

*Meaningful
Collaborations
& Relationships
Guiding Ethical
Research*

MARANA DYARGALI



Beata Bajorek

Interviewed By:

Professor
Robynne Quiggin

In this chapter, Professor Beata Bajorek discusses her role in contributing to the UTS ethics committee. Dispelling myths of ethics being a “tick the box” process, Beata shares insights on how the purpose of the ethics process is to strengthen research design and rigour while also respecting human participants. Understanding the ethics committee’s questions around research design and engagement helps people consider the impact of their research. This understanding is important both in terms of the engagement with research participants as well as considering the impact of the research both within communities, society, industry and academia.

“One of the key pieces of advice we would have for researchers undertaking Indigenous research is to be really clear in your application about what has practically taken place before you have come to the point of submitting your ethics application where you outline your proposal. What conversations have you had around your research? What is the level of engagement that you have had? Who have you spoken with and who is actually being brought into your project? We are particularly looking for meaningful collaboration and engagement.”

Beata also discusses the unique and collaborative approach taken at UTS to review ethics applications. Bringing a diverse range of people together to get the best outcome for research while ensuring that engagement with research participants is based on principles of respectful relationships. Beata reminds us of the importance of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Code of Ethics which is guided by four principles that underpin ethical research 1: Indigenous self-determination, 2: Indigenous leadership, 3: Impact and value, and 4: Sustainability and accountability.

About Beata

Professor Bajorek is a clinical academic pharmacist, having practiced in community & hospital settings, and is the inaugural Academic Pharmacist at Royal North Shore Hospital. Previously she has been a Research Fellow at the Clinical Practice Advancement Centre, University Health System Consortium (Chicago, USA), followed by 9 years in academia in the Faculties of Pharmacy and Nursing, University of Sydney (Australia), before coming to UTS in 2011 to help set up the Graduate School of Health. She is a highly experienced clinical educator and researcher, and has been recognised through awards and nominations for Outstanding Teaching, Support for the Student Experience, and Research Supervision. In her own research, Prof Bajorek has focused on consumer engagement and multidisciplinary stakeholder collaboration to address health-related problems.

RQ Could you tell us about the ethics committee, the ethics proposal review process and the kinds of discussions you have in the meetings?

BB We look at every proposal as an independent group of researchers, experts and lay persons who reflect the broader community viewpoint. We come with a very diverse range of perspectives and lenses through which we discuss a detailed research ethics application form that has been filled in by a researcher. We try to make sense of the research, understand what's happening through this really concise presentation. We are trying to understand the story in that application and the purpose of the research. We imagine what the value and experience would be like for a research participant, whether that is at an individual or a community level. We try to make some sort of judgements around that and proactively work with all the people involved in the process to ensure the research is meeting ethical principles. Ultimately, we're making sure that the proposed research is able to move forward and achieve the best possible outcomes for all involved—following ethics principles will ensure these outcomes.

When we get to a meeting, we have extensive discussions around the proposal. It is a very collegiate discussion congratulating the researchers on addressing the challenges of their research area. Sometimes we have no awareness of the issue being addressed and we discuss our interest and learnings about this as a problem. We use this as an educational moment for the committee members. We work together and seek clarification from each other. We seek out each other's experience with particular methods or topics, and we often turn to the expertise of the research team itself to assist our understanding—we invite researchers to attend our meetings where we feel a joint discussion would assist our understanding of the research proposal. It is a very positive discussion about moving the research proposal forward and

we always canvas what practical advice we can offer the research team to ensure ethics principles are applied.

If there are things that we don't understand, because we know that we are reading limited detail within a form, we go back to researchers and ask for clarification. We are never in a position where we would not approve a research study to go ahead. That is never the conversation. That is one of the myths around the research ethics process that it is either you get approval or you don't get approval. For our committee, that is not what it is. It is about discussing whether we have done everything that we can possibly do to adhere to ethics principles, so we can with confidence—send the research off into the real world. We discuss whether there is benefit to all, and the relevant safety measures, within the research proposal. We check that people are fully informed and that the research will generate worthwhile outcomes. We have lots of follow up conversations with researchers to exchange information, which is both beneficial to the committee and the researchers in clarifying the processes and thoughts around the research.

