Case Study

Power imbalance in media representation: An Aboriginal Australian public relations experience

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Abstract: This article uses a case study to interrogate the role of public relations in the power imbalance between a mining company and the Traditional Owners of land in Australia, and to explore how public relations could be used to strengthen the voices and reputations of disenfranchised communities. The literature review finds the practice of public relations for and by Aboriginal Australians is relatively under-researched and highlights the low level of media representation in Australia of its First Peoples in comparison with the representation of governments and corporations. Recommendations are made for further research and application, including incorporating Indigenous research methodologies and applying emerging models of public-centered and culture-centered approaches to public relations research as a means to redress the imbalance and to give voice to First Peoples.

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1. Introduction

The role of public relations and its application to an Aboriginal community is viewed here in the context of approval being granted to a non-Indigenous company to mine on Aboriginal land in Australia. Approval was granted to Heathgate Resources Pty Ltd (Heathgate), subsidiary of US General Atomics, to mine uranium on Adnyamathanha land in South Australia. The case study explores the collaborative action between a corporation and two levels of government in order to ensure the corporation gained approval, and the response of the Traditional Owners (Marsh, 2010; 2013). The focus is on media representation and community engagement, two key practices of public relations (Johnston & Zawawi, 2014).

Media relations is the establishment and maintenance of strong relationships with traditional media, achieved through disseminating media releases, background briefings, interviews and photo opportunities (Johnston & Zawawi, 2014). Tymson and Lazar (2006) observe that community relations programs "promote favourable public opinion in the community where the organisation operates" (p. 344). Successful community relations require authentic community engagement – and this, according to Hunt (2013), depends on the organization's recognition of its dependence on the host community, and its willingness to listen rather than tell. Trust and integrity are required, rather than just consultation, as is the intent to work towards shared goals and high levels of participation. According to Demetrious (2014), community engagement encompasses capacity building; she notes a fundamental shift from the earlier dominant view that corporations had an unconditional license to operate, to a more inclusive view that corporations should "empower citizens to think and deliberate on a course of action" (p. 261).

This article also examines current perspectives of public relations practice in relation to Australia's First Peoples – Aboriginal Australians. It is an exploratory study of this under-researched

field, with the objective of raising issues and suggesting future directions. This article highlights the need for public relations to be more inclusive of Indigenous perspectives, in order to strengthen the voice of Indigenous communities where power imbalances exist so they can speak on their own behalf, rather than by and through others. Current definitions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of conducting public relations are minimal: Clark (2012) highlights the inequitable nature of the practice in Australia, where, she says, public relations means "communicating to and/or on behalf of Aboriginal people, Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal communities" (p. 21). Although, as Clark (2012) notes, public relations practice "involves a combination of Aboriginal cultural knowledge, values and protocols and mainstream public relations" (p. 21).

2. Australia's First Peoples and mining

Much of Australia's mineral wealth lies beneath the lands traditionally owned by Aboriginal Australians, the most disadvantaged group in the nation, who make up 2.8 per cent of the population – 649,200 people in 2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). They endure some of the worst conditions experienced by 'third world' countries (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2014; Gardiner-Garden, 2008) and face significant power imbalances when negotiating land use agreements with mining companies and governments (Cheney, Lovel, & Solomon, 2002). Closing the Gap measures the attainment of targets addressing Aboriginal disadvantage. The 2019 report found that only two of seven targets are on track, with little progress being made in improving life expectancy, employment outcomes, reading, writing and school attendance for Aboriginal Australians. Only Year 12 attainment and early childhood education are progressing (George Institute, 2019).

While Australia ranks among the top countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Better Life Index, the top 20 per cent of the population earn more than five times as much as the bottom 20 per cent (OECD, 2018). Australia has a sizable public relations industry employing 21,800 people (Job Outlook, 2019), of whom eight per cent work in the mining industry (Salt & Shein, 2013), which accounts for nearly 15 per cent of Australia's GDP (Pearson, 2017).

