

## **Co-construction of a Data Collection Tool: A Case Study with Atikamekw Women**

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### **Abstract**

Gendered knowledge, roles, and responsibilities in Indigenous cultures have historically been based on reciprocity and complementarity. By excluding Indigenous women from decision-making, colonial policies have reduced the knowledge base on which decisions are made. Indigenous women's voices have also been largely excluded from research, and researchers have played a substantial



role in their marginalization. It is within this context, and in a research decolonization effort, that we present a case study of the process of co-constructing a data collection tool with Atikamekw women. While preparing a research project on Indigenous women's roles in the governance of land and natural resources, we worked with three Atikamekw women who gave particularly high importance to the process of obtaining participant consent. We designed the consent form together, so that it would address their concerns about trust, transparency, and community involvement throughout the research process. If research is to be decolonized, research tools should not be developed within university offices, but through meaningful collaboration with research participants.

### **Keywords**

Research decolonization; participatory research; data collection tools; consent form; Aboriginal women; Atikamekw

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### **Résumé**

Dans les cultures Autochtones, les savoirs, les rôles et les pratiques étaient historiquement basés sur la réciprocité et la complémentarité entre les genres. En excluant les femmes Autochtones des processus de prise de décision, les politiques coloniales ont réduit la base de savoirs sur laquelle les décisions s'appuient. Les voix des femmes Autochtones ont longtemps été exclues des recherches et les chercheurs ont joué un rôle important dans leur marginalisation. C'est dans ce contexte – et dans un effort de décolonisation de la recherche – que nous présentons une étude de cas du processus de co-construction d'un outil de collecte de données avec des femmes Atikamekw. En préparant un projet de recherche sur le rôle des femmes Autochtones dans la gouvernance du territoire et des ressources naturelles, nous avons travaillé avec trois femmes Atikamekw, qui ont attribué une grande importance au processus d'obtention du consentement des participantes. Nous avons élaboré le formulaire de consentement ensemble, afin qu'il réponde à leurs préoccupations quant à la confiance, la transparence et l'implication de la communauté tout au long de la recherche. Décoloniser la recherche implique que les outils de collecte de données ne devraient pas être élaborés dans des bureaux universitaires, mais par une collaboration significative avec les participants à la recherche.

### **Mots clés**

Décolonisation de la recherche; recherche participative; outils de collecte de données; formulaire de consentement; femmes autochtones; Atikamekw

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## Introduction

The rising interest in collaborative research with Indigenous<sup>1</sup> people has brought a call for decolonized approaches (Castleden et al., 2012; de Leeuw et al., 2012; Gentelet, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, S., 2008). However, as Hunt (2014, p. 28) elegantly puts it: “There is an inherent subtlety to dancing between [the academic and Indigenous] worlds”. Mere sprinkling of Indigenous knowledge on a rigid colonial research framework has more to do with settler appropriation than actual decolonization (Tuck and Yang, 2012). In a context where knowledge co-production is gaining popularity (Davidson-Hunt et al., 2013; Lévesque et al., 2013; Schuttenberg and Guth, 2015), we present a case study of co-construction of a data collection tool with Atikamekw women (Quebec, Canada). Indeed, collaboration should be present all along the research process, including during the early stages that are still often done by researchers alone in their offices. Our research team, which includes an Atikamekw researcher, chose to work with women as their experience with colonialism is different from that of men<sup>2</sup> (O’Brien, 2007), as they have been absent from research to a larger extent than men (Green, 2007), and because specific methodological challenges are associated with conducting research with Indigenous women (Desbiens, 2010). In the paper that follows, we discuss each of these considerations in turn as we describe and analyze our collaborative process of co-creating a data collection tool emphasizing methods for gaining consent in a research context.

### *Colonial exclusion of Indigenous women*

Before colonization, Indigenous societies in Canada were largely based on egalitarian relations between genders (Government of Canada, 1996; Ohmagari and Berkes, 1997; Rude and Deiter, 2004; Van Woudenberg, 2004). “Equality” in these contexts did not necessarily entail people of each gender having the same rights and responsibilities but, rather, a relation of reciprocity based on the respect and complementarity of all gender roles, thus maintaining social equilibrium (Kenny, 2004; LaFromboise, et al. 1990; Lajimodiere, 2011; Lavell-Harvard and Corbiere Lavell, 2006; Sayers and MacDonald, 2001).

