Developing an Accountability Framework to Support Bridging Inuit Worldviews and the Critical Paradigm in Qualitative Research

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Abstract
Bridging Indigenous and Western paradigms in research can offer benefits but it can also be challenging because of the need to navigate power dynamics and differences in perspectives. Amid the Western epistemic norms that dominate most academic spaces in Canada, researchers must endeavour to bridge paradigms in such a way that Indigenous rights to self-determination are upheld, ensuring that Indigenous paradigms or worldviews are not subsumed by or tokenized within Western paradigms. Researchers must also be able to demonstrate the coherence of their project, showing how all aspects fit well together despite the involvement of different perspectives. This article shares lessons learned from a research project in which we aimed to coherently bridge Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm in a manner that foregrounds Inuit perspectives. We present an accountability framework that supported project planning and decision-making in alignment with our core project intentions by prioritizing requirements for paradigm bridging. This framework was guided by concepts from or based on Inuit knowledge (i.e., piliriqatigiinniq and the Qaggiq Model) and qualitative research (i.e., meaningful coherence). We draw examples from our study to illustrate how we strove to achieve a balanced, dynamic relationship between Inuit and Western epistemologies, which was facilitated by shared points of common ground. Intentional focus was required to continually resist and redress power imbalances. We emphasize the importance of reflexivity and humility to the whole endeavour, highlighting the relevance of researcher positionality from the perspective of the Qallunaq (White) lead researcher. While acknowledging that any effort to bridge paradigms must be specific to context, we propose that following an iterative, collaborative, reflexive, dynamic and responsive process can enable accountability to Indigenous communities and fidelity to researcher intentions. Such actions support the production of research that is meaningful, valued and useful to the population it intends to serve.

Keywords
Indigenous research, critical research, research paradigms, qualitative methodologies, Indigenous rights, meaningful coherence

Introduction
Bridging Indigenous and Western paradigms in research offers many benefits but doing this well can be challenging, involving navigation of power dynamics and differences in perspectives. This article shares lessons learned from a research project that sought to bridge Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm. As we navigated challenges in bridging paradigms, an accountability framework evolved that was
informed by concepts from Inuit knowledge and qualitative research.

This article is written to researchers who, like me (the first author), do not share the worldviews of the Indigenous populations with whom they are working (having been raised with other ways of knowing and being and/or on other lands). I speak especially to those who have been raised and trained in Western systems, as I anticipate the sort of accountability structure I propose may respond to the learning styles and needs of this group.

The Challenge of Coherently Bridging Paradigms

Research paradigms are a set of beliefs that guide action (Wilson, 2001). A paradigm represents a discrete tradition of research comprised of interconnected philosophical, theoretical and methodological beliefs that guide their application in practice (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Willis, 2007b). Each paradigm follows a specific ontology, epistemology, axiology and praxis that orient and shape research (Wilson, 2008). By focussing researcher attention according to its specific framework or worldview, paradigms provide guidance on which questions are worthy of being researched, how these questions are framed, how the work is theorized, what methods are used for engaging with data and analysis, and even what knowledge is produced (Davis, 2012; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Willis, 2007b). As such, some paradigms are better suited than others to address particular issues (Grant & Giddings, 2002).

There are instances when more than one paradigm can be helpful for informing a given issue. For example, the influence of both interpretive and critical paradigms is present in the movements of postmodernism and feminism (Willis, 2007a). Another example, and the focus of this paper, is bringing together the critical paradigm and an Indigenous perspective, Inuit worldviews. Inuit worldviews can themselves be understood as inherently critical, as Inuit convey, interpret, apply and evolve knowledge over time (Martin, 2009). As a Western-trained Qallunaat1,2 academic, however, I enter the research space with a Western-informed understanding of critical perspectives in the context of research. For this perspective to collaborate with Inuit worldviews, there is bridging work to be done. Proposing a relationship between Inuit worldviews and the (Western) critical paradigm is in part, in the context of this paper, a discussion about how Western and Indigenous knowledge systems can work together.

The respected late Inuk3 Elder, Aupiljarjuk (as recorded in McGrath, 2018, and Etherington, 2013) taught that Inuit and Western systems must work together and are stronger together. He advocated for finding ways to bridge the “two worlds together” (Etherington, 2013, para 6). Leetia James, an Inuk collaborator in my research project has taught me that the space between different perspectives offers opportunities for learning from and collaborating with one another. In his description of the Cultural Interface, Nakata (2002, 2007) discusses how Indigenous, Western and other knowledge systems exist in a complex and contested space, already present together in the contexts of the lives of Indigenous Peoples. He teaches that knowledge systems, embedded socially and culturally, are constantly evolving and informing one another. Knowledge systems are not the same and yet they are also not entirely separate from one another. Finding a means of bridging the knowledge systems of a space in a way that supports Indigenous interests, navigating the tensions that exist, is of benefit to Indigenous Peoples (Nakata, 2002, 2007).