According to Crawley and Sinclair (2003), "[S]ome mining companies in Australia had for generations been accustomed to almost uninhibited access to land, and since the nineteenth century their wealth had shaped non-indigenous Australia's political, social and economic landscape" (p. 363). As a significant stakeholder group, Aboriginal Australians have been the target of public relations strategies from governments and corporations (Synnott, 2012). However, their customary law and culture has not been granted significance or authenticity, their needs have been under-valued and their voices silenced, and they have been disabled from full participation (Howitt, 2012). In 1992, Aboriginal Australians were granted native title to their traditional lands for the first time (Crawley & Sinclair, 2003). This profoundly changed "the direction and scope of relations between mining companies and Indigenous groups in Australia" (Crawley & Sinclair, 2003, p. 363), and since then the regulatory framework facing mining companies has become more complex. Although traditional custodians can claim native title to their lands, they have limited capacity to play an equal role in decision-making because corporations still dominate the public sphere. In the context of mining, Indigenous communities are fundamentally unequal, write Campbell and Hunt (2013) because Indigenous people remain marginalized into a 'fourth world' context based on Australia's colonial and post-colonial experience.

3. The role of public relations

In their definition of public relations, Leitch and Neilson (1997) highlight the significant role public relations plays in reinforcing the power imbalance between organizations and their publics:

> Public relations is concerned with the different forms of communication between publics and organizations, but it is also concerned with the power, strategy and objectives, and the manifold ways each articulates and overdetermines, constructs and deconstructs, organises and disorganizes, the other… on a strategic terrain of competing discourses and unequal access to power and resources. (p. 26)

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) definition of public relations highlights the importance of relationship building, from an organization-centric rather than public-centric orientation: "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (PRSA, 2019, para. 4). Ihlen and van Ruler (2009), cited in Motion and Burgess (2014), note that managerial public relations efforts are concentrated on "the relationship between an organization and its publics" (p. 524) rather than on how an organization relates to society.

Foley (2003) encourages Aboriginal Australians to look to anti-colonial epistemologies and methodologies in order to construct, rediscover and/or re-affirm their knowledge and cultures. First Peoples research in New Zealand (Motion, Haar & Leitch, 2012; Tilley & Love, 2010) has found that success with community engagement requires the incorporation of the Indigenous voice in organizational communication. Motion et al. (2012) call for the integration of Indigenous communication practices, protocols and principles into public relations practice, to enable authentic and respectful engagement. Tilley and Love (2010) argue that Indigenous peoples have a contribution to make both normatively and practically to the theory of community engagement. They blame the ongoing failure to achieve the desired outcomes for Indigenous communities on the lack of insight into culturally appropriate engagement and relationship-building.

However, such collaborative approaches are not common; the organization's perspective still dominates, and Indigenous research methodologies are not incorporated in public relations research and embedded into practice. Moloney (2002) notes that "the PR 'voices' of dominant groups in society are heard more than those of the less dominant voices" (p. 88), and that this asymmetrical power relationship reinforces inequality and influences the outcome. L'Etang (2010) has coined the term 'corporate imperialism' to refer to communication that is initiated and controlled by the dominant player to fulfil its agenda; she questions whether public relations can indeed work for the information-poor as it does for the information-rich. Mohan Dutta has written widely on how public relations is used by corporations to support transnational capitalism through the management of public opinion, public policy and resources (Dutta, 2012, 2014; Dutta-Bergman, 2004, 2005; Dutta, Ban, & Pal, 2012). In the context of mining, Dutta (2012) claims that corporations and governments are able, by manipulating consultation and dialogue, to hide their "oppressive, coercive, and exploitative strategies" (p. 206). Such strategies, according to Dutta (2012), aim to displace local communities and facilitate approvals of mining and industrial projects.

Dutta's (2012) culture-centered approach to public relations emphasizes the need to incorporate local culture into communication practices that are meaningful to Indigenous communities, based on co-constructed participatory processes. He believes this approach provides an alternative theory and praxis of public relations to counter the current situation, where "knowledge of and about communication is constructed within West-centric … academic structures, … privileging certain sets of values and simultaneously undermining values from elsewhere … to justify neo-colonial interventions carried out through public relations activities" (Dutta, 2012, p. 205). Dutta's approach may be pertinent to cross-cultural contexts such as those encountered by Aboriginal Australians when facing multinational resource companies, because it allows disempowered groups a stronger voice in dialogue and the recognition of their rights, traditions and practices. The aim of the culture-centered approach is "to theorize the absences … by engaging in dialogue with voices that have typically been erased from the discursive space" (Dutta-Bergman, 2004, p. 242).