RQ How does your experience inform your participation on the ethics committee?

BB You have to bring in multiple lenses when you are on an ethics committee. From a researcher perspective, what you are bringing is knowledge and experience around the “how to” in understanding the unique problem being faced and how it can be best addressed. So, how do you know it is a problem? What's your evidence base for that and how has that informed your approach? We're looking to ensure that your proposed research will be meaningful, addressing real issues, taking on board learnings and feedback from previous research, the community, and society more generally. Taking it from that point in your research, it's about understanding how you will engage with all the people that are going to be involved in the conduct of, and impacted by, your proposed research. Experience of that entire research process and understanding what you are striving for in terms of actual research outcome allows us to understand how and why the data are being collected to have meaningful impact and to address the original stated problem. Being on an ethics committee and

having that ‘researcher’ insight is extremely important. You are able to look at someone else’s application and understand the process of working through that.

The other lens you have to be able to review ethics applications through is as a research participant or recipient stakeholder. We try to foresee what an individual going into this research study might be expecting. The ethics committee tries to imagine what that would be like for that individual participant and the impact of that contribution for the communities and population they are representing. How have they understood what this research is about? Why have they been invited to participate? What would they be expecting to contribute? What is the benefit or value in the participant making this contribution? The ethics committee recognises that people participating in research are giving up a part of themselves, individually, or by way of representing their communities or broader populations. That is quite a big investment on their part into research that is going to benefit a lot of people. Applying this lens can be quite hard and it means, as an ethics committee, we need to be human. We can’t just be academic researchers, looking at a process and making sure that we’ve got all “the i’s dotted and the t’s crossed”, as the saying goes. We have to bring in that human element, be personable and think about the ‘lived experience’ of participants—‘life’ in more general terms is the true context for human research. Research is ultimately about improving our lives.

What is really important from an Indigenous research perspective is for us to try and have that human understanding, or at least that sensitivity, because if we are not Indigenous researchers or Indigenous persons ourselves, we are never going to fully understand that lived experience. We need to have a starting point of sensitivity to know what we are looking for and who to consult with. Who do we seek expert advice from? Who do we engage in that process so that we understand what that research experience would be like and what the real value and the true impact of that research will be? Being on a research ethics committee is more than just about the research process. Again, it is about being human.

One of the reasons I really enjoy being on the ethics committee is because I think research is so invaluable—it does change our daily lives in so many different ways. However, it is only valuable if you are addressing problems that people want addressed, in which they can see that their perspective and their experiences have been taken on board. My own research is not in the Indigenous research space, I’m a clinical health researcher, but I’ve spent a lot of time talking to people, patients, carers, clinicians—and if you allow them to speak freely, they will tell you what the issues are and what they need from your research. I remember one of the very first research projects I did as a PhD student, I was fairly naive to methods and the whole research process. I remember sitting back and thinking, I just need to let these people talk whilst I get my head around what I’m doing. However in allowing them to speak freely and openly, in different ways they were each effectively saying, this is what I think you’d really ought to be doing with your research—such a simple first step in the research process. There was nothing complex in the method nor approach, it was purely about listening to people to understand the problem from their perspective and how it could be resolved. That was so impactful and powerful for me. I thought, this isn’t really about me, I am a PhD student, I will get a PhD at the end of this, which will be great for me in my own professional development, however, the research is not actually about me or for me. I needed to make the research truly focused on the people at the heart of the research, those who were going to benefit from it. That was such an important life changing experience for me and it has changed the way I approach research across the board. The ethics review process reflects that—it’s not about you—as a researcher—ticking off the boxes regarding your research methods to complete a project. It’s about the research per se—you always have to remember what the purpose of research ultimately is.