Further, as research in Indigenous communities in Canada takes place in colonial spaces, it can be helpful to engage a critical anti-colonial stance in partnership with an Indigenous approach (Hart et al., 2017). Benefits of bridging critical and Indigenous paradigms can include countering colonialism in a way that centres Indigenous ways of knowing, promoting social change and supporting the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Nowgesic, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) advise resisting confinement to a single paradigm when engaging critical and Indigenous perspectives.

However, pairing Western and Indigenous perspectives in research is not without challenges. Researchers who seek to bridge Western and Indigenous worldviews in research might anticipate finding differences between paradigmatic elements. Tensions can be anticipated (Bartlett et al., 2015; Castleden, Martin, et al., 2017; Cram & Mertens, 2016; Hart et al., 2017; Held, 2019; Simonds & Christopher, 2013; Smylie et al., 2004). Different paradigms, each with their own logic and norms, may point a researcher in dissimilar directions over the course of a research project. When both an Indigenous and a Western paradigm are involved, researchers must determine how to navigate areas of difference to produce a project that is coherent or, in other words, makes sense.

Bridging Paradigms Amid a Western Status Quo

Beyond navigating tensions between paradigms, researchers must attend to power dynamics embedded within and between research paradigms. Systems and societal conditions in Canada are generally not set up to privilege Indigenous paradigms in research. Western epistemic privileging is typically the default of government and academic institutions, which explicitly or implicitly endorse Western approaches through training, academic literature, and structures of governance, funding and ethical approvals (Castleden, Martin, et al., 2017; McGrath, 2018). For instance, in Inuit Nunangat4, “Inuit and Qallunaat2 now live together under Qallunaat authority, using Qallunaat systems which affirm Qallunaat values” (Karetak & Tester, 2017, p. 14). The implications are significant; when Indigenous ways of knowing are considered secondary to Western ways of knowing, colonization is perpetuated, and self-determination is limited for Indigenous Peoples (Kovach, 2009).
Western-trained researchers who seek to bridge paradigms risk reproducing coloniality. Without attending carefully to the character of the perspectives they intend to bridge, these researchers may inadvertently prioritize what they know best (i.e., Western approaches). In projects that claim to bridge paradigms, Indigenous paradigms can easily be sidelined, tokenized or involved as an afterthought (Bartlett et al., 2012; Castleden, Hart, et al., 2017; Castleden, Martin, et al., 2017). Such actions are dangerous because readers may be persuaded that a specific Indigenous perspective was privileged when this was only true on a superficial level, thereby further obscuring Indigenous perspectives and reifying Western hegemony in research. Furthermore, superficial inclusion of Indigenous paradigms is likely to produce incoherence in project outputs through inconsistencies of logic and disconnects between actions and stated intentions.

Self-determination is a right of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008). Researchers risk denying this right when Indigenous Peoples are not involved in defining what legitimate research in their communities looks like (Healey & Tagak, 2014), including when Western norms are tacitly privileged. Indigenous methodologies can lose their truth when subsumed into Western research paradigms (Cavino, 2013), their Indigenous knowledge becoming overshadowed or sidelined. Furthermore, researchers working in Indigenous communities often hold various forms of privilege associated with power and influence (e.g., whiteness, formal education, access to resources) that may obscure Indigenous voices (Hart et al., 2017). The power of Western academic norms imposed on and embedded into the training of a researcher (especially non-Indigenous researchers) may be difficult to see and resist, leading well-intentioned researchers to purport to value Indigenous paradigms without showing this in action. Assuring space for Indigenous knowledge and self-determination in research, therefore, requires a shift in the power dynamics of the status quo (Hart et al., 2017).

Accountable Paradigm Bridging

Researchers seeking to bridge Indigenous and Western paradigms must do so coherently and in a manner that seeks to redress Western epistemic privileging and respects Indigenous Peoples’ rights to self-determination. To help prevent possible harms as described above, these requirements should be reflected in a project’s methodology. Much has been written that supports researchers to address these requirements⁵. Recommended strategies include practicing reflexivity (Gerlach, 2018; Marriott et al., 2020; Susana Caxaj, 2015), building authentic relationships (Bull, 2010), collaborating with Indigenous communities (Castleden, Hart, et al., 2017; Castleden, Martin, et al., 2017), confronting colonialism and redressing power differentials (Castleden, Martin, et al., 2017; Hart et al., 2017), focusing on listening and humility (Castleden, Martin, et al., 2017; McGrath, 2018), and building a space where paradigms can work together (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Held, 2019). This article adds to the literature by incorporating the spirit of these strategies into an accountability framework based on guiding concepts that I used to help me respect Inuit self-determination rights while seeking to coherently bridge Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm in my research. These guiding concepts are pilir-iqatigiinniq, the Qaggiq Model (McGrath, 2018), and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010). The first two are concepts from or based on Inuit knowledge and the third is a marker of qualitative research quality. I show how consciously employing these concepts focused my attention on intentionally, transparently and concretely mapping out how paradigm bridging would occur. This mapping process evolved into a framework, which helped me stay accountable to my commitments to respect Inuit self-determination in the conduct of research and coherently bridge Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm. The framework is presented in Figure 1 and Table 1, and explained in the article sections that follow.