Coming from relatively homogenous societies with static, profoundly gendered social roles, colonial settlers were not able to understand the nuances of

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous peoples in Canada include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. The terms Aboriginal and Indian – seen in Canadian government legislation, some organizations’ names and in references cited herein – are used only where they best reflect the terminology of source materials.

<sup>2</sup> This article is based on a study we conducted with Indigenous women in a context where most research involves men. This, however, should not be understood as an implicit recognition of a gender dichotomy. Though they are not discussed in this paper, we fully recognize gender diversity in Indigenous societies (see for example Wilson, A., 1996, 2008; Scheim et al., 2013; Hunt, 2015).

gender roles that structured Indigenous societies (Boyer, 2009; LaFromboise et al., 1990; Suzack et al., 2010). Colonial processes of dispossession and assimilation included measures which directly and indirectly suppressed the gender relations through which Indigenous societies were maintained. For example, settler establishment reduced access to hunting grounds used by Wabanaki men and to marshlands where material for basketry were gathered by Wabanaki women. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wabanaki men gradually invaded the basketry business for lack of access to other resources, thus depriving women of their principal subsistence mean and forcing them to renegotiate their relation to the land. The ability of Wabanaki women to practice basketry, and the respect associated with this culturally significant role, were consequently imperiled (Van Woudenberg, 2004). Colonization first religious, then political sought to homogenize gendered social roles and to align them with the European model (Mihesuah, 2000). Societies qualified as matriarchal or matrilineal by European observers where women played an important role in political decision-making were particularly affected. The *Indian Act* was the principal colonial instrument of restructuration of gender relations, particularly as it institutionalized patriarchal discrimination against Indigenous women (Anderson, 2009; Boyer, 2009; Nahanee, 1997; Van Woudenberg, 2004). Indeed, until 1985, article 12(1)b of the *Indian Act* stipulated that “an Indian woman marrying a non-Indian man ceased to be an Indian” (Séguin, 1981, p. 251). Inversely, a status Indian man marrying a non-status or non-Indian woman kept his status and his right to live on reserve, and his wife and children obtained full status and all the associated rights.

According to article 22.1 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* (United Nations, 2007; adopted by Canada in 2010), particular attention has to be given to the rights and needs of marginalized Indigenous groups, including women. In Canada, although the *Indian Act* was modified by the adoption of amendment C-31 in 1985, and although the C-3 Act was passed in 2011 (following the 2009 Supreme Court ruling *Sharon McIvor and Jacob Grismer v. Canada*), partly addressing discrimination against Indigenous women, designations of status in the *Indian Act* continue to discriminate against women. Marginalization of Indigenous women within Canadian society, including the high rates of violence against them, have prompted advocacy groups such as Quebec Native Women Association (QNWA), Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) and Pauktuutit (the national representative organization of Inuit women in Canada), to denounce colonialism, racism and sexism against Indigenous women. Further, Indigenous women in Canada have been pressuring the federal government for decades to address the inadequate justice response to widespread violence, in recent years advocating for a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (NWAC and FAFIA, 2012), which was

finally launched in December 2015 and officially started its activities in August 2016<sup>3</sup>.

In Quebec, the creation of QNWA in 1974 contributed to consolidating mobilization of Indigenous women in their struggle for improving living conditions and obtaining a place on the political checkerboard (QNWA, 2012; Séguin, 1981). In 1992, the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL) attributed non-voting seats to Indigenous women, youth, elders and friendship centers representatives<sup>4</sup> and the place of women within Indigenous institutions in Quebec has grown ever since. The Atikamekw<sup>5</sup>, with whom we collaborated on this project, elected a woman as Grand Chief in 2006 (and again in 2010) with an absolute majority and for the first time since the band electoral system was instituted by the *Indian Act*. Until 1951, the *Indian Act* explicitly excluded women from local politics; they were forbidden to run for election as chief or councillor (Voyageur, 2008). Today, more and more Indigenous women are involved in band politics, as reflected in the 2008 creation of the Council of Elected Women of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador. At the time, 86 women were acting as chief or councillor in First Nations communities in Quebec (Groupe Nekiera'ha, 2010). The same year, 90 women were acting as chief of one of the 633 First Nation communities in Canada (Voyageur, 2008), which grew to 111 women in elected leadership positions in 2012 (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015). Political involvement is also growing among Inuit women, as they account for 45% of municipal councillors in Nunavik (then northernmost region of the province of Quebec), a much higher representation than in the rest of Quebec (Koperqualuk, 2013).

