects (Voyageur, 2000). We need to have an analysis of colonization (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) and our cultural past to decolonize our mind, heart, body, and spirit. Without this critical knowledge, we are operating in a vacuum. Thus, recontextualizing and revising Aboriginal experiences, events, and history can help us make sense of our reality (Henderson,
Research As Resistance

Location in research has a role as we revise and recontextualize our past, present, and future.

Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal peoples are wonderfully dynamic and diverse. As we recover from colonization, racism, residential schooling, and genocidal policies, we are retrieving and locating bits and pieces of who we are. Essentially, we are in the process of pulling ourselves together. Location means that we begin by stating who we are and we revise this statement over and over again. We each locate ourselves differently at various points in our lives. As our recovery from colonialism progresses, we speak about our past and present experiences with more awareness, understanding, and knowledge, and we revise the stories of our lives. Revision through location is essential and integral to our recovery process. We will tell our stories one way today, then revise and retell them tomorrow. The means by which we locate may also be revised. Sometimes we locate with song, dance, or story or we locate using ceremony, language, or tradition. For example, when we open a class with a smudge, we locate our cultural identity through a traditional ceremony. When we open a meeting with a prayer, we locate ourselves through our spirituality. We can also locate in more contemporary avenues through our dress, hair, jewellery, or general presentation. When we walk into a room wearing clothing with Indigenous motifs and symbols, we are locating our cultural identity or alliances. Some people wear feathers in their hair; others wear beautiful earrings of silver, turquoise, feathers, carvings, Medicine Wheels, or beading. Location as a cultural protocol provides us with an important opportunity to revise our self-concept and the way in which we present ourselves.

Re-Claiming: Avoiding the Extraction of Knowledge

Native scholars and writers are demonstrating that “voice” can be, must be, used within academic studies not only as an expression of cultural integrity but also as an attempt to begin to balance the legacy of dehumanization and bias entrenched in Canadian studies about Native peoples. (LaRocque, 1996, p. 13)

To locate is to make a claim about who you are and where you come from, your investment and your intent. To put yourself forward means to say who you are, give yourself voice, and claim your position.
Reclaiming creates space for Aboriginal authors to name who they are and to claim their location in relation to their research topic. At the onset of this chapter, we (the writers) each claimed a specific location based on our individual experiences. Aboriginal peoples must now say who we are directly and proudly, in the glory of our traditional regalia, songs, ceremonies, and languages and in the reality of contemporary issues. In reclaiming our location we assert our presence and power to define ourselves. By asserting our presence we refuse to be relics of the past. In defining ourselves we establish authority over our own knowledge. Thus, we begin to counter knowledge extraction and define our location in our own reality. Taking a position and owning your location is a reclaiming of your personal space and territory in the context of research and writing. Claiming your personal space within your research and writing counters objectivity and neutrality with subjectivity, credibility, accountability, and humanity. We will no longer be the subjects of objective study; we are the subjects of our own knowledge creation. When we claim our location, we become congruent with Indigenous world views and knowledge, thus transforming our place within research.

The writing of Indigenous knowledge is a delicate topic. First, there is the issue of which Indigenous knowledge should be put into text and which should not. Non-Indigenous writers have historically extracted Indigenous knowledge for their own interests, with Indigenous peoples receiving little acknowledgment and practically no benefit. Further, while there have been innumerable misrepresentations and wild inaccuracies, Indigenous peoples “have never been able to stop the traffic in distorted and sensationalized imagery” (Miller, 1998, p. 106). Indigenous authors, producers, actors, researchers, artists, songwriters, and others have invested incredible time and energy to counter racist images as they tell, sing, write, act, and paint from an Indigenous perspective. Many of the references for this chapter evidence Indigenous voice and representation. While there has been some movement toward more accurate representations of Indigenous peoples, the onslaught of distorted images continues through such media as television, movies, literature, school curricula, and popular culture. As Aboriginal writers perform the critical role of countering and critiquing these misrepresentations, we must be considerate about what knowledge we put into text. Considerations such as cultural protocol, sacredness, oral traditions, copyright, and ownership all must be factored into deciding what Indigenous knowledge goes into
text. However, as we record our own Indigenous histories, stories, and experiences via location, we reclaim ourselves.