When I have people coming to me with proposals to do a PhD, asking me to supervise, I ask them what topic they want to do. When I ask them why they want to do it is sometimes very hard for them to articulate that because they have just picked it as a current ‘hot topic’ that has appeared in different research or public media. However, they are not quite sure why it is important, or why they should be doing it,

other than it gaining media attention. I try to get them to go back and have that human connection to it and understand the base from which this research is coming. Why are they really interested in doing it? How will they judge whether their research has been a success, and for whom will it be a success? I try and view things from that human aspect and that is why I enjoy being on the research ethics committee.

RQ How do you gauge what is valuable for the participants and the community?

BB The number one thing we do as a committee is go back to the researchers and ask them, as experts in the field, what have they done to ensure the research is inclusive of the community that they are engaging as research participants? What level of collaboration and engagement have they had? How have they received that evidence that they are proposing is worthwhile? Have they determined this as an area of need for that population or group? We go back to the researchers themselves. There is a lot of trust in this part of the ethics process. We try and learn about the research teams. Where did they come from? What is the research context for them as people with a lived experience, stakeholders, or academic expertise? What is their background? What is their expertise and professional or personal experience? A lot of researchers go into their fields of research because of personal experience with events, history, context, culture and other aspects of life. These are the things that will enable the ethical conduct of the research, and this is what we're really interested in when we ask for researchers to briefly describe their experience or track record—we're not really interested in a list of formal qualifications per se. We go back to the researchers and ask them to demonstrate to us how these factors have been considered and facilitated within the research proposal.

“One of the key pieces of advice we would have for researchers undertaking Indigenous research is to be really clear in your application about what has practically taken place before you have come to the point of submitting your ethics application where you outline your proposal. What conversations have you had around your research? What is the level of engagement that you have

had? Who have you spoken with and who is actually being brought into your project? We are particularly looking for meaningful collaboration and engagement.”

This is not what we tended to do in the past where you would just send someone an email saying you have an interesting project idea, and ask them whether they would like to be a part of it, yay or nay? Then, you simply told people—including those likely to be impacted by the research—what you were doing or you had already done, after the fact! So, effectively getting feedback after you've done the project. That approach doesn't fly these days. Research needs to be meaningful and have value. The only way you are going to make that happen is if you are establishing relationships, working with communities, asking them what they need and what they want. It is important to let communities drive research because if you let them lead, it is inherently going to generate positive outcomes. We always go back to the researchers to explain that relationship-building process, as one of the most important steps before you physically conduct your research. It is a really detailed first step that should be invested in quite heavily by all of those involved in the research.

RQ When you rely on the word of a researcher and need to consider risk to a community, what are some of the considerations and thoughts about the risk the committee take when offering an approval for that research to take place?

BB There is a lot of trust in the whole research ethics process. Trusting the researchers do have the experience and expertise they profess to have. Trusting that they have done what they say they have done or will do in their ethics application. Trusting the research participants will adhere to what they are being asked to do and that the data they provide is correct. There is a lot of trust placed in that process. For the most part, we have that trust and it can be better assured if everyone is working towards the same goals with the same shared understanding of what research is about and what its

importance is. The process is not entirely risk free and we accept that. Research will never be 100 percent nil risk. Even what we call low risk projects may receive complaints, because someone has had a slightly different experience in life and might react differently to questions that have been asked or around data they have been asked to supply. That will always happen in the context of human research. It is about people's lives, their context, their experiences, so we accept that.

At UTS we try really hard to work with researchers in a practical and proactive way to ensure there is trust in the whole ethics review process, between the research academics, participants, stakeholders, and ethics committee. In one scenario where we had quite extensive conversations with the research team about their project involving Indigenous community groups, we tried to engage the broader collaborators in that as well to understand the level of community and stakeholder involvement and facilitate discussion on expectations around outcomes, effectively building up that trust for all involved, which I think is a unique process at UTS. I don't think most institutions would engage in that level of discussion and conversation to try and understand the application and its context. It took a few iterations, especially for the non-Indigenous researchers to understand how the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) principles needed to be demonstrated, what that meant practically. We just kept moving forward with that process step by step, in small steps, to get them to a point where we felt that there was enough practical demonstration and also to a

MARANA DYARGALI

INTERVIEWS

point where the extended collaboration was comfortable with the proposal.