Generally speaking, then, Indigenous women in Quebec and across Canada are increasingly occupying elected leadership seats that were historically restricted to men through the *Indian Act* as well as through the imposition of patriarchal gender norms inherent to colonialism (Potvin, 2011). In addition to taking up elected roles in community governance, Indigenous women are mobilizing through reclaiming and revitalizing their social, cultural and political roles as community leaders. A recent example is the *Innu Ishkueu* (Innu women) walk between Sept-

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that, to date, the inquiry has been heavily critiqued due to its lengthy start-up time, the limitations on its scope and numerous other obstacles.

<sup>4</sup> AFNQL voting members are chiefs of the Quebec and Labrador First Nations.

<sup>5</sup> Even if Atikamekw political organizations favor the use of the term *Nehirowisiwok* to designate the Atikamekw people, *Nehirowisiw* (plural *Nehirowisiwok*) meaning an “autonomous being living in equilibrium with the land”, we chose to use the term Atikamekw. Terms in *Nehiromowin* (the Atikamekw language) such as *Nehirowiskew* (an Atikamekw woman) and *Nehirowiskewok* (Atikamekw women) will not be used due to the personal preferences of one of our co-authors. Indeed, Atikamekw people aged 30-45 years, to which the first author belongs, preferably use *Atikamekw iriniwok* to designate men and *Atikamekw iskwewok* to designate women.

Îles and Montreal in April 2012 to denounce development in northern Quebec with no respect for *Nitassinan* (“our land”). Similarly, *Nehirowisiw Iskwewok Nikanik Otcî* (Movement of Atikamekw Women for the Future) originated in 2010 to reaffirm the role of Atikamekw women as protectors of life. It should also be noted that the *Idle No More* movement was initiated in Canada in October 2012 (with echoes far beyond) by three Indigenous women and a non-Indigenous woman from Saskatchewan in reaction to discriminatory politics of the federal government, particularly the modifications to more than 60 laws and rulings – including the *Indian Act* – that lifted some barriers to the exploitation of natural resources (Wotherspoon and Hansen, 2013)<sup>6</sup>. As these significant interventions indicate, Indigenous women are increasingly mobilizing and re-affirming their leadership through both grassroots organizing and formal sites of community governance, insisting on the inclusion of their voices in decision-making processes impacting their communities and future generations.

### *Indigenous women and research*

As discussed above, colonization involved the imposition of governance models which restricted political leadership to Indigenous men and which introduced patriarchal power relations. It should come as no surprise, then, that Indigenous women have long been – and still often are – marginalized, even excluded, from academic research (Green, 2007). Researchers often use data solely collected with men to generalize their findings to communities (Box 1). When Indigenous women are considered, it is often with respect to issues relating to non-Indigenous women (Markstrom, 2008; Silvey, 1999). Indigenous women scholars have noted that the lack of interest in, or valuation of, the experience of Indigenous women is evidenced by the fact that research led by Indigenous women is often judged to be invalid and biased (Green, 1993; LaRocque, 1996).

#### **Box 1.** Example of a research project having excluded indigenous women

A land use and occupancy study was realized in the early 1980’s in Atikamekw and Innu communities to provide “evidence” in support of the land claims of these two nations. Better known as “The great research”, this work has, among other things, highlighted the nature and extent of hunting activities and land occupancy. Of the 208 people interviewed in the three Atikamekw communities, only 9 were women. According to the guide used to train research assistants, “the only women that [were] included in the list of potential informants [were] widows”. Furthermore, a hunter’s “partner” was welcome to participate to the interview to complete or clarify the information shared with researchers. Absence of women or trivialization of their accounts to “complete” those of men is striking. Such a vision of research

<sup>6</sup> See the book *The Winter We Danced* for a full discussion of the Idle No More movement and its history (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014).

was already criticized by those practicing it, for lack of having defined a more inclusive approach, as indicated by the following quote from a researcher participating to “The great research” (Dandenault, 1983, p. A15):

[there is] a deficiency that needs to be highlighted however, no woman was interviewed during this research, so that some questions remain to be answered on their role within production groups, as well as description of typically feminine activities key to the functioning of these groups.