Re-Naming Research in Our Own Language

There are at least two issues around what we call “renaming.” The first centres on the word “research.” In many Aboriginal communities the very word “research” makes our skin crawl as we remember the way our knowledge has been misrepresented and extracted. The word “research” evokes images of ethnographers, missionaries, explorers, and social scientists voyeuristically noting their observations and labelling Indigenous peoples as hedonistic, barbaric, and savage. We are reminded of White archaeologists who have extracted the bones of our ancestors and displayed them ceremoniously like flags in museums around the world. The word “research” has too much racist and colonial baggage attached to it to be used in an Indigenous context. If we are to gather and share knowledge in an Indigenous way, we must find new words to liberate and decolonize our processes for doing so. We call on Indigenous peoples to rename our process of gathering and sharing knowledge (aka: research) to distinguish it from the exploitation, sterility, and individualism inherent to Western positivist research. It is necessary to rename “research” in order to exemplify that the Indigenous process for gathering and sharing knowledge is of a completely unique paradigm.

The second issue around renaming is related to language usage. Learning the English language from mothers whose first language is not English has given us unique epistemological lenses. Cultural world views are embedded in language. Therefore, as native Ojibway and Cree speakers, our mothers held world views that were distinctly Indigenous. As we grew up, these world views were transmitted to us linguistically in English, but also physically and psychologically in Cree and Ojibway. Although English is our first language, we learned to speak it and write it through lenses (our mothers’) that were distinctly Indigenous. Therefore, the rules and structure of the English language make it inadequate to express what we truly mean. In order to express ourselves, we have no choice but to break these rules to make the words work for us, or to create new words. We must use the English language in a way that is congruent with Indigenous experiences and cultures. For example, a friend of ours, Professor Gale Cyr of Timiskaming First
Nation, created the term “matrifocalist Indigenist” in locating herself at a public lecture. Her term represents a perspective that is unknown to Western ways of knowing and for which there was, until now, no English term. As another example, Indigenous peoples often say that we “Indigenize” ideas, concepts, and processes by bringing an Indigenous world view to them. Although we Indigenize things every day, the word “Indigenize” is not in the English dictionary.

We need to transcend the rules and limitations of the English language to make it work for us as Indigenous peoples. Cole’s (2002) research and poetry is an example of such transcendence. In poetic form, Cole demonstrates First Nations’ knowings as a legitimate discourse in education and research through the analogy of a canoe journey. His poetry integrates Aboriginal epistemology and validates frameworks derived from Indigenous knowledge. Cole (2002) contends that paragraphs and chapters are meaningless, and that academically correct punctuation distances Aboriginal research methods from Indigenous concepts of space, time, and speech patterns. Cole writes for meaning rather than grammatical correctness and offers his experiences/location as a reference point rather than as expert testimony.

Ultimately, we know that the meaning of our words will often be overlooked or misunderstood not only because there is no adequate way to express our meaning in English, but also because many people lack the epistemological framework to understand it. Yet it is a burden we must accept as we forge the sword of research into an implement that works for Indigenous peoples.

Re-Membering

Through the re-membering process, individuals are absolved of blame and the community is brought into re-connecting. (Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, and MacKay, 1998, p. 114)

Locating ourselves is a remembering process. The word “remember” can have two different meanings: (1) to recall from memory or (2) to reconnect. Location establishes connection through memory. When we locate, we search through our memory banks and retrieve information about who we are, where we come from, and our roots. Everyone has the capacity for this kind of memory. For Aboriginal Canadian peoples, locating re-members us with our ancestors and with our Nations. We were externally dis-membered as Indian or non-Indian, status and
non-status according to the Indian Act and the government of Canada, which has only attempted to dis-member us from our cultural origins. Despite the intrusions into our membership, we can re-member ourselves through our DNA, through our spirituality, and through our blood memory of cultural origin.

As Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, and MacKay (1998) explain, “research is understood in Native terms to be a quest for the roots of problems, and a convening of the voices needed to re-member the history and assess the future” (p. 114). Research as a “learning circle” (Nabigon et al., 1998) is a process that generates information sharing, connections, builds capacity, and seeks balance and healing. A learning circle also facilitates the remembering process and re-membering of individual experiences into a collective knowing and consciousness. The idea of re-membering as a research method and process facilitates a full reconnection, which is also healing to our recovery process. Re-membering facilitates recovering stories, experiences, teachings, tradition, and connections.

The general discourse that is propagated in the academy is that we as Aboriginal peoples are losing our culture, languages, and traditions. The truth is that we have been subjected to centuries of programs and policies deliberately calculated to strip us of our language and culture. We have not “misplaced” anything. We have survived and continue to survive countless political, educational, legal, and military mechanisms that are meant to eradicate our ethnicity from the face of the earth, yet we are still here. We are proud to stand beside McGuire (1997) in pointing out that Aboriginal peoples, “of course, never vanished, nor did they forget their own histories and heritages. They have always taught their children this culture” (p. 77).

Fortunately for us, human beings have an amazing capacity for memory both on individual and collective levels. Elders have evidenced their memory capacity through oral tradition as histories, events, songs, dances, ceremonies, and traditions have been retold and passed from one generation to the next. Memory is more than a mental process of recalling facts, experiences, and information. Human beings also have a capacity for sensory, physical, spiritual, and emotional memory. Physical or body memory refers to the body’s capacity to remember how to skin a moose, snare a rabbit, or where to pick medicines. Sensory memory is the kind of memory where smells, sounds, or tastes evoke vivid memories of other times, people, and places. These memories, for example, come alive when we smell a burning fire and remember the
cabin our grandparents lived in. Spiritual memory is the extrasensory perception or connection we have with the spiritual world. Some say that *déjà vu* is a form of spiritual memory and that at a spiritual level we are remembering the earth journey our spirit was shown prior to our birth. Emotional memory rests in our hearts and in our capacity to remember emotional connections with other people. We associate feelings from the past with feelings in the present and we make assumptions about feelings in the future. Holistically, our memories are activated when we locate, and through location we re-member, reconnect, and recover our very identity. We are proud that after so many generations of oppression and genocide (attempts to make us disappear, be forgotten, and forget), we are able to “re-search” and “re-member” ourselves with the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects of our beautiful heritage. Location within the research process is essentially both remembering who we are and “re-membering” within our Nations. Indigenous researchers, we believe, research to remember and re-member.

**Re-Connecting**

Indigenous researchers are expected, by their communities and by the institutions which employ them, to have some form of historical and critical analysis of the role of research in the indigenous world. (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 5)

Colonization and genocide have disconnected Aboriginal peoples from our natural contexts. Henderson (2000) states that if the context does not allow people to move in their world to discover as much about themselves as they can, then such a context is artificial. As Aboriginal researchers locate themselves, the context from which they come becomes validated. Contextual validation makes our reality, experiences, and existence as Aboriginal peoples visible. Aboriginal researchers are then challenged with making transformative changes in research processes and practices. A revolution or transformation is a shift in context. “We do, however, have a common struggle—that is to decolonize ourselves and our knowledge production. We need to change research methods to end the objectification of Aboriginal communities, and to encourage action based knowledge that is useful on the road to self-determination” (Gilchrist, 1997, p. 80). Subjectivity
via location is one way to counter dehumanizing objectification in research.

