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“Thank You Very Much... You Can Leave Our Community Now.”: Geographies of Responsibility, Relational Ethics, Acts of Refusal, and the Conflicting Requirements of Academic Localities in Indigenous Research

Paul Sylvestre

Department of Geography and Planning
Queen's University
paul.sylvestre@queensu.ca

Heather Castleden

Canada Research Chair in Reconciling Relations for Health, Environments, and Communities
Department of Geography and Planning
Queen's University
heather.castleden@queensu.ca

Debbie Martin

Canadian Research Chair, Indigenous Peoples Health and Wellbeing
School of Health and Human Performance
Dalhousie University
debbie.martin@dal.ca



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Mary McNally

Faculty of Dentistry
Dalhousie University
mary.mcnamara@dal.ca

Abstract

This paper reports on the findings from a series of twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews that explored how a group of leading Canadian health researchers who are recognized for their excellence in community-engaged Indigenous health research envision enacting an anti-colonial research agenda and the inherent tensions of doing so in institutional settings. Interview transcripts were thematically analyzed in order to explore how the different places that shape community-engaged scholarship (Community spaces, Offices of Research Ethics, and Office of Finance and Administration) 1) produce different, often conflicting understandings of responsibility; 2) how different spaces constrain and shape agency in terms of enacting forms of responsibility in research, and; 3) the role that settler subjectivities have in shaping acts of interpretation that are productive of institutionally mediated forms of responsibility. We organize themes of responsibility, relational ethics, and acts of refusal around the locales through which they are produced and mediated in order to display narratives relating to each site. Specifically, we highlight how relationally negotiated formulations of ethical responsibility, which occur between Indigenous community partners and researchers, can be circumscribed or marginalized by existing institutional structures. By making visible the ways in which conflicting responsibilities emerge and must be negotiated in working toward anti-colonial research relationships, our findings contribute to ongoing conversations regarding Indigenous-settler alliances in health research.

Keywords

Community-based participatory research; geographies of responsibility; research policy; research ethics; Indigenous health research; institutional barriers

Introduction

After decades of institutionally-based, investigator-driven research in Canada (as well as other settler-colonial states) that has resulted in the promulgation of violent pathologizing and stigmatizing discourses which perpetuate stereotypes of deficiency (Gorringe et al., 2010; Humphrey, 2001; Louis, 2007) that have exacerbated, rather than addressed, persistent health disparities (Czyszewski, 2011; Maar et al., 2005; Martin, 2010; Reading and Nowgesic, 2002; Reading and Wien, 2009), the past 15 years have seen a proliferation of policy guidelines which have sought to promote respectful and reciprocal community-led research relationships in Indigenous¹ health research. Yet despite solid gains in working to improve Indigenous health in Canada, health disparities between Indigenous peoples and settlers² persist, and deep systemic and intersubjective racism remains the norm rather than the exception (Adelson, 2005; Allan and Smylie, 2015). Health research, as an academic enterprise has, in countless instances, either wittingly or unwittingly (re)produced broad stigmatizing discourses that have perpetuated ongoing racism and violence against Indigenous populations (Humphrey 2001; Louis, 2007). As much as institutional policy guidelines seek to redress this deeply asymmetric and unjust legacy by responding to strident calls on the part of Indigenous scholars, advocates, and their non-Indigenous allies for greater Indigenous ownership, control, and self-determination in research (Battiste, 2000; Jacklin and Kinoshameg, 2008; Louis, 2007; Schnarch, 2004; Smith, 1999) and a deeper engagement with Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing (Bartlett et al., 2012; Haig-Brown, 2008; Mahuika, 2008; Martin, 2012; Wilson, 2008), questions emerge concerning the realities of doing anti-colonial research in an institution which is colonial to its core (Coombes et al., 2014).