For several decades, funding agencies and Indigenous organizations in Canada and internationally have worked on developing protocols and guidelines for research in Indigenous contexts. For example, the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC), published in 2010 and updated in 2014, includes a chapter dedicated to research with Indigenous people (CIHR et al., 2014). While these national policies govern research being conducted at all institutions and organizations receiving research funds through CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC, Indigenous communities and governing bodies have also worked to develop their own research protocols and policies. For example, in 2014 the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador published the second edition of its own Research Protocol (AFNQL, 2014). Useful to Indigenous communities and to researchers alike, it suggests a series of values and principles specific to research with Indigenous communities in that region, as well as examples of relevant and well-designed research projects. Within the AFNQL research protocols, OCAP<sup>TM</sup> principles (ownership, control, access and possession of research data), elaborated in 1998 by the Board of Directors of the *First Nations Regional Health Survey* (AFNQL, 2014), are considered as baseline principles that should guide research with Indigenous people. Building on this foundational work to implement Indigenous-led research protocols, *Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal Women* (QNWA, 2012) were developed by the Quebec Native Women’s Association to clarify some specificities of research with Indigenous women (Table 1).

One of the foundational principles in the *Guidelines* (QNWA, 2012) states that researchers must consult with an Indigenous community or organization before undertaking research with or about them. This consultation, which is also recognized as a component of national research ethics protocols (CIHR et al., 2014), is intended to determine (1) if the proposed research responds to community needs; (2) if it meets local conditions and protocols; (3) what will be the involvement of Indigenous women at all steps of the project; and (4) what are the protocols to provide/obtain consent (collective and individual). These four conditions readily distinguish research conducted with Indigenous women from that in non-Indigenous contexts, even if conducted with women, as they support the restoration of Indigenous women’s decision-making and leadership roles.

Below, we discuss the final step in the consultation procedures outlined in QNWA protocols – developing the interview guide and consent form with Indigenous women. Obtaining consent is a significant aspect of respectful, decolonized research with Indigenous women, as it conditions the research topic, its progress, and provides a solid basis for the collection of high-quality data, useful to both researchers and the participating communities (Asselin and Basile, 2012). Moreover, when done properly, protocols for obtaining consent can center Indigenous women’s agency and leadership within the research relationship. Here, we reflect on the epistemological, ethical and methodological challenges we faced while preparing a research project on the role and place of Atikamekw women in the governance of land and natural resources (see Basile, 2017). Most researchers using interviews as a data collection tool pre-test their interview guide in order to detect and correct problems. Our process was entirely different. We conducted a pre-fieldwork exercise during which we worked with three Atikamekw women known to be highly knowledgeable within their communities, to co-construct data acquisition tools and co-develop processes for establishing and maintaining respectful, consensual relationships between the research team and participants before, during, and after the research project.

**Table 1.** Guidelines for research with Aboriginal women (QNWA, 2012)

<b>Guidelines</b>	<b>Explanations</b>
Initial contact	Make sure Aboriginal women are present during the initial contact between the researchers and the aboriginal organization or community.
Extensive consultation	Consult aboriginal governing bodies beforehand, specifically Aboriginal women.
Definition of research subject	Involve Aboriginal women in defining the research subject and methodology, and in all subsequent steps of the research.
Local needs and priorities	Base the research project on local needs and priorities, including those identified by women.
Aboriginal knowledge	Consider Aboriginal knowledge on equal footing with Western science-based knowledge, and pay attention to knowledge that is specific to women.
Research methodology	Use a research methodology that takes into account the values and knowledge of Aboriginal women.
Voice of Aboriginal women	Restore the voice of Aboriginal women to bring balance back to the ongoing discourse.
Holistic vision	Respect the holistic vision common to most Aboriginal peoples and generally transmitted by women.
Reciprocity	Give something in return for the knowledge obtained from Aboriginal women who take part in research.
Communication of findings	Validate the research results with Aboriginal women and give them the final results in a usable format.
Core values	Uphold the core values of Aboriginal women throughout the entire research process.
Ongoing dialogue	Maintain an ongoing dialogue and an effective partnership with Aboriginal women.