My Journey to This Article

“We know what we know from where we stand” (Kovach, 2009, p. 7). As such, I will position the need for an accountability framework within my own learning journey. I am a White woman of European descent who grew up in a rural community in Mi’kma’ki⁶. I have periodically lived and worked in Iqaluit, Nunavut, as an occupational therapist since 2006. Despite Nunavut being a territory of Inuit homelands within Canada’s borders, health care continues to primarily be delivered by non-Inuit providers, following a delivery model designed in southern Canada (Qikiqtani Inuit Association, 2014). From the beginning of my time working in Nunavut, I sensed that the occupational therapy I had been trained to provide did not always meet Inuit families’ needs. When I began my doctoral degree, I sought to interrogate the status quo, and to gain new knowledge so that I could see ways to do better as a service provider. I immersed myself in both critical qualitative and Indigenous research methodologies, acquiring learning that solidified my motivations for engaging in a project that would seek transformative change in the status quo of rehabilitation services for Inuit children and families. As such, I entered this work positioned within a critical research paradigm, stemming from Western systems of thought. At the same time, I wished to produce findings that would be most relevant to Inuit by centring Inuit worldviews and learning from Inuit perspectives on how rehabilitation could do better. Navigating Inuit and Western worldview alignments, differences and opportunities for synergy, therefore, became the focus of my substantive research topic and a necessary point of examination in the methodology employed to execute this work.

My dissertation research project sought to understand how the interests of Inuit children could be understood and supported in rehabilitation services by foregrounding Inuit perspectives. The rationale for supporting these objectives was that mainstream rehabilitation has been primarily shaped by Western biomedical
norms (Nicholls et al., 2015). Without an opportunity for Inuit perspectives to shape rehabilitation, Inuit self-determination and culturally safe service delivery are limited. The Piliriqatigiinniq Partnership Model of Health Research (Healey & Tagak, 2014) provided methodological guidance in the project. Twenty-five participants were engaged in storytelling sessions in which they shared knowledge. A participatory analysis process helped to shape findings, which will be reported in forthcoming publications (MacLachlan et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

As I assembled my research proposal, I began to take various aspects of my project intentions, relationships, positionality, and methodology into account. I was puzzled about how I would be able to stay true to all while producing work that was still coherent. I needed to learn how to bridge paradigms in a way that supported research objectives and was relevant to Inuit, while representing myself appropriately, resisting hegemonic Western research norms, respecting Inuit self-determination, and making sure that the research plans all made sense for everyone involved. This quandary led me to develop the accountability framework shared here. I share my learning story in this article but do not pretend to have done this work perfectly. In fact, some of my greatest learning has come from making mistakes, of which I will humbly share a few.

My co-authors, as members of my supervisory committee and doctoral supervisor, have contributed immeasurably to the content presented here through their teaching, modeling, support, and guidance. As an Inuk physiotherapist, Andrea Andersen brings an understanding of Inuit knowledge and the Nunavut health services context. Anita Benoit is a Mi’kmaw researcher who contributes her experience in community-based research addressing Indigenous health. Earl Nowgesic is an Anishinaabe academic who shares knowledge of engaging Indigenous perspectives and critical theory to address issues in health services and policy. From her position as a White settler scholar activist, Stephanie Nixon provides mentorship on critical allyship and countering systems of inequity in health services and research.

**Concepts I Drew on to Bridge Inuit Worldviews and the Critical Paradigm**

**Piliriqatigiinniq and the Qaggiq Model**

Locating guiding concepts from Inuit knowledge was key to bridging Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm in my research. Aupilarjuk, as recorded in McGrath (2018),
### Table 1. Detailed elaboration of the accountability framework that supported me in bridging Inuit worldviews and the critical research paradigm, showing questions I reflected on and knowledge I considered.