As we (Aboriginal peoples) put our knowledge, experiences, and world views into written text, we must do so in connection to our communities (whoever, whatever, or wherever they may be). Location in research authenticates relations within community. To write in the absence of connection to community or tribal group could be perceived and interpreted as second-hand writing or as writing in a vacuum. Library research and writing is not enough. We need to talk to other Aboriginal peoples and to go beyond the library (Mihesuah, 1998). We need to be coming from a context that is based on a current reality and that reflects representations of that reality.

Location exposes the researchers’ current context as details about the researchers such as where they are from, their race and gender, who they are connected to, and what their research intentions are become revealed. We take the position here that it is impossible to conduct valid and ethical research about Aboriginal peoples without locating because location asserts the identity of the writer and the importance of the research. For example, a quick scanning of the “Aboriginal” section of any bookstore will reveal countless books written about Aboriginal peoples by non-Aboriginal authors passing themselves off as “Indian experts.” Very few books about Aboriginal peoples reveal anything substantial about the identity and location of the author. It is as if these authors have no connection or affiliation with any community whatsoever, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. Yet all researchers must certainly have connections either with an Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal community or with both. Unfortunately, with no knowledge of these connections, we are unable to assess the lens through which the researcher views the data and there are no mechanisms to flag Aboriginal community participants of biased research results (Gilchrist, 1997). While such studies collect, interpret, and present data as scientific truth, it is often not useful to Indigenous peoples.

Location as an Aboriginal research methodology is one way to ensure that researchers of Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal knowledge are connected with and accountable to the Aboriginal community. As Kathy stated in the initial dialogue, ethical research on Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal knowledge is conducted with the goal of enhancing life for Aboriginal peoples and communities. Location makes the researcher accountable to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Putting yourself forward as a researcher
tells the community whether or not you are connected and committed to those you are researching. Further, our sections on respectful representation, remembering, reconnection, and recovery all clearly identify how location makes the research ethical and accountable. When the community knows who you are and what you are doing, the nebulous, neutral, objective voice is overcome. Through location the researcher reconnects the research to self and to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community.

Re-Covering

In recovering our truths, we have a responsibility to uncover and realize our historicity. That is, we have to know our historical truth. Recovery of truth is evident in how, what, when, and where a person locates himself or herself. For example, we (the writers) can both locate residential school experiences in our families, which is essential to recovering elements of our historicity. In the beginning of the chapter, we also located our racial ethnicity, geographic upbringing, and absences of cultural teachings. Seeking our truth in our location aids us in recovering ourselves and our strengths, and in uncovering historical oppressions. Our perceptions of who we are and how we locate ourselves are a result of our own personal and political consciousness. Nonetheless, recovering truth inherently implies taking off the blinders to become conscious. Another example is Cam’s earlier references to how he didn’t experience racism in his youth. But as he grew and learned more about his own history, he began to see that he had not escaped experiences of racism or oppression. The very fact that his ethnic heritage was not acknowledged or celebrated, as if it were something to be ashamed of, was racism. By this same principle, we (Kathy and Cam) cannot just say that we are Cree or Anishinabe, but we must also acknowledge our European heritage. The search for our truth is often marred with inaccurate images and representations that diminish or ignore our cultural identity. Many Aboriginal peoples experience internal chaos, conflict, and confusion about who they really are. It is as if they are being torn in two. A critical turning point in healing and recovering our truth is the moment you recognize that today there are many truths and that within the collective Indigenous experience there are many individual diversities. Recovering, accepting, and becoming proud of who we are as we tell and retell our individual
stories is a difficult challenge. Yet location is essential to the recovery of our individual and collective experiences and identities as Indigenous peoples because it honours individual diversity and recovery of self from internalized colonialism, racism, and oppression.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers today who tackle any facet of Indigenous study must have a critical analysis of colonialism and an understanding of Western scientific research as a mechanism of colonization. For location to be insightful and conscious, a critical analysis is required among all researchers. Recovering truth in history implies the necessary element of uncovering history. That is, we need to be able to re-examine, question, contemplate, and comprehend how research has been used to reinforce racist notions of evolutionary thought and how research has therefore justified and legitimized genocide in policy and action. Only when we have decolonized ourselves can we recover, contemplate, and envision ways in which research can be used to eradicate racism and lift the oppression. The answers, our Elders tell us, are in our own Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and ways. In recovering Indigenous paradigms and methods, the knowledge set that is expected of an Aboriginal researcher far exceeds what has been expected of non-Aboriginal researchers. As Aboriginal researchers, we must be masters of both our own world views and Euro-Western world views. We must have the ability to critically examine Western research methods and to develop methods that will work within Indigenous paradigms. Also, we must have knowledge of the cultural context, protocols, and issues within which we are researching. Gilchrist (1997) further explains:

We cannot blame the individual for underlying racist assumptions acquired through socialization and education. However, it is not unreasonable to expect researchers, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal alike (McNab, 1986), to bring with them a thorough background on the history of colonialism and a broad based knowledge of Aboriginal cultures when engaging in research with our communities. Researchers must have a critical interpretation of colonialism and western domination embedded in research methodology. They must be prepared to engage with community representatives so that their research methodology more accurately reflects an Aboriginal point of view. (Gilchrist, 1997, p. 80)

We must also know our own Indigenous epistemologies, genealogies, traditions, and cultures. The origins of our roots are there
for us to learn. Our ancestors call to be remembered and recovered into our present. Cultural traditions, ceremonies, stories, songs, dances, and rituals are our responsibility to learn. Because colonization has attempted to erase our roots, ancestors, and traditions, we must work hard to recover all that we can. Recovering museum artifacts, the bones of our ancestors, and remnants of our cultural identity are the responsibility of Indigenous peoples today. We cannot trust non-Aboriginal researchers to record the stories of our creation and our survival. Indigenous researchers today are hard at work recovering stories, songs, histories, experiences, ancestors, traditions, and cultural identities. And location is a critical part of our recovering process. When it comes to the research of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledge, to be ethical and diligent researchers, we must reveal the lenses that each of us, as human beings, look through.

**Re-Search Methods: Affirming Indigenous Paths**

Free Your Minds, Aboriginal Brothers and Sisters  
Free your minds, Aboriginal brothers and sisters  
Brothers and sisters of turtle island  
Now is the time to wake up  
Get up!  
Rub the sleep from your eyes and wake up!  
Let go of your colonial dreams and wake up!  
Splash cold water on your face, take a drink, and look in the mirror!  
Your cheeks are the gentle curves of grandmother moon  
Your hair is the breeze of mother earth  
There is ice in your breath  
and fire in your eyes  
You are beautiful!  
Aboriginal  
Proud

—Cam Willett, 2004

Aboriginal realities are unique and diverse, and expressing these realities demands creativity and innovation. We encourage Indigenous writers to develop and utilize styles of writing such as narrative, self-location, subjective text, poetry, and storytelling that better reflect Aboriginal realities than do academic prose. Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999)
decolonizing methodologies, Monture-Angus’s (1995) anger, and Cole’s (2002) poetry are only a few examples of literature that exemplify and validate Indigenous world views. LaRocque describes Indigenous voice and location as “Native resistance scholarship” (1996, p. 13). Sinclair (2003) examines how Indigenous scholars operationalize Indigenous world views in their research. Interestingly, she finds that many Indigenous scholars have inherently and creatively integrated their world views into their research in resistance to the restrictive methods of Western positivist research.