As an example of a co-constructive journey, Dutta et al. (2012, p. 4) cite an example of how Korean farmer activists actively mobilized at local, national and globally to challenge unfair global policies. They claim that "this approach draws attention to the voices on the periphery and aims to disrupt the Eurocentric notion of what constitutes public relations in the service of neoliberal power structures" (Dutta, 2012, p. 4).

According to Petersen (2016), Dutta's culture-centered approach to public relations can be the means to resist the dominant power structures. It has the potential to drive social change by providing a voice to marginalized groups by creating a communicative space where they are represented. She writes: "a more holistic conception of PR is made possible when acknowledging the various

dimensions of PR (social, cultural, historical, economic and political), one that encourages the study of diverse communicative contexts in which PR practices emerge" (Petersen, 2016, p. 31).

Petersen writes that public relations scholarship and practice hold the potential to give voice to and drive social change for minorities and has identified the need to acquire alternative mind-sets that reflect its diverse practices. She cites Sison who calls for the courageous participation of scholars with different backgrounds "to ask questions beyond the comforts and conventions of our linguistic and cultural familiarity" (as cited in Petersen, 2016, p. 15).

Leitch and Neilson (1997, 2001) provide another theoretical alternative to the dominant organization-centric model. Their public-centered approach to public relations categorizes organizations and publics into systems and lifeworld organizations:

> 'Systems organisations' are established corporations and governments, while 'lifeworld organisations' are groups of individuals, or publics, who participate in the public sphere and develop into their own 'organisation' enabling them to become organised and engage in 'wars of position' with 'systems organisations'. (Leitch & Neilson, 1997, p. 23)

Dutta (2012) affirms the capacity of public relations to address power imbalances through the co-construction of knowledge, enabled by relationship-building and genuine dialogue. He cites Kim and Pal's (2008) claims that, through dialogue between powerful and subaltern groups, an alternative representation of truth can be co-created to flow across cultural boundaries.

Motion et al. (2012) express the need for public relations practitioners to "[break] down the boundaries of organisational discourses in order to make respectful space for indigenous principles, protocols and practices and to advocate for a more influential role for indigenous peoples in society" (p. 56). For Clark (2012), increasing the number of Aboriginal Australian public relations practitioners – to promote both public relations knowledges and Indigenous cultural competencies – should be a priority; she recommends pathways to public relations roles be created, relevant courses be promoted and specialized community-based public relations programs be provided in regional areas. Further, Marsh (2010) argues that non-Aboriginal Australian public relations practitioners could be more effective if they were trained in Aboriginal knowledge, values and protocols.

In New Zealand, public relations scholars (Tilley & Love, 2010; Motion et al., 2012) have commenced actively exploring the incorporation of Indigenous practices and have highlighted the difficulties this poses. Motion et al. (2012) note: "[I]ntegrating indigenous communicative principles, protocols and practices is a complex and a challenging task for Public Relations professionals in bicultural and multicultural nations" (p. 54). If mutually beneficial relationships are to be attained, all publics need to be involved in agenda-setting, decision-making and determining the policy context. Tilley and Love (2010) reinforce the value of learning to think outside one's own paradigm and to recognize one's own biases and assumptions.

Aboriginal Australian and non-Aboriginal scholars have explored public relations practices and associated disciplines yet there is limited information about how public relations is conducted within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organizations, groups, communities and individual practices, although research is now being undertaken at Honours and Masters levels. Clark (2012) examined public relations in three Aboriginal community-controlled organizations, to identify public relations strategies and tactics, and the balance between public relations and Aboriginal cultural competency preferences, but she found only non-Aboriginal people working in the public relations and communication roles. Petersen (2016) explored Aboriginal Australian public relations in six Aboriginal community-controlled organizations in Perth, Western Australia. She encountered different terminologies and perceptions of public relations, and, in addition to common tactics and strategies, found an Indigenous style of public relations practice. Both Clark (2012) and Petersen (2016) identified Indigenous-specific commonalities, such as an emphasis on relationship management and community engagement and ongoing endeavors to strive for positive media and reporting.