| Reflective questions | Critical research paradigm | Relationship between knowledge systems | Examples of actions to bridge knowledge systems, as guided by the teachings of piliqtaginaqq and the Qaggiq Model | What has been made | Unresolved tensions have come to see so far |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Listening for a relationship between Inuit worldviews and the critical research paradigm. (What have I learned?) | Reflective | Critical | Critical | Reflective |
| **What are some common objectives?** | Work for the common good (Healey & Tagak, 2014), a good life (Karetak & Tester, 2017), balance and harmony (Tagak, 2012), self-determination (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami [ITK], 2018a) | Social justice, emancipation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Scotland, 2012), equity (Giełach, 2015), illumination and shifting of power relations (Held, 2019) | Different points of departure but work well together. The common good, harmony and a good life describe a socially just society. | Frame objectives in terms of social change with an imperative to restore balance and harmony. Include critiques of how colonialism disrupts the balance and negatively impacts the common good. Respect Inuit self-determination in the design and outcomes of the project. | With better understanding of different perspectives comes better understanding of how we can respect and learn from one another. E.g., my understanding of the “common good” has evolved and will hopefully support the relevance of findings. | The Inuit worldviews’ objectives feel welcoming while the critical paradigm’s objectives tend to unsettle. It can feel difficult to represent both boxes at the same time. |
| **Whose voices are centred?** | Inuit perspectives should be heard first on Inuit lands (Ausiirnajuk, as recorded in McGrath, 2016). | Historically marginalized voices and ways of knowing should be centred and valued (Smith, 2012). | Well aligned. | Background perspective wherein possible. Hold myself and my work accountable to Inuit. | Wisdom and impactful solutions are emerging that never would have been imagined through the critical paradigm alone. | It feels challenging to share Inuit perspectives while being clear that findings were written with influence from my Western perspective. |
| **Where should power or control be located?** | Inuit governance and self-determination (ITK, 2018a), decision-making by consensus (Ferrazzi et al., 2020). | Empowerment of power-sharing with those who have been marginalized by society (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Scotland, 2012). | Align, although the critical paradigm may not go as far in shifting power. | Create opportunities for Inuit governance and engagement (e.g., local research advisory group; seat on dissertation committee, participatory analysis). Engage with Inuit as rights holders (ITK, 2018a; 2018b). Practice principles of critical allyship and anti-colonial approaches. | Participatory analysis has significantly shifted the focus and interpretation of findings from what I would have found on my own. This helps achieve the objective to foreground Inuit perspectives. | It can be a delicate balance to transfer power meaningfully without putting unwanted burden on people. |
| **What is the connection between context and knowledge?** | Knowledge and experience are specific to context (Healey & Tagak, 2014). One can only speak to their own experience (Karetak & Tester, 2017). | Reality and knowledge are socially, dialogically and historically constructed (Held, 2019; Scotland, 2012). Knowledge should be contextualized (Giełach, 2015). | Align, but the critical paradigm may permit researchers to speak on behalf of others. | Reflect on how my worldview was shaped by context and how this influences how I engage with Inuit knowledge. Remember I can only speak of my own learning, not on behalf of participants or all Nunavutits (residents of Nunavut). | Practicing occupational therapy while carrying out research in the same region has helped me recognize deeper meanings in participant stories, supporting the relevance and applicability of findings. | By sharing only a partial view, research presentations and publications risk stripping knowledge of context. |
| **How does one engage with their own knowledge?** | With humility and sibujuq (personal congruence, fidelity to one’s own truth) (McGrath, 2018). | With reflexivity (Giełach, 2015). | Different but aligned with similar intentions. Humility and reflexivity may each be necessary within each other. | Remain flexible to shift course based on reflections, feedback and learning. Continuously consider power dynamics to prevent harm (Hart et al., 2017). Reflect on the coherence between Inuit worldviews and my own personal values and ways of being (Hart et al., 2017), and my intentions and relationships (Healey, 2019). | Sharing my clinical stories, reflections and intentions with participants felt like it led to some of the most helpful and meaningful knowledge exchange to inform research questions. | As Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm both validate uncertainty, it feels difficult to know when the research work is completed and ready to share. |
| How are relationships within research considered? | A relational epistemology is foundational. Relational accountability and a collaborative approach are valued. Participants are engaged, not recruited (Healey & Tagak, 2014). | Relationships are valued. Participants are viewed as co-researchers (Grant & Giddings, 2002). |
|---|---|---|
| Is the focus on strengths or deficits? | Strengths (Tagak, 2012b). | By naming injustices, some work focuses on deficits (e.g., of systems). Other critical work focusses on strengths and resilience (e.g., Cram & Mertens, 2016). |
| How does learning happen? | Learning happens in relationships and through experience. Listening is key. Knowledge may come from observing the natural world, people, dreams and cosmology. Mind, body, and spirit are all involved (Healey & Tagak, 2014; McGrath, 2016). | Western paradigms generally instruct the brain and teach thinking in a certain way: intersubjective and experiential learning is supported in the critical paradigm (Held, 2019). |
| How is knowledge shared? | Lessons are often taught orally and in story. Stories are shared in relationships, not collected, and should be kept whole (Healey & Tagak, 2014). Critical feedback is shared by non-confrontational means (McGrath, 2018). Wisdom is passed down through generations (Tagak, 2017). | Data collection may involve interviews, focus groups, observations, document review, etc. Knowledge dissemination is typically in written formats, although visual means are also welcomed. There is some emphasis on making knowledge accessible. |
| How are research findings acted on? | Research must be followed by action (Healey & Tagak, 2014). There is an interconnection of “knowing-doing-accounting” (McGrath, 2018, p. 249). | Research must contribute to social change, with focus on praxis and catalytic validity (Scotland, 2012). |