Resistance to colonizing research methods involves envisioning and utilizing research methods that better reflect Indigenous world views. In doing so, we help build a foundation for the ongoing development of Indigenous cultural knowledge production in a pattern that is congruent with Indigenous ways of knowing. When Aboriginal scholars in Canada bring our voices to our research, we bring “the other half of Canada into light … we offer new ways of seeing and saying things … and provide new directions and fresh methodologies to cross-cultural research” (LaRocque, 1996, p. 12). The distinction and innovation of Indigenous philosophy, Indigenous thought, and Indigenous methodology is, by definition, contrary to Western epistemology and positivist research methodology. There is no dignity for Aboriginal peoples in a philosophy that attempts to destroy, distort, and/or reject oneself. Aboriginal researching calls upon us to examine research motives, values, beliefs, and methods by questioning, reflecting, and acknowledging our locations (Archibald, 1993). Movers and shakers trail-blazing in the terrain of Aboriginal research methodology must, therefore, have tenacity, courage, and faith. Research of Indigenous peoples by Indigenous researchers remains an emerging, yet powerful, body of literature. We can only reassure Indigenous scholars that you are not alone; it is there if you seek it out.

Location Equals Contextual Validation

When we have overcome the myths of value neutrality and objectivity; when we insist on historical contextualization and cultural acknowledgement, and when we have complete access to technical knowledge and ownership of our research; we will improve the quality and value of research concerning Aboriginal people. Only then will we fully realize the rights of Aboriginal people and construct our own reality. (Gilchrist, 1997, p. 80)
It is time that academics recognize the validity of research processes that account for the influence of the researcher’s reality and experience. Locating self in research brings forward this reality. Critical authors advocate doing so as a response to the crisis in representation where the objective neutrality of writing is no longer considered real (hooks, 1992, 1993; Mihesuah, 1998; Monture-Angus, 1995; Monture-Okanee, 1995; Owens, 2002; Said, 1994; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Tierney, 2002). Many authors encourage writers to “get real” and to see ourselves as an important element in the work of social science research, writing, and representation (Tierney, 2002).

When researching Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal Elders and communities expect researchers to foster a knowledge creation process that accounts for many variables, including epistemological, cultural, colonial, historical, and contemporary contexts of both the researched and the researcher. It is putting ourselves forward that establishes these contexts, guides the research process, and determines research outcomes. Research outcomes, in turn, affect policy, programming, practice, and societal perceptions.

In short, location is good protocol for research methodology because it accounts for the context of the researcher. Further, research becomes transformative both for researched and researcher as individual stories are told and retold. Location ensures that individual realities are not misrepresented as generalizable collectives. Our ancestors gave us membership into nations and traditions; location both remembers and “re-members” us to those things. The recovery processes of location facilitate healing by restoring pride in ourselves.

Gathering and sharing Indigenous knowledge requires pride in self, family, community, culture, nation, identity, economy, and governance; it requires courage to resist the rules and rigours of the dominant culture; and it requires faith that change can be made for the betterment of society as a whole, qualities that ought to be reflected in the location of the researcher. Following the example of a genre of writers who choose to represent themselves via storytelling, poems, or personal narrative (Cole, 2002; hooks, 1992) we end this chapter with a poem. Its meaning and impact depend on you, the reader.

**The Story of Me**

I saw a picture of myself and said “Hey? That’s not me!”

“Yes I am!” said the picture

“No I’m not!” I said
“In all of the pictures I have ever seen
and all the stories I have ever read, I could not see myself”
So I made up a story about me
And whispered it softly to myself at night as I went to sleep
The next day I wrote it down and read it slowly over and over again
It wasn’t right so I crumpled it up, threw it away, and made a new one
Which I hid beneath my pillow and pulled out to look at from time to time
I would have conversations with myself
As I looked in the mirror
And soon
My reflection changed
I began to argue with myself
And very nearly had a falling out with me
Before I forgave myself and made up
And now I’ve gotten used to living with me
I find out something new about myself every day
And sometimes we fight, but usually we get along just fine and
I know the story of me by heart
And sometimes I share it with people around me
Like when I’m meeting a group of people for the very first time
Or when I get close to someone and I want them to know who I really am
Or when I write about things other than myself
So that people don’t get me confused with anyone else
—Cam Willett, 2004

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Research As Resistance

critical, indigenous, & anti-oppressive approaches

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