4. Barriers to effective media coverage and public relations

The value placed by public relations practitioners on good media relations is underscored by Macnamara (2014):

The rich and powerful have the resources to make [an] investment in polished experts [who are] available 24/7 and, partly as a result of this, media reporting is dominated by a relatively small group of elite sources, while less accomplished, less erudite, and less available voices miss out. (p. 52)

Becker's "hierarchy of credibility" (1967, p. 242) places governments and institutional elites at the top of the hierarchy because they are valued as the most credible sources, while disenfranchised groups are 'underdogs' — low in the hierarchy and less credible. The Australian Uranium Association (AUA), an industry lobby group high in this hierarchy, established a "key stakeholder group" (Statham, 2009) in 2009. Appointees include uranium mining representatives and Aboriginal Australians with high media profiles who support mining and who are able to endorse the AUA in interviews and opinion pieces (e.g. Mundine, 2014). They are more respected in the broader Australian community than they are among the majority of Aboriginal communities who oppose mining on their land, but it is their voices and opinions that dominate the public space (Baker & McKenzie, 2014; Green, 2014; Green Left Weekly, 1999; Ingram, 2014). According to Dave Sweeney from the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), the AUA is not "some balanced, measured, disinterested, impartial body[;] it is an industry advocacy group that is trying to facilitate the expansion of the uranium industry … a cynical attempt on the part of the industry to reposition itself as an industry that listens, cares and is concerned" (Statham, 2009). Muir, Watts and Mitch (2013) have expressed concern about the stakeholder group's lack of independence.

According to McCallum and Waller (2013), unfamiliarity with the rules of engagement can make it difficult for activists representing disenfranchised groups to have their views included in news stories. Those who understand how the media operates have learnt to overcome some of the barriers, using the media to their advantage to penetrate public debate; they acknowledge, however, that their success is dependent on the prevailing policy climate and their position in the political spectrum. Aboriginal media consultant and former journalist Ursula Raymond notes: "To be fully effective, media-savvy Aborigines know to use both the mainstream and Indigenous networks to state their case" (cited in Hartley, 2003, p. 53). In her role as executive director of the Apunipinna Cape York Health Council, Kerry Arabena established a communications unit to produce media statements and digital media to enable communities to generate and disseminate their own good news stories; she attests to the effectiveness of active communication (McCallum, Waller & Meadows, 2012).

There is also a structural under-representation of Aboriginal Australians in the media sector. Only 1.8 per cent of journalists identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent (Hanusch, 2013), and they work mainly in Aboriginal media. Jason Glanville's (2014) opinion piece in *The Sydney Morning Herald* notes that Aboriginal Australians should and will create media channels to amplify stories of Indigenous excellence. He noted: "It remains incumbent on media at every level to ensure that when telling the indigenous story, they tell the full story to remind all Australians of the good as well as the bad" (Glanville, 2014, para. 21). According to Marsh (2010), a lack of cultural awareness on the part of the journalists may further inhibit accurate media representation: without an understanding of Aboriginal Australians' relationship with heritage and land, journalists may be unable to represent Aboriginal perspectives appropriately. She suggests cultural awareness training as a possible solution.

The need for such training is endorsed by Leach, James, McManus and Thompson's (2012) findings that in Western Australia, journalists' poor cultural awareness prevented effective reporting on Aboriginal health issues; they recommend relationship-building as a means to address this problem. They developed a media guide, derived from focus groups of Aboriginal health workers and journalists, to ensure greater accuracy in reporting. The focus groups revealed health workers' views that media representations of Aboriginal people are often inaccurate and uninformed, displayed negative stereotypes, sensationalized issues, and provided limited context to the stories being presented, so that issues were misrepresented, with detrimental effects. In turn, the journalists

acknowledged various challenges facing Aboriginal Australians in engaging with the media, but also had some concerns, including their accessibility to Aboriginal spokespeople, conflicting professional and cultural protocols, sensitivities in the Aboriginal community, and differing understanding about and approaches to deadlines, timeliness and efficiency. In 2018, a handbook for journalists on the reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs was released (Media Diversity Australia, 2018) providing ample resources for the media industry to become more culturally appropriate.

Unbalanced coverage is further exacerbated by the nature of Australian media ownership. Mining mogul Gina Rinehart is a powerful player in the Australian media: she was a board member of Network Ten and, until 2015, held a 15 per cent stake in Fairfax Media (Simpson, 2012; Farrell, 2015). This enabled her to project her own views of the mining sector (McKnight, 2012), reducing the potential for more balanced dialogue between stakeholders (Miller, 1999). The Beverley case study further illustrates the effects of a power imbalance on media coverage.