**Table 1. (continued)**

| **Discussion** | **Reflecting** | **Learning** | **Doing** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aligned although Inuit worldviews may show a deeper commitment to relationships. | Opportunities exist for alignment. | Different points of departure but the critical paradigm appears to be open to Inuit learning approaches. | Different but the critical paradigm’s approaches appear broad enough to value Inuit worldviews’ forms of knowledge sharing. |
| Aligned although Inuit worldviews may show a deeper commitment to relationships. | Opportunities exist for alignment. | Different points of departure but the critical paradigm appears to be open to Inuit learning approaches. | Different but the critical paradigm’s approaches appear broad enough to value Inuit worldviews’ forms of knowledge sharing. |
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Some of the findings that feel most important are revelations that emerged through dialogue in relationships. The structure of common critical narratives could negatively impact relationships with those who would implement findings (see lessons section below).

Employing critical, informed rationale has helped to unveil Western norms and open minds to an Inuit-informed strengths-oriented perspective. I have found it challenging to be strengths-oriented while critiquing rehabilitation’s status quo.

Validating my heart as a guide has led to stronger relationships, and positively transformed clinical and research practices. Attending to gut feelings and emotions has led me to deeper insights.

The generosity of participants and local advisory group members in sharing stories and advice has made the project rich with insights that align with both Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm, and help achieve objectives of the research project as a whole.

It can be challenging to draw on participant stories to support critical arguments while keeping stories whole.

Relationships and collaboration with community members and local rehabilitation teams throughout the project will facilitate integrating findings into practice. Despite centering Inuit perspectives, practice changes will need to be approved through Western bureaucratic and governance structures.
described how differences in land contribute to differences in approaches and thought. It follows then that as a Qallunaaq researcher working in Inuit Nunangat, I must become familiar with the approaches and thought of Inuit, including concepts addressing how outside knowledge systems can or should work in collaboration with the knowledge systems of this land. The Inuit value of piliriqatigiinniq and the Qaggiq Model (McGrath, 2018) are not specifically about how to bridge paradigms, but through their character, provide substantial guidance toward this objective.

Piliriqatigiinniq is an Inuit value that describes “working together for a common cause” (Government of Nunavut, 2018, para. 6). This value is highlighted in the Piliriqatigiinniq Partnership Model of Community Health Research, which emphasizes relational accountability and collaboration among anyone with an interest in contributing to the common good. Bringing multiple perspectives together strengthens work, helping it to be more broadly relevant (Healey & Tagak, 2014). Piliriqatigiinniq guides me to work collaboratively with Inuit and other stakeholders to imagine a renewed and beneficial relationship between Inuit and rehabilitation. Similarly, it prompts me to reflect on how Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm can work together in the design of a project addressing this endeavor.

The Qaggiq Model emerged from in-depth discussions between Aupilarjuk and Janet Tamalik McGrath (McGrath, 2018). It employs the metaphor of a qaggiq, a large communal igloo, to describe the space in which Inuktitut knowledge renewal can occur on terms consistent with Inuit values. In this gathering space, relationships are renewed, skills are built and problems are dealt with, as group harmony is essential to the wellbeing of all. In McGrath (2018), Aupilarjuk encourages Inuit and Western knowledge systems to work together. He stresses, however, that Inuit knowledge must be privileged on Inuit lands (McGrath, 2018). In support of this, McGrath describes the Qaggiq Model as a conceptual space where non-Inuit “can listen, experience, and observe the strength of Inuktitut renewal so they understand more clearly what they need to support” (McGrath, 2018, p. 312). This guides non-Inuit researchers to begin understanding how to engage in respectful and accountable relationships with Inuit and Inuit knowledge on Inuit lands.

Both piliriqatigiinniq and the Qaggiq Model provide guidance on how relationships and power sharing can be structured according to Inuit epistemology. Both concepts supported me to foreground Inuit ways of knowing from my position as a Qallunaaq researcher and provided consistent reference points for decision-making throughout the project. They especially prompted me to reflect on and attend to my epistemic privilege as a Western researcher.

### Meaningful Coherence

Meaningful coherence is a marker of qualitative research quality that reflects the alignment or fit between parts of a study (Tracy, 2010). A study has meaningful coherence when it achieves its intended purpose, accomplishes what it purports to be about, employs methods and means of knowledge representation that align with its theoretical foundations and interconnects all aspects of the project with one another (Tracy, 2010). The concept is flexible enough to apply across paradigms in qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). Where there are apparent disjunctures between aspects of a study, researchers can be transparent and explain why their choices make sense in the context of the research (Tracy, 2010). With such flexibility, differences in thought and approach can be valued and celebrated (Ravenek & Rudman, 2013; Tracy, 2010; Walby & Luscombe, 2017).