In effect, we were trying to understand the level of support from, and meaningful engagement with, the extended collaborative network, including the Indigenous communities and organisations that were part of the research, to gauge to what extent the research—which addressed highly sensitive issues—was acceptable to them all. It also became an example of where we often recommend staging the research to optimise community engagement and consultation throughout the research project. We might get a really large proposal that has multiple objectives in it and it may not be possible for the researchers to demonstrate the application of Indigenous research ethics principles across the whole application. We would recommend breaking the research down, articulating it through a number of phases, so we can get it off the ground and ensure there is the right level of engagement and collaboration for that project. The researchers then build from that as they move forward. Staging the research ensures that there is time for proper pause and reflection on the conduct of the research, with appropriate consultation. I did a lot of follow up with the lead researchers in the aforementioned case and we still have that application open for the researchers to come back for the next phases of the larger project. They did move forward, it took them some time, however they did learn quite a lot in that process. They learnt what it means to have meaningful engagement and what it means to establish meaningful relationships in the process. It was a worthwhile process, influencing the way those researchers and community groups have positively engaged with subsequent research activities. The investment in this step has been critical to the success of that project.

RQ What changes to the research ethics process have you seen over the years that you have been working in this space?

BB Lots of changes on lots of levels. There is a lot more emphasis on ethics in the review rather than the mechanics of undertaking research. The value of the research, what can be practically done to provide that value, alongside the



assurance of reasonable safety, within that. Historically, people have seen the ethics review more as an administrative, risk assessment process where universities or institutions would review applications to ensure the risk to the institution, researchers and participants is negated. That is important, of course, as we want to ensure safety as much as possible in the process. However, there are hard problems that have to be explored in research, and it's not always possible to reduce risks to 'zero' percent, so sometimes we have to accept that there will be risks whilst trying to address these problems. The research ethics review, the principles that have been put forward and the process of review, is about putting everything into context. It is not about whether a research proposal is approved or not to proceed based on whether there are any risks present. It is about discussing what the risks are, how can safety be maximally attained in context, whilst addressing real problems in the world through the research. It's about discussing to what extent any identified risks are acceptable given the potential benefits and significance of outcomes from the proposed research, and how research participants, communities, and stakeholders have been enabled and empowered to contribute to that discussion and related decision-making, be it on an individual or societal level.

There have been fairly recent revisions to the National Statement (National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research) and in terms of Indigenous research there has been the revision of the AIATSIS guidelines, which are now—as of 2020—formally a code (The AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research). UTS was quite involved in that review process back in 2019 and it was fantastic to have a voice at that consultation table. The AIATSIS guidelines, now a code, have always been a really wonderful resource for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. The 2019 revisions made it clear that following the code is not optional, it's not just a guideline recommendation or something to flag in the background. It says that these principles need to be front and centre, this is how research proposals need to be framed, it's best practice, reflecting the appropriate way of undertaking research in this space. A key revision in the translation of the guideline into a code in 2019, was the consolidation of the four overarching

governing principles. They are very easy to find online and are supported by a guide that demonstrates to researchers how you can practically align your research activities to these principles. Everyone is in agreement with the principles, you don't find researchers that disagree with the principles, everyone is committed to them. However, researchers often struggle to demonstrate to an ethics committee how they are practically acting on those principles—what exactly are they doing to apply these principles. Again, through meaningful engagement and collaboration at the start, researchers will easily identify what Indigenous communities and organisations expect of them in this regard.

More generally, I also think there is better cultural awareness within research. In Australia, we have a lot of interest in undertaking research in people from different ethno-cultural backgrounds, whether we are talking about our First Nations people or whether we are talking about people who have migrated to Australia within our modern history, in recent decades. There is generally a lot more engagement with concepts of culture, ethnicity and diversity, which has had an impact on the way people approach research. There is better consideration of how research needs to be conducted in a culturally sensitive way, respecting the diversity in people's lived experiences, expectations, and understandings, as well as the need to engage people from those different ethno-cultural groups within the research process. This engagement relates to both diversity among the co-researchers as well as in seeking guidance from community groups around the conduct of the research. Collectively, there have been changes both from a societal perspective and from a research ethics perspective, particularly in the last five years. There has been quite a tangible shift in attitudes, sensitivities, and understanding.