5. Methodology

Research question 1

How can a case study illustrate the effects of power imbalance between a disenfranchised Aboriginal Australian community and a dominant corporate / government alliance to secure media representation?

Research question 2

What research methodologies and public relations practices can be introduced to represent the perspectives of Indigenous peoples and redress the imbalance in power and control?

The Beverley Uranium Mine case study was identified as the focus for this research because it portrays a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2003). Case study methodology was selected because, according to Kumar (2019), it is useful for exploring a little-known topic and to gain a holistic understanding of an episode. Case studies are recommended in public relations practice because they provide factual data from real life, to be used to examine and analyse issues (Johnston & Zawawi, 2009). However, Cutler (2004) found that although up to one third of published articles on public relations were case studies, there had been limited discussion on their methodological advantages or shortcomings as a research tool. He suggests they are well suited to the study of public relations to "balance the influence of quantitative research which tends to isolate research problems from the processes of public relations practice that are embedded in social or organizational contexts" (Cutler, 2004, p. 365).

Macnamara (2012) recognizes their value as a formal research method because case studies enable practitioners to identify best practice, as well as poor strategies. In his book, Macnamara (2012) uses public relations case studies to demonstrate a range of theories, models and practices so that students can learn how to integrate theory and practice. While he includes "critical/societal approach" and "organisational activist/public advocate" (Macnamara, 2012, p. 479) among his criteria, none of the included case studies tick these boxes, illustrating how these models may not yet be used by public relations practitioners. Petersen (2016) believes the public relations practitioner as in-house activist has not been explored and believes more culturally sensitive and sector-specific public relations should be incorporated into theory and practice.

The Beverley Mine case study highlights two aspects of public relations: media relations and community engagement. It illustrates the imbalance of power relations between corporations and the Aboriginal community and Traditional Owners, and the effects of this imbalance on their ability to secure media representation. Heathgate, the uranium industry and state and federal governments successfully used the media to influence their public representation. This compromised the development of dialogue between the dominant parties and the disadvantaged community (Marsh, 2010). The Aboriginal community's lack of resources diminished its voice, and this study has found that it was only when the community created its own networks (by entering into a partnership with

an anti-nuclear advocacy body) that it was able to build capacity and have a voice in the mainstream media (Dorman, 2008; Marsh, 2010; Russell, 2009; Statham, 2009; *Yurabila's blog*, 2008).

The framing and voice of this paper utilizes the critical lens of anti-colonial epistemologies and methodologies (Dutta, 2012; 2014; Dutta, Ban & Pal, 2012; Foley, 2003; Howitt, 2012; Love & Tilley, 2010; Marsh, 2010; Motion, Haar & Leitch, 2012) by the co-authors of this paper, who are of Indigenous and non-Indigenous descent. The exploitation of the land and its people taps into Aboriginal philosophy that resides in an ontology that treasures mother earth beyond human life (West as cited in Foley 2003, p. 47). This philosophy is an Indigenous approach to knowledge: a strategy based on the three principles of resistance as the emancipatory imperative, political integrity, and privileging Indigenous voice (Foley, 2003). Indigenist research is done by Indigenous researchers to assist in the Indigenous struggle and to give voice to Indigenous people, "to uncover and stop the continuing forms of oppression against Indigenous Australians" (Foley, 2003, p. 48).

In public relations critical theory (Dutta, 2016; L'Etang, 2010), Indigenous themes (Clark, 2011, 2012; Howitt, 2012; Macnamara, 2012; Marsh, 2010; Sakinofsky, 2013; Sison, 2016; Petersen, 2016), and postcolonial/anti-colonial critiques (Broadfoot & Munshi, 2007; Dutta, 2009, 2012, 2016; Dutta & Pal, 2011; McKie & Munshi, 2007, 2009; Motion, Haar & Leitch, 2012; Munshi, 2005; Sison, 2016) are limited, and this paper contributes to building research in these emerging, but under-developed specializations. Dutta (2016) expounds a public relations postcolonial/anti-colonial framework and explains this approach as "the interplays of culture and power in processes of communication within the realm of geopolitics, unequal power relationships, and colonial relationships of exploitation and oppression" (p. 248).