Meaningful coherence is a concept that evolved from Western traditions of assessing qualitative research quality. However, some Indigenous scholars have referenced meaningful coherence in work describing Indigenous and Western paradigm bridging (e.g., Marriott et al., 2020; Nowgesic, 2013). Additionally, pursuing meaningful coherence can support relational accountability. Accountability to Indigenous communities and to the researcher’s stated intentions requires transparency of logic and approach. The researcher’s reasoning and actions must be clear, coherent, responsive to needs, and demonstrate follow through for community members to find value in engaging with a project and taking up its findings.

### How These Concepts Work Together

The three concepts work well together: piliriqatigiinniq and the Qaggiq Model guide how I bridge Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm, while meaningful coherence reminds me to apply this bridging consistently across all stages of the research project. My lessons from piliriqatigiinniq and the Qaggiq Model support the meaningful coherence of the study by guiding how the study “hangs together” (Tracy, 2010, p. 848). Together, these three concepts provide me with a consistent system of logic to follow.

### An Accountability Framework

**Positioning my Learning About Inuit Worldviews and the Critical Paradigm**

I take the position of Battiste and Henderson (2000), who describe how “from the Indigenous vantage point, the process of understanding is more important than the process of classification” (p. 37). Scholarship bridging critical and Indigenous perspectives “should not be judged in terms of neocolonial paradigms” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 2). As such, my focus in this paper is on my journey to bridge two knowledge systems in research, without emphasis on the specific characterizations of Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm. Table 1 brings together aspects of these knowledge systems that I have learned about, and which I felt may be brought together in support of the research objectives. This means that Table 1 does not contain a complete and definitive characterization of either Inuit worldviews or the critical paradigm. Both knowledge systems are continuously evolving.
Figure 1 overviews the main actions of the accountability framework and shows how it is a cyclical process. Table 1 shows how I employed the framework to support reflection and action. Moving from lightly shaded to darkly shaded regions (clockwise in the figure; left to right in the table), the framework shows learning, planning, doing, reflecting and circling around again to revisit, re-examine and renew these steps. This process supported me in evolving and improving my work as I moved forward. The lightly shaded section is focused on learning about Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm, seeking to draw out points of alignment and tension. This learning informs the medium shaded section, in which I plan how the project should move forward, guided by lessons from piliriqatigiinniq and the Qaggiq Model. In the darkly shaded section, I evaluate the plan’s execution. This supports meaningful coherence by attending to the fit of decisions and actions with project intentions and objectives. I consider positive outcomes that were made possible through the bridging of Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm, but also persistent tensions and issues that need to be attended to. When I encounter these new possibilities and tensions, I circle back to renew learning, revisit project intentions and objectives, and re-examine where to go next. This circling process is never finished as I can never fully complete my learning (Gerlach, 2018; Thayer-Bacon, 2003).

Much of the table is informed by literature, observations and reflections on experience, but it was not developed in isolation. The table evolves through discussion with my academic committee, research advisory group members, participants, friends, and colleagues, and my daily life in Nunavut. Evolving iteratively, the framework is active and dynamic, growing and changing over time. It is only static now to go into print, representing this moment in my learning.

There are important caveats to consider with this framework. Firstly, the reality of my learning has been much messier and more incomplete than the table and figure suggest. I did not follow the framework rigidly in one direction. My work moved back and forth and around through the steps as needed. Secondly, I recognize that a table is largely a Western means of organizing for coherence. I acknowledge its logic was comfortable to me as someone raised and trained in Western systems. Finally, I wish to emphasize process over content. Just as I don’t claim to have exhaustively characterized Inuit worldviews or the critical paradigm, my assessment of how these knowledge systems can work together should not be taken as an authoritative evaluation. The table simply represents my process of understanding, specific to the context of my project (Battiste & Henderson, 2000).

Lessons About Bridging Learned From my Perspective

Coherence Does Not Require a Unified Epistemology

When I started project planning, I assumed that project coherence required congruence between the epistemologies involved (Mayan, 2009). Under this assumption, I assembled content in the left and centre columns of Table 1. This exercise was helpful, as I did, at least on the surface, find areas of agreement between the knowledge systems, which gave me a
solid foundation for beginning participant engagement activities. Where I noted areas of disagreement between Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm, I planned to privilege Inuit worldviews wherever possible. This work forced me to name and consider the beliefs, values and priorities that I was bringing together in the project.

However, in executing the project, I learned that locating surface-level similarities did not mean I had found epistemological uniformity. There was general agreement between Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm in terms of many broad principles. Nevertheless, I found that the specifics of how these principles are acted upon can be different from different paradigmatic positions, with implications for research methods.

For instance, in a high-level overview, it is accurate to say that both Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm support relationality. However, the critical paradigm’s valuing of relationships is very different from relationality being a central tenet, interconnected through all aspects of Inuit worldviews. A relational worldview will produce logic, actions and norms that follow from its relational foundation. Not sharing such a relational foundation, the critical paradigm produces different logic, actions and norms. To illustrate this in relation to our research, I have read much critical scholarship that frames findings in terms of the status quo being problematic. As I considered how we would present the findings of our research, this framing didn’t feel helpful as it might risk damaging relationships with service colleagues and funders, and, therefore, be counterproductive to producing the changes suggested by the findings. With the help of the accountability framework, I was able to reconsider how findings could be productively framed in alignment with both Inuit and critical perspectives. With Inuit approaches foregrounded, the result is a more strengths-oriented, solution-focused framing that speaks in terms of opportunities for building rather than tearing down.

Boiling a worldview or a paradigm down to broadly aligned principles requires loss of important nuance. Such nuances highlight the important distinctiveness of the epistemologies involved in my project. Locating shared foundational values was a good point of departure, but was just that—a starting point, requiring further dialogue and understanding about what the values meant in context. Relationships and experience in the context of research facilitated learning with deeper resonance and relevance, illuminating what was working well and ongoing tensions. In recognizing that my initial plan was incomplete, the need for the third step in the accountability framework became evident. To support ongoing learning and revision of plans, the framework became a circular process and validated that I would see the project with new eyes over time.

Although I was reading about piliriqatigiinniq and the Qaggiq Model while I was seeking epistemological uniformity between Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm, it took me some time to recognize that my attempts to force congruence between these knowledge systems came itself from my Western training where standardization and linearity are valued (Norris, 2014). Assuming that epistemological uniformity has been found risks privileging the Western norms of the researcher’s training by supposing that they now know entirely how to proceed.

A meaningfully coherent project does not need to strictly follow one paradigm (Tracy, 2010). Accordingly, I do not believe that meaningful coherence requires that all people, decisions and actions involved in a project follow the same understandings about the world. Neither piliriqatigiinniq nor the Qaggiq Model advise that those involved in working together must think about the world in the same way. Rather, differences in ways of thinking are welcomed. These concepts accord me space to value and engage with Inuit ways of knowing and being as a Qallunaaq with my own ways of knowing and being. They offer space for both knowledge systems to be respected and work together, while each remaining distinct. The goal is to bridge, not to blend knowledge systems, and the research product can be representative of both.

As an illustration of the benefits of welcoming a diversity of perspectives, I will share something I learned from participant perspectives on how Western rehabilitation approaches differ from Inuit approaches in supporting children. I imagined I might learn of a dichotomy of approaches, but as I completed analysis, I found that participant perspectives actually mapped more onto a spectrum. In participatory analysis, these findings became the most endorsed ideas that former participants and other stakeholders, who themselves represented a diversity of perspectives, felt would be beneficial to share broadly. The openness encouraged by Inuit worldviews supported a critical analysis about how rehabilitation could evolve to be responsive to the unique needs and interests of all who seek it (MacLachlan et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

Although paradigms need not share an epistemology, bridging is facilitated by shared points of common ground. Had both Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm not valued relationality, the distance to bridge would have been much greater. Sharing points of connection and distinctiveness provides a basis for building relationships (Long, 2021). Finding meaningful coherence in my project, therefore, was largely a process of continuously seeking a balanced and dynamic, respectful relationship between Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm.

Power Imbalances Must Be Redressed with Intention

Although I committed to conducting my research by centring Inuit worldviews, and despite my preparation, I acknowledge that I did not always fully understand what it meant to do this. For example, there were times in storytelling sessions with Inuit participants when I came to feel that some follow-up questions were off base, perhaps framed from a critical stance that didn’t resonate. Revisiting the accountability framework helped me to reconsider the structure and use of these
questions. Without being Inuk and having only worked in Nunavut periodically over the last 15 years, I could never prevent all the instances when I would follow Western assumptions. However, supported by the concepts and process of my accountability framework, I could work on corrections when I recognized actions that were not in line with my intentions and research objectives. While I could not eliminate the power differential that privileged Western perspectives, especially because I embody so much of these perspectives myself, I was able to take action to resist it.

A primary goal of my accountability framework was to prevent the harms caused by Western epistemic privileging by supporting the visibility and intentional foregrounding of Inuit worldviews. The framework laid bare the actions to be taken in the project, as well as the values and assumptions underlying those actions, informed by knowledge of both Inuit worldviews and the critical research paradigm. It helped me ensure that all actions were accountable to project intentions and research objectives. For example, during storytelling sessions, many people shared threads of a common story that I began to feel could be paired with an impactful critical analysis. However, in participatory analysis, it was clear that many people did not agree. I felt conflicted about what to do. In revisiting the accountability framework, ideas of listening, relational accountability and Inuit governance reminded me of the importance of the participatory analysis process. Pushing ahead with my critical analysis on this subject, no matter how much I could not eliminate, I was able to take action to resist it.

Inuit participants and collaborators have been welcoming, and kind, patient, generous and forgiving when I make mistakes. I could only come to the project as me, with my commitments to privilege Inuit worldviews, uphold Inuit self-determination rights, attend to relational accountability, bring my heart, and do my best. I can employ strategies that support this work, including those described at the outset of this article such as building relationships, being reflexive and acting with humility. This work is part of a process of lifelong learning.

I agree with Castleden, Martin, et al. (2017) who emphasize that bridging knowledge systems does not happen at a desk; this work is a social process. While the first set of columns in Table 1 were created at a desk, it was necessary homework that allowed me to be open and receptive to the learning that would happen during project execution. This homework helped me to recognize Western assumptions and norms, which supported me to enter the project with greater humility and awareness of what I might represent and reproduce. It enabled me to anticipate and plan for some tensions. However, the truest attempt at bridging Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm happened when I began executing the project and talking with people in Nunavut. My desk learning exponentially gained relevance and meaning in context. For example, I entered participant engagement having read about and theorized how mainstream rehabilitation approaches might be incompatible with Inuit worldviews. When participants shared ideas that differed from my expectations, it prompted me to cycle through the accountability framework again, revisiting and updating what I knew and how to proceed. These actions supported my research objective to foreground Inuit perspectives, both in the methodology and findings produced from participant stories.

Another point for reflection is recognizing the limitations of my accountability framework. I can never be fully aware of how my Western worldview is influencing my work or fully certain that my actions align with Inuit worldviews. As such, it is not for me to judge whether meaningful coherence or the optimal balance between Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm has been achieved. For Inuit rights to self-determination to be upheld through my research project, I must practice relational accountability and seek Inuit governance and collaboration (Healey & Tagak, 2014; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2018a). I can also show my heart, be transparent about my intentions and approach, be reflexive, humble and responsive, and discuss my work with others along the way. From these actions, Inuit and other Nunavummiut can judge whether or in what ways the research makes sense and will be relevant to them.

**Conclusion**

Navigating the bridging work described in this article has been the biggest challenge I have faced in my project to date. I know I
missed much, as I continue to gain clarity on the subject even as I finalize this article. By specifically reflecting on meaningful coherence and how paradigm bridging should be done on Inuit lands, my plans for how Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm could work together were better informed and held to a higher standard of accountability. Overall, the accountability framework was an effective tool to support decision making and changes in course as I learned over the duration of the project. My engagement with both Inuit worldviews and the critical paradigm helped me to view the status quo through two distinct but complimentary perspectives, producing a variety of insights that were instructive toward my research objective of understanding Inuit perspectives on rehabilitation. The tensions encountered created productive learning opportunities.

Keeping in mind that finding a good path will be specific to person, place and time (Simonds & Christopher, 2013), I believe some lessons shared in this paper may be relevant to readers in contexts beyond Nunavut. Learning how Indigenous and Western paradigms involved in a project are similar and different, and how they can coherently work together in an iterative, reflexive, dynamic, collaborative and responsive relationship supports researcher transparency, and accountability to Indigenous communities and researcher intentions. This work supports the production of relevant and valuable research for the Indigenous communities involved, in part by prompting the researcher to attend to and resist Western hegemony in their work.

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Ethical Approval
The research project discussed in this article was approved by the University of Toronto Health Sciences Research Ethics Board (protocol #37968) and licenced by the Nunavut Research Institute (#02 035 21R-M).

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Notes
1. Words presented here from Inuit language follow the roman orthography spellings from the South Qikiqtaaluk dialect of Inuktut (Piruvik, n.d.).
2. Qallunaq (Inuktitut): White person. The plural form of Qallunaaq is Qallunaat, which in the context of this paper is primarily used to express the predominant Eurocentric perspectives that underpin mainstream Canadian institutions.
3. Inuk (person) is the singular form of Inuit (people).
4. Inuit Nunangat refers to Inuit homelands in Canada.
5. While I focus in this paper on individual researcher actions, it is important to emphasize the need for systemic change as well, particularly in government and academic institutions, to validate, facilitate and encourage research that meaningfully respects Indigenous self-determination rights.
6. Mi’kma’ki is the homelands of the Mi’kmaq People, which include regions known today as Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and parts of New Brunswick and Quebec.
7. Translating to “in the manner of an Inuk” (McGrath, 2018, p. 380), Inukutut is used in this context as an adjective, but is also used as a noun to describe the spectrum of Inuit language dialects in Canada (Piruvik, n.d.).
8. Even the choice to name Inuit knowledge systems as “Inuit worldviews” is a tentative choice. As stated by Karetak et al. (2017, p. 243), Inuit knowledge “is not a thing.” Assigning a singular descriptor, therefore, is a disputed proposition. Inuit ways of knowing and doing have been described in terms of Inuit worldviews in resources such as Karetak et al. (2017) and Nakasuk, et al. (2017). They are also very commonly described in terms of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (e.g., Karetak et al., 2017), among other characterizations.
9. Indigenous research paradigms are discussed in the literature (e.g., Hart, 2010), but to be specific to the context of my research, I focus in this paper on Inuit research knowledge and approaches encompassed within Inuit worldviews.

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