### Methods: collaborating on research design

The voices, agency and consent of Atikamekw women were centered at every step of our research initiative. Significantly, the project was led by co-author Suzy Basile, a Wemotaci Atikamekw woman, in alignment with decolonization principles that call for Indigenous researchers to be actively involved in research projects within their own communities (Koster et al., 2012; Smith, 2012). Before we formally started the research project, we had several informal discussions with Atikamekw women in a process intended to obtain collective consent for the research (AFNQL, 2005b, 2014; CIHR et al., 2010). Among the people we met, some women mentioned they are rarely – if ever – consulted about research projects. “At last someone is asking my opinion!”, said one of them. Following favorable opinions from all of the women with whom we met, a letter of intent was sent to each of the 3 Atikamekw band councils to propose a meeting to present the research project and obtain their consent. Following local research protocols, consultations were also held with the Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw, with the Quebec Native Women’s Association, and with the Council of Elected Women of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL, 2005a). Letters of support were obtained from all of these organizations. Following these consultations and collective approval to proceed with the research, an ethics certificate was delivered in April 2012 by the Ethics Review Board of Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

In order to ensure our research was designed in collaboration with women in the partnering communities, we conducted preliminary interviews with one woman from each of the three communities of the Atikamekw First Nation between April and December 2012. These three women were referred to us by their band councils based on their experience with research, their involvement in various activities and committees (at the community or nation level), or because they were in charge of women’s issues in their communities. Interviews lasted 20 to 60 minutes and were held in places chosen by the respondents<sup>7</sup>. After a brief presentation of the research objectives, the respondents were asked to comment on the research process and on their preferred approach in light of the *Guidelines of Research with Aboriginal Women* (QNWA, 2012). With the agreement of the respondents, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to facilitate thematic analysis following the 12 principles of the *Guidelines* (QNWA, 2012), while leaving the door open to the emergence of new themes.

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<sup>7</sup> We acknowledge that this denomination belongs to the normal science terminology, according to the kuhnian definition (Kuhn, 1962). According to us, respondents are more than experts in research methodology applied to the Atikamekw context, but for the purpose of writing this article we adopted this conventional vocabulary for pragmatic reasons, as the term “respondent” allowed us to distinguish respondents to the three preliminary interviews from the “participants” in the research that were met later on.

Before starting the interviews, we worked with each community to determine the best time to schedule research activities. Summer pow wows and annual meetings of women and elders were identified as occasions to meet with several people and plan interviews for later dates. Respondents advised that women's availability varied during the year depending on the various events in which they participate (e.g., weddings, funerals, political meetings, etc.). We thus had to determine the most appropriate time to conduct the interviews, also taking into account the rhythm and progress of research work (Saint-Arnaud, 2009). For example, Atikamekw families often reconnect with the land during spring and fall cultural weeks. Women are thus generally less available at these times. Furthermore, as women (mothers and grand-mothers especially) usually take care of the children, we had to account for the school schedule. The possibility of conducting the interviews in two separate periods was suggested so that enough time would be available without putting pressure on women's schedules.

### **Results and discussion: transformation of the research tools through collaboration**

During the preliminary interviews with Atikamekw women from each of the three communities, respondents confirmed the relevance and legitimacy of the themes included in the interview guide, related to women's roles in governance of land and resources. The discussions we had with them underscored the importance of our research as the proposed project dealt with sensitive topics such as identity, place of origin, connections to the land, environmental changes, and future perspectives for Atikamekw people. This process also allowed us to highlight Atikamekw cultural specificities that should be taken into account. For example, the respondents stressed the importance of asking the traditional names of the participants, as "the traditional name is as important – probably even more – as the official name"<sup>8</sup>. For Atikamekw people, the traditional name (sometimes called nickname) can be linked to a personality trait, an event, a place or another person. A traditional name is part of someone's identity and is often better known to other community members than English or French first and last names. Respondents also made sure that the questions could be asked in the Atikamekw language during interviews with women who prefer to express themselves in their mother tongue. According to them, using and respecting the language is a mandatory condition of the success of any research project conducted with Atikamekw people. One respondent said that "language is the primary ingredient to identify oneself to the territory". Discussing personal and important topics, such as connection to the land, can be a complex endeavour if undertaken in a foreign language; some nuances might be difficult – even impossible – to express in French or English. Indeed,

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<sup>8</sup> Interview excerpts were translated from French or from the Atikamekw language to English for the purpose of this article.