Motion et al. (2012) express the need for collaboration, calling for the establishment of "collaborative approaches that ensure that Western organizational communication practices create spaces for and are compatible with indigenous approaches" (p. 57). This article reinforces this need for Aboriginal Australian researchers to take up the challenge in this area of research.

Other literature was examined to provide deeper understanding of relevant prevailing theory and to establish a framework for further discussion, research and application, as outlined in the recommendations.

6. Case study: Beverley Uranium Mine

Prospectors first identified uranium in the 1920s at the Beverley site in the remote northern Flinders Ranges, South Australia, on the traditional lands of the Adnyamathanha (People of the Rocky Country). The Traditional Owners had long been aware of the presence of "poisonous ground", describing the uranium-contaminated gases and water sources as "tabu zones" in their oral history (Mudd, 1998, p. 117), and were strongly opposed to any development on their land: "We regard any disturbance of these sites as a threat to our health, our environment, our culture and our heritage. It's totally at odds with our beliefs and values. This dangerous substance should be left in the ground" (Marsh as cited in Green Left Weekly, 1999, para. 9).

In 1990 the Australian government lifted its ban on uranium mining, enabling Heathgate to commence exploration at the site. There was concern among the local people and anti-nuclear groups about Heathgate's "secretive, rushed" development plans (Marsh, 2010, p. 188; Mudd, 1998) before the government announced its approval of a trial mine for the extraction of uranium in November 1997, and released a draft environmental impact statement. Final approval for full-scale mining was granted in March 1999, and Heathgate was awarded a license to commence mining in January 2001 (Marsh, 2010). Table 1 provides the sequence of events.

Table 1. Beverley Mine — sequence of events

Date	Event
November 1997	Trial mine approved by State Government
June 1998	Consultation held for draft environmental impact statement
March 1999	Final approval for full scale mining granted to Heathgate
November 1999	'Beverley Bash' on-site protest held
January 2001	Mining commenced

7. "Control will never rest with us": A disempowered community

Adnyamathanha woman Jillian Marsh (2010) explored the poor representation and lack of legitimate participation of the Adnyamathanha in the license-granting process and showed how Heathgate gained approval without consideration of Aboriginal heritage issues and contrary to community wishes. According to Marsh (2010), Heathgate maintained that any land with a commercial value could be developed and that communities would willingly accept monetary compensation for the use of, damage to, or destruction of heritage sites. Marsh (2010) also stated that Heathgate created conflict within the community between those who sought financial gain from uranium mining and those who viewed land as a cultural asset and opposed the mine – the elders and the Flinders Ranges Aboriginal Heritage Consultative Committee (FRAHCC). There was no acknowledgement of Adnyamathanha cultural values in Heathgate's environmental studies, and in Heathgate's negotiations with the Adnyamathanha the community's collective and enduring worldview was ignored or erased (Marsh, 2013). In an interview published in Green Left Weekly (1999), Marsh summarized the Traditional Owners' view of their vulnerability and lack of agency in relation to the outcome:

> What has emerged through the white legal system will never reflect what Aboriginal people want because those laws are not developed by Aboriginal people, they cannot reflect indigenous perspectives, and control will never rest with us when decisions are made to enact these laws. (Marsh in Green Left Weekly, 1999, para. 12)

According to Marsh, engagement with the Adnyamathanha was insensitively managed by Heathgate and negotiations were "misrepresentative, ill-informed, and designed to divide and disempower the community" (Dorman, 2008).

In June 1998 the South Australian government released an environmental impact statement for public consultation. The brevity of the response period – only two months – made it very difficult for community leaders to consult adequately with their people and represent their position appropriately. Marsh (2010) cites numerous other factors which indicated a lack of genuine commitment to consultation, including a lack of clarity about the rules of engagement between traditional and contemporary governance; insufficient recognition of ancient rites and native title; limited recognition of and respect for Adnyamathanha heritage, literacy and language; and the distance to the two public consultation meetings in Port Augusta (10 hours' travel) and Adelaide (13 hours away).

Pressure by the corporate stakeholders weakened the internal bonds in the Aboriginal community. Fractures appeared: internal community conflict; the breakdown of traditional Aboriginal decision-making structures; inter- and intra-cultural differences and shifts; internal governance issues in the community; and feelings of hopelessness, frustration, cynicism, mistrust and confusion about where authority resided (Marsh, 2010).