RQ What is the common misconception about ethics and ethics applications in people's attitudes toward them?

BB Fortunately, there has been a change in mindset. Historically, people have seen the research ethics process as another layer of administration and bureaucracy, because it is another formal step prior to physically starting the research

project. It is not an insignificant step for researchers to have to go through. There is a form that needs to be filled in, papers and documents that need to be provided, a process of formal review, often followed by researchers having to respond to specific committee queries, and then a final approval step. We still get researchers with a mindset of, I know what I'm doing in my research, why do I need to fill in another form to tell a committee that doesn't have my expertise about what I'm doing? Why do I need another committee to be telling me whether I can or can't do my research? That mindset does still exist in some settings, however it is rapidly changing.

The first thing I would say to those questions is that the ethics of research is not separate to the conduct of the research. It is not a standalone step that you have to go through at the end of everything else, as a tick box, administrative exercise to get the green light to go ahead. Research ethics is fundamental to the process of undertaking research. When most people create a research proposal they are already thinking from an ethical perspective—for example, when they are describing the rationale for and significance of their research, the consultation and communication process, participant recruitment, reporting of research findings, potential for harm to those involved in the research—researchers aren't always aware that these are all part of the ethical considerations. Instead, they get to a final point in actioning their research where there is a formal process called the research ethics review and approval step, which they see as being something extra and quite separate, however, they have already been engaging in that process when planning out these aspects of their research.

It starts with understanding what your research is truly about, what has informed your research questions, who you have engaged to help clarify those research questions. The beneficence of the research is about ensuring that the conduct of and engagement of people in the research is actually informative and beneficial, outweighing any unavoidable risks. It is also about ensuring that people who may be affected by the research have the autonomy to participate in, and voice to influence, the research. This is the first step in preparing your research proposal, and most do consider this carefully, to at least some extent. For

example, the proposal describes the research question, provides a literature review, and canvases the research team's composition to confirm that there is relevant experience and/or engagement with the community. In the next step, the researcher has thought about their research method and how it is undertaken to engage people in a meaningful and safe way, so that participants feel their contribution is valued whilst minimising risks. And researchers do think about research dissemination, who is going to find out what the research outcomes are and how they will use the research findings to ensure impact and value.

Most researchers can competently complete these steps when they prepare their proposals, they just don't consciously see them as being ethical considerations. That is a reflection of our training process. We probably have not engaged enough in the broader research training and we don't use the word ethics as much as we should when discussing research. When we think about research design, we think more about the physical mechanics of recruiting participants to meet our sample sizes then collecting and analysing data, and we don't always see it through a human lens—and we consciously need to as those mechanical aspects are where researchers interact with and impact people. There are lots of ethical considerations within these mechanics—even sample size calculations are critically important to the ethical conduct of research. Ethics goes hand in hand with the process of designing the methods and mechanics of your research proposal. People just need to have a little bit more self-awareness around that, that that is what they are doing. Ethics review is not an extra step, it is inherent to what you are doing already.

The second thing I would say is, it is not really an approval process, even though we tend to call it that. It's an independent review of a research application to ensure that the research is undertaken to the highest ethical standards possible. The value in having an independent review, involving other experts as well as lay persons representing different parts of the community, is that you have many people with different viewpoints, ideas and strategies inputting into that application, providing suggestions about how we can attain those high ethical standards. That is what the ethics

review process should be seen as. How are we all viewing this research, especially if we were the recipients of it? Are we all on the same page with understanding this proposal, noting the potential diversity in expectations? And what are the opportunities for optimising the ethical conduct of the research? The review is about supporting the researchers in undertaking the proposal in the best way possible to optimise the outcomes for all of the people who are engaged with the research.