Indigenous people's languages, knowledge and values are strongly linked to how they relate to the land (Stevenson, 2010). Thus, the research team committed to having an interpreter available not only for the interviews, but beginning with the first contact with participants. We sought to obtain clear and informed consent after having explained – in the Atikamekw language – the objectives of the research project. According to the respondents, respecting the Atikamekw language involves translating the consent form, which should include information relevant to the context of research with Indigenous people. The respondents said that the consent form must mention that the research complies with the principles stated in the *First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Research Protocol* (AFNQL, 2005b, 2014), as well as with the procedures and protocols agreed upon with the community representatives. For example, in the context of this research project, it was agreed that the results would be discussed with the communities before publication, and that the final results would be transferred to the communities. Moreover, the consent form must highlight that, whenever possible, interviews should be held on the land to better understand Atikamekw women's viewpoint and to better take into account their life on the land. All of these recommendations arising from our collaborative work with members of the three Atikamekw communities were included in a revised version of the consent form that was subsequently used for data collection.

Although it might seem modest, we argue this pre-fieldwork exercise constitutes an important methodological innovation. Indeed, various community-based research projects conducted in western Canada have shown the necessity of taking into account the communities' ethics codes in order to obtain free, prior and informed consent (Fletcher et al., 2011). Consent forms are usually created by researchers based on models provided by their institutions' ethics review boards, without consulting with members of the communities who will eventually be asked to sign them. Even when consent forms are adapted to meet the specific requirements associated with working in an Indigenous context, these adaptations are often based on broad guidelines set forth by institutions or governing bodies (Indigenous or not) instead of the needs and hopes of the participants themselves. To decolonize research methodologies, co-construction of data collection tools with research participants should be thoughtfully considered. Participatory action research (PAR) offers interesting insights in this regard (e.g., Schensul et al., 2008).

While for some researchers the consent form is a necessary evil, a bureaucratic obligation that kills spontaneity and creates a distance between researcher and participant (e.g., Haggerty, 2004), our experience led us to realize that a consent form must be viewed as a contract – not in a strictly legal sense but rather as part of building respectful relationships. We view the consent process not as a contract to protect the researchers and their institutions (Martin, 2013), but rather a social contract allowing each party (including Indigenous participants and community partners) to express its needs and expectations and to clearly define

limits that should not be trespassed. Following this experience of having our consent form critically reviewed by Atikamekw women, we question the current approach favored by universities. Indeed, if the consent form is used to draft an agreement based on mutual respect and collaboration, how can the terms of such an agreement be decided unilaterally? As collaboration and co-construction of knowledge are increasingly favored in research with Indigenous people (Lévesque, 2009), co-constructing the consent form is a way to jointly define the values and ethics that should guide the research.

Our analysis of the consent form/contract grows out of the fact that the three women we interviewed during the preliminary consultation showed great interest in the design of the consent form. Indeed, in addition to the above-mentioned recommendations, they commented on the measures suggested to protect confidentiality and anonymity, confirming their importance for Atikamekw women. One of them said “We will feel more secure” having these assurances in place. However, respecting confidentiality can be a challenge in small Indigenous communities with strong social cohesion. According to the respondents, the consent form must also suggest future research avenues, thus allowing an increase in the proportion of research projects of interest to Indigenous women.

Respondents were asked to suggest names of potential participants for the research, following the snowball sampling technique (Gamborg et al., 2012). But instead of directly suggesting names to the research team, the respondents instead suggested they should first approach potential participants themselves – particularly elders – in order to clearly explain the project, and determine their interest and availability to participate. This process, designed and led by the three Atikamekw women, had a substantial impact on the research, as it allowed us to recruit 32 participants with whom we established a mutual trust relationship (Basile, 2017).

#### *Discussing the results with the research participants*

As mentioned above, one topic of great significance to respondents was that of discussing the research results with the participants, and transferring the final results to the communities. According to the respondents, the obligation of giving the participants an opportunity to discuss the results must be understood as a right to inspect, and potentially contest or affirm, the way the results are interpreted and presented by the research team. Such a discussion should not only be about the preliminary results, but also the final results in order not to repeat errors from historic and dominant research paradigms *on* (not with) Indigenous communities. Indigenous people have indeed frequently deplored seeing researchers take information from them (often without even having obtained permission to do so), before leaving for good, not ever returning to the community to present the research results, let alone bothering to discuss them and make sure they were properly interpreted by community members (Jérôme, 2009; Menzies, 2006). This

is why a process for discussing the results must be agreed upon with the women involved, right from the start of the project (Bull, 2010; Smith, 2012).

Given the option for participants to conduct their interview in the Atikamekw language, and the fact that the research team was not fluent in that language, the process for discussing results played an important role in avoiding erroneous interpretations. Depending on their availability and interest, the results of the preliminary interviews were discussed with the research participants as well as with band council members and employees (Asselin and Basile, 2012). The respondents also suggested we explore alternative ways to present the results to Atikamekw communities, apart from the usual thick and rebutting research report. For example, a synthesized version of the main results and conclusions could be translated in the Atikamekw language and published in a newsletter or broadcast on the community radio station. A respondent specified “I think it would be better [to hand over the results to] the [band] council”.