8. Collaboration for increasing voice

The case study also shows, however, how collaboration and the sharing of resources increased community capacity which could assist in repairing some of these fractures. In 1997, to fight the opening of the mine, the Greens Party, the ACF and the anti-nuclear movement united with the Adnyamathanha and the FRAHCC to form the Alliance Against Uranium. By working together, the

community was able to strengthen its internal capacity (Marsh, 2010) and improved its voice and representation in the media. The Alliance produced media releases, wrote blogs, provided spokespeople and generated media coverage that publicized Adnyamathanha heritage values and environmental concerns (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2008; Dorman, 2008; Marsh, 2010; Russell, 2009; Statham, 2009; *Yurabila's blog*, 2008).

The public profile of the Alliance was raised by the staging of two public events. In November 1997, after approval for the trial mine was granted, the Adnyamathanha and the Alliance ran their first-ever public forum. In March 1999, after full-scale mining was announced, an on-site protest was held. This became known as the 'Beverley Bash', due to brutality by police and security guards against the protestors (Marsh, 2010). However, even though these events generated media coverage, the Alliance was unable to change the outcome (see Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2008; Dorman, 2008; Russell, 2009; Statham, 2009; *Yurabila's blog*, 2008).

9. Discussion and recommendations: Towards genuine dialogue

The Beverley Mine case study addresses the first research question by illustrating clearly the effects of power imbalance and it provides valuable insights for Australia and other countries where there are diverse Indigenous cultures within national boundaries. It also supports the findings of Cheney et al.'s (2002) review of three separate mining negotiations in Victoria, Australia: that inadequate participatory processes led to communities feeling disempowered and struggling to achieve justice and fairness.

Many factors contributed to the power imbalance and played a role in the failure to stop a mining license being granted. These included poor engagement processes by Heathgate – a 'systems organisation' – inadequate consultation, limited negotiation skills, lack of experience and internal conflict within the community (Marsh, 2010). Cheney et al. (2002) argue that, for the power balance to be maintained, Traditional Owners should be consulted, particularly at the preliminary stages before approvals are granted. Solomon, Katz and Lovel (2008) note that governments and companies are beginning to invest more in examining community expectations and building relationships, including relationships with those who are affected but have little power over decision-making; however it is evident that genuine dialogue was never considered by Heathgate (Marsh, 2010). Further, Motion et al.'s (2012) recommendation to integrate Aboriginal Australian communicative principles, protocols and practices into public relations practice was not considered either.

Clark (2012) acknowledges the difficulties endemic in attempting to increase cultural awareness but Marsh (2010) believes it is critical for non-Aboriginal people to have an understanding of Aboriginal decision-making processes. She notes that poor levels of inclusion experienced by the Adnyamathanha during the critical stages of planning, particularly pertaining to informed decision-making, may have been due to a lack of cultural awareness on the part of Heathgate. Marsh (2010) sees a need to "nurture an ideology of genuine community engagement within exploration and mining impact assessment procedures" (p. 18). In her view, while the introduction of cultural awareness and competency workplace training packages may address the widespread problems arising in public policy areas such health and education, the effectiveness of such training depends on the willingness of private enterprise to adopt it. According to Marsh, private enterprise attitudes range from "highly embracing" to "stubbornly resistant" (personal communication, 24 March 2014).

The action by the Alliance Against Uranium illustrates the potential of public relations to enable oft-silenced voices to be heard and acknowledged. Empowerment was achieved through the sharing of public relations skills and resources. As a result of the Alliance's efforts, the Adnyamathanha participated more fully as a 'lifeworld organisation', raising the issues of heritage, land ownership and land use in the public debate. Even so, they lost their battle.

The controversy in Australia surrounding uranium mining and the nuclear industry has not abated. The key players – resource companies, governments, the anti-nuclear movement, Traditional Owners and local communities – are still in conflict (Baker & McKenzie, 2014; Grant, 2014; Ingram, 2014; Mundine, 2014). The lessons learnt from the Beverley Mine situation remain pertinent for public relations practitioners and academics: just prior to calling the May 2019 elections, the Federal

Government approved the Western Australia Yeelirrie uranium mine (Slezak, 2019) and in July the Tjiwarl Traditional Owners lost their appeal to the Supreme Court to have this approval revoked (Jenkins, 2019).