We appreciate that when you complete an ethics application, it can feel like a series of checkboxes, and I've been in that mindset too as a researcher. Like anyone else, if you ask me to fill in another form of any kind, I will probably roll my eyes initially as well. We all have plenty of administrative tasks and related workloads that we have to manage. However, the ethics review process is an important one. The best way to approach it is to keep in mind that you have already worked out most of your research proposal before you get to the ethics application form and then all you are doing is simply relaying that information back to a committee. Remember that when you are putting information into those boxes on the ethics application form, it needs to collectively tell a story from beginning to end. That is how the committee looks at the application. Fill in the boxes, but go back and reread the inputs, and think about how the information in these fields will be interpreted by somebody who is looking at this fresh for the first time and who perhaps knows nothing about this research area and perhaps doesn't understand your research methods. Can they understand what this story is?

RQ Do you think UTS runs a more thorough or clearer process than others?

BB I have been on other research ethics committees, so I have a frame of reference, however I have not sat on any Indigenous research ethics committees. The UTS approach is unique in the sense that we are much more engaged in the research ethics process via our openness to conversations

with researchers. We engage a lot more directly with researchers to better understand their research, what they are trying to do. We encourage researchers to engage with us at the very beginning of their research and make contact with the ethics office, even before receiving funding, so that we can support them through the process. We'll arrange to have a meeting with them, work through their proposals, exchange information, and give them lots of practical advice on how to do things. We make ourselves available to review documents for their studies and provide detailed guidance around that. We can also identify other researchers across the university who may be able to provide advice around specific types of methods—we're fortunate at UTS that we have a community of researchers who generously share their expertise across disciplines.

We also support researchers by having ethics applications pre-reviewed by the Secretariat prior to their submission to the ethics committee so that any obvious omissions can be addressed early—this prevents the “to-ing and fro-ing” between researchers and the committee that sometimes happens during the review process. We also follow up with the researchers at the end of the formal committee review and make ourselves available to clarify the committee's discussion comments and suggestions. We get amazing feedback from our researchers about that level of engagement. Once researchers have had a conversation with us they really change their minds around what we are about and what we are trying to achieve. It's a very supportive process.

We have our co-committees like the Indigenous Research Advisory Panel, which we rely on quite heavily for their expertise. There is a lot of information exchange between this panel and the ethics committee, which is unique to UTS. That makes our process much more collaborative in moving research forward. We are probably less strict than most committees. A lot of external committees will very quickly reject an application outright at the first step in the submission process, and send it back to researchers before it's even made its way to a committee. UTS researchers have a lot more engagement with the committee across the whole ethics review process, to expedite review and the start of the

research project. People have much more interaction with us where it is needed.

UTS is in the unique position of having a very diverse research portfolio and one that is well complemented by strong industry and community partnerships. You do not see this in a lot of universities, even those that are research intensive. We see a different type of research at UTS, research that is community-based and committed to practical outcomes, less so on understanding or developing theories. This makes the ethics process really worthwhile for us when reviewing proposals—we can immediately see the translation of the research into practical outcomes. There is a strong design commitment from the community to help our research move forward. UTS has a very strong research office, research ethics unit and committed ethics Secretariat managed by a dedicated research ethics manager. There is a whole range of support and resourcing to help us drive research forward.

It is wonderful to see the university invest so much into this. There is not only a commitment, but resources available to drive forward the UTS Indigenous Research Strategy and related research portfolio within that. However, it is also the uptake of the strategy and available resources by UTS researchers that supports the process and enables positive outcomes. You can make resources available, but if people are not engaged enough to use them you are not going to get any of the desired outcomes. We have both resources available and researchers who are hugely responsive to and engaged with them. Both aspects are working really well in tandem. We are seeing successes at the moment. The amount of Indigenous research ethics applications that have come through in the last twelve months has significantly increased compared to the last five or six years. It is also big-ticket research, not just pilot studies, or initial preliminary studies undertaken by students, we are talking about large, nationwide projects that have been competitively funded through large government grants. They are projects with impact that are going to make a real difference and it is really pleasing to see UTS leading that.