For health researchers seeking to respond to these calls, authentic community-based participatory research (CBPR) has become a ‘go-to’ approach for enacting ethical health research with Indigenous people (Ball and Janyst, 2008; Cargo and Mercer, 2008; Castleden et al., 2012; de Leeuw et al., 2012; Flicker, 2008). More a philosophical and ethical orientation than a hard and fast methodology, proponents of CBPR highlight how equitably involving community representatives as partners in research makes processes and outcomes more meaningful and thus more likely to generate sustained and meaningful change (Israel et al., 2010; Wallerstein and Durant, 2006). Be that as it may, there is a

¹ In this paper, we use the term ‘Indigenous’ to refer to identities that stem from the distinctive cultural, political and legal systems (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005) of the original inhabitants of the land now known as Canada; the Canadian constitution collectively refers to this population as ‘Aboriginal’ and recognizes three groups: Indian (First Nations), Inuit, and Metis.

² The term ‘settler’ is used here to refer to peoples of various backgrounds who are dependent upon the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their territories within current settler colonial contexts (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014; Wolfe, 2006). ‘Indigenous’ and ‘settler’ identities are diverse and varied.

persistent gap between the theory and practice of CBPR (Castleden et al., 2012). As much as researchers work to be ‘community-based’ they are at the same time ‘university-based’, and universities are notorious for producing significant barriers and constraints to working with communities in general (Stoecker, 2008). For community-based Indigenous health research in particular, researchers need to be sensitive to how being embedded within broader institutional power-geometries whose internal logics and practices work to circumscribe how CBPR is enacted with Indigenous communities works to (re)inscribe, rather than deconstruct, colonial dominance in research (Castleden et al., 2015; de Leeuw et al., 2012).

This paper reports on empirical findings from a series of 20 semi-structured interviews with Network Environment for Aboriginal Health Research³ (NEAHR) principal investigators who are recognized as being authentically and effectively engaged in community-based Indigenous health research in Canada. It builds on our previous critique in Castleden et al., (2015) of how successfully navigating departmental tenure and promotion processes in health is contingent on the enactment of particular academic responsibilities that are fundamentally at odds with the realities of CBPR with Indigenous partners. Here we extend our analysis to elucidate how researchers’ notions of ‘responsibility’ are articulated and enacted in three other modal sites⁴ within the spaces of CBPR. These are: Indigenous communities, Offices of Research Ethics, and institutional Financial Services. By responsibility, we draw particularly on the work of Noxolo (2009), Noxolo and colleagues (2012) and Raghuram and colleagues (2009), taking it to mean a messy, relational process, where the ‘other’s’ call is always partially ungraspable, and responding to it is always imperfect. Therefore this paper offers a sustained engagement with existing discussion around geographies of responsibility (see, for example, Massey, 2004; Milligan and Wyles, 2012; Noxolo et al., 2012) to explore how the locational imperatives of sites at the university produce place-based forms of responsibility that work to disrupt and circumscribe forms of responsibility

³ The NEAHR centers are an evolution from an earlier Indigenous health network developed and funded by the Canadian Institute for Health Research’s (CIHR) Institute for Aboriginal People’s Health (IAPH). Their purpose was to focus on critical Indigenous health, promote research into the determinants of Indigenous health in order to address deep and persistent health disparities, and to build capacity and mentorship for Indigenous health researchers. In Canada, NEAHR investigators are considered among the top leaders in the field of Indigenous health. Though the network had been highly successful in working toward its stated goals, as of March 2014, the program sun-set in a move that was part of a broader neoliberal turn in health research funding in Canada (for a history of this, see Aboriginal Health Research Steering Committee, 2014).

⁴ Analytic categories can easily reify and essentialize the subjects and places that are being analyzed. Our use of the modifier ‘modal’ in reference to the three ‘types of sites’ we are using to frame our analysis (Community spaces, Offices of Research Ethics, and Offices of Finance and Administration) is employed to signal our awareness of this and to draw attention to the considerable variability within ‘types of sites’. This has long been discussed and accepted with respect to communities, but less so with respect to Offices of Research Ethics and Offices of Finance and Administration.

between Indigenous and non-Indigenous university-based researchers and Indigenous community-based partners. Given the inherent power asymmetries within the researcher-community-university triad (de Leeuw et al., 2012), we question how and in what way conflicting responsibilities may pre-emptively foreclose potential paths of responsible action, thereby undermining the anti-colonial and reconciliatory potential of CBPR.

Background

Research Policy with Indigenous People in Canada

The Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies developed some of the earliest policy statements regarding research involving Indigenous communities (ACUNS, 1982; ACUNS 1994). While narrow in scope and limited to