Using the Beverley Mine case study, this article has interrogated the ability of public relations to redress power imbalances and strengthen the voices and reputations of disenfranchised communities. It has also investigated whether societal rather than corporate imperatives may become the dominant logic for a public relations strategy (Motion & Burgess, 2014).

The case study also addressed the second research question, asking what research methodologies and practices could be introduced. It became clear that further research is required in order to develop an informed and balanced approach to effective communication between corporations and governments and Aboriginal communities. As highlighted earlier in this article, in the PRSA definition of public relations the organization-centric, Western-based orientation is dominant. Analysis of approaches such as Dutta's (2005, 2012, 2014) and Leitch and Neilson's (1997; 2001) would contribute to a definition that gives more weight to the public voice. Dutta et al. (2012) argue that the voices of groups on the peripheries of dominant organizational practices and powerful stakeholders have been ignored in much of public relations theorizing and that alternative practices emanating from these different and resistive publics can provide new learnings in public relations.

However, much work is required in this area to ensure that such a definition would gain acceptance and encompass practicable solutions. While Dutta challenges the emphasis on organizational public relations theory and argues for the co-creation of knowledge in a respectful manner of mutual trust and genuine listening, he provides little empirical analysis on how this process may occur, and does not offer suggestions on how to execute his approach (Bailur, 2012). Marsh (personal communication, 24 March 2014) also questions the effectiveness of Dutta's model: the co-creation approach may have strong social justice appeal, but, in an environment of government and industry alliances based on corporate priorities and legalistic frameworks, there is little likelihood of such an approach being regarded as worthwhile by mining companies.

It would also be valuable to analyze how Aboriginal corporations, peak bodies and not-for-profit organizations are using specialist consultancies and incorporating mainstream public relations practice into their own operations. Because Aboriginal Australians have too often been denied the opportunity to define their own histories, identities, cultures, research, practices and futures, Indigenous research methodologies, including Foley's (2003) Indigenist methodology, should be explored as it pertains to public relations, and integrated into practice.

Although Solomon et al. (2008) support Howitt's (2001) call for greater dialogue, other theorists doubt that dialogue can be incorporated into public relations practice in all situations, including in the mining context. For Lane (2013), the dialogic theory of public relations requires the willingness of all parties to discuss any topic, openness about intentions and agendas, and a mutual desire to share power in decision-making. Lane (2013) finds that "the behaviour required to satisfy the principles of Dialogue sits awkwardly alongside the strategic imperatives that motivate public relations practice" (p. 2) because the public relations consultant's objective is to get what the client – usually an organization – wants. Consequently, Lane argues, public relations practitioners intentionally do not carry out 'Dialogue' in their work. Further, Macnamara (2012) notes that in most organizations public relations practitioners who privilege the interests of external publics over those of the organization may be considered disloyal.

Along with expressing the need for further research, this article makes some specific recommendations based on the findings of the case study, namely:

1. The enhancement of Indigenous representation in the media of 'lifeworld organizations' through training, skills development and capacity-building, and integrating a culture-centered approach to engagement.
2. Greater support for the development of sustainable pathways to public relations and journalism careers for Aboriginal Australians, thereby increasing the strength of their own voices from within their communities and in culturally appropriate forms.

3. Cultural awareness and competency training and more avenues for dialogue for non-Aboriginal people working with Aboriginal communities.
4. More inclusive public relations research and content in textbooks that incorporates Indigenous research methodologies and a culture-centered approach to public relations to drive social change and generate practices that are more inclusive and culturally sensitive to First Peoples' perspectives.
5. Exploration of the role and prevalence of in-house activism in public relations.
6. Early career Aboriginal Australian researchers are encouraged to take up the emerging specializations of Indigenous themes and postcolonial/anti-colonial critiques to provide an alternate lens for the study and teaching of First Peoples public relations and community engagement.

If these recommendations are explored, it may become possible for public relations to be used effectively by "information-poor" and not just by "information-rich" groups (L'Etang, 2010, p. 233). Further, disenfranchised and voiceless groups may be supported to become 'lifeworld organizations' so they can represent themselves, in answer to L'Etang's (2010) question: "Who is to represent, negotiate and manage the reputations on behalf of those whose livelihood is determined by the corporation and political elites that comprise 'international society'?" (p. 240)

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