### *Reciprocity and dialogue*

It was suggested that some of the participants should be interviewed a second time (on the condition that they provide their consent) so that life histories could be documented and published under the participants’ names. The researchers would then move to a mere editing role, leaving the participants in full control of their own life histories (CIHR et al., 2010; Guay and Martin, 2012). This additional process of collecting and publishing individual narratives under the guidance of participants would further facilitate the operationalization of OCAP<sup>TM</sup> principles, particularly the principle of ownership.

Furthermore, the topic of relations between researchers and communities emerged as a strong theme in the preliminary interviews. One respondent said that “in the past, some women felt ‘deloused’ by researchers. This shall not happen again”. Hence, the link between the researchers and the participants must be maintained even following the end of the research project itself; the “after research” relationship being as important as – if not more important than – the research itself (Lévesque, 2009).

### *Research principles*

Respondents in the three preliminary interviews explicitly mentioned 4 of the 12 research principles presented within the *Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal Women* (QNWA, 2012). Regarding the relevance of the research topic and objectives, a respondent mentioned that the project will “give the floor to those without power”. Another said that “this research will be good for upcoming

generations. We will leave something to our children”<sup>9</sup>. The principles concerned with research methodology, communication of findings and reciprocity were also discussed in detail (Table 1). It is important to clarify that we do not understand the principles that were not mentioned during the preliminary interviews to be less important. Rather, some of these principles had already been taken into account during previous stages of the project and did not need to be discussed (initial contact; extensive consultation; definition of the research topic; identification of local needs and priorities; and protection of Indigenous knowledge). Finally, principles concerned with the voice of Indigenous women, the importance of adopting a holistic vision of the world, the respect for Indigenous core values, and the need for an ongoing dialogue were identified, but will be addressed at later stages of our project.

## Conclusion

The preliminary interviews with women in each of the three Atikamekw communities reaffirmed the relevance of the principles included in the *Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal Women* (QNWA, 2012), and showed us that the views and wishes of the women were in line with the approach we used since the beginning of the project – most significantly, to listen to the voices of the Indigenous women with whom we intended to work. Having been historically excluded from research projects in their communities (see Box 1), Atikamekw women have nevertheless developed an opinion as to how research should be conducted. They shared their views on the methods and tools that can be used to decolonize research (Gentelet, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, S. 2008), thus transforming our project to better align with their own priorities and needs. This preliminary step in our research – which was in fact a reflection on our approach – allowed us to highlight yet another facet of decolonization, that of the participation of Indigenous women in the co-creation of research tools.

Taking time to understand the context within which research will be conducted –watching where we set foot (Desbiens, 2010) – invites participants to share how they view the project before it even starts, and co-construct the research tools (particularly the consent form and the contract relationship therein). We have argued this is an effective way to create a relationship based on collaboration, complementarity, and respect between all members of the research team. In line with the *Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal Women* (QNWA, 2012), the

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<sup>9</sup> Even though several research projects have been done “about” or “with” Atikamekw people over the last few decades, we cannot confirm that all results from these projects have been adequately transmitted to all Atikamekw people (e.g., by using an accessible language, by orally presenting the results accompanied by an interpret, by presenting the results in radio interviews, etc.). We thus interpret the words of this respondent as the expression of a wish to leave a legacy to future generations consisting of the voice of Atikamekw women that participated in a research project concerning them specifically.

suggestions made by the 3 respondents to our preliminary interviews will hopefully prevent future research from repeating past errors and those being replicated today in dominant research paradigms. Although we focused here on a methodological issue, decolonizing research implies much more than that (Gentelet, 2009; Zavala, 2013). Further research is needed to extend the reflection to other stages of the research process, to different knowledge transmission types (e.g., stories and art), to other Indigenous communities and to a variety of research topics.

### Acknowledgements

The first author, from the Wemotaci Atikamekw community, and the two co-authors want to express their sincere thanks to the three Atikamekw women who participated to the preliminary interviews. This article could not have been written without their helpful contribution. The authors also thank the band councils of the three Atikamekw communities, as well as the Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw for supporting this research from its inception. *Kitci mikwetc.*

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