RQ You spoke about ethics being relationship building with your participants, building trust

MARANA DYARGALI

INTERVIEWS

and having that in your research. I wonder if you could speak to relationship building as work within the university and the time it takes to do?

BB It is more difficult to undertake research with the changing academic environment, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are limited external resources, more pressure on university staff to do a lot more as part of their day-to-day work. All of that does make it harder, there is a lot more pressure. However, it also means that investing in relationship building, establishing those collaborations and partnerships, really engaging at the front end of the research process, is more important than ever—there needs to be a conscious decision to invest real time and real effort in this process. These cannot be tokenistic activities if you want your research to succeed in addressing real world problems and in undertaking research that's going to have an impact.

These are fundamental steps in the process, and they can't be cut short. If you go through a tokenistic framework to make it look like you have engagement, once you start undertaking that research, it will very quickly unravel. We know that as it can be seen through the lack of participant recruitment, or when your collaborators start to disengage, or when there is a lack of quality and integrity in your data, and you don't get the outcomes you ultimately require. You may not be able to get the research published, because people can't see the value of it, or you can't get any uptake of your research findings into policy, or the translation into practical that is needed from that particular research.

The consultation and engagement process is a fundamental step, you have to work at it and it requires effort. If you meaningfully make that investment at the front end everything else that follows from that will be a much smoother and efficient process. You will get your research impact. You don't want to be a researcher that goes through the motions, going through those checklists, being busy all the time, but really not getting any impact from your research. People who

collect publications, the “collectors”, may have lots of papers in low impact journals, the rungs on the board, as part of your track record. However what impact have they really had? That is why there’s a lot more attention now being paid to impact metrics. It doesn’t mean necessarily gaining citations in papers, but practically how are the research findings being taken up in the community, industry, practice? How are they being used? What you don’t want is to get to the end of a research project, analyse your data, and that’s the end—it goes no further than that.

RQ *Do you have any additional reflections about Indigenous research and the ethics process that you would like to add?*

BB One of the things that sticks in my mind about the Indigenous research space, is non-Indigenous researchers not having the awareness or understanding of when they need to think about the AIATSIS principles—or why the code even exists. We often get projects where people say in the application that the research is not about Indigenous people, Indigenous concepts or topics, but may incidentally involve Indigenous people. And, the researchers give no further consideration about the implications for Indigenous people who are recruited to the research, even incidentally. They do need to think about whether this could be a different experience for an Indigenous person? Would there be different considerations? Do I need to think about the way I’m asking questions or the information I’m gathering in a different way for these individuals? What might I get in terms of research findings? Would that have a different impact for people in an Indigenous community versus in a non-Indigenous one? We often have those conversations around our research ethics committee and when we go back to researchers they say it is not an Indigenous project. That is true. However, the participants may be Indigenous, as part of an open recruitment process where anybody can volunteer to participate.

I would encourage researchers to go back to the AIATSIS code for every research proposal. Knowing that Indigenous people could be participants in any study, researchers should go back to the code and read the introduction as a minimum.

Try and imagine the engagement of Indigenous people in the research project through that lens. We have open fields in the ethics application that ask people to speak to those considerations—what do they mean in the context of your specific study? How could you manage those considerations practically? Does it mean you might need to reframe the question, or have sensitivity to the responses? Are you—as a researcher—appropriately experienced and qualified to interpret the responses? Maybe those participants need more support or guidance? Maybe you need to engage an Indigenous person who can represent the community and be able to provide some expert guidance around the research—its conduct and interpretation of findings—or to serve as a point of referral if somebody needs support. The practical actions taken around these considerations can be quite simple. They are not complicated actions to engage with stakeholders or community representatives as a starting point. And, it is demonstrating in an ethics application that you have both thought about the considerations and actively addressed them. You show you are sensitive to where there might be a different experience for those participants. The next step is asking how can you make the research safer, and a more positive and meaningful experience, for those impacted by the research. After all, research is about helping to improve the way we live—so, we need to consider the specific and unique needs of those with the lived experience and enable them to drive the research. As a researcher—yours is not the most important lens through which the research is viewed—it is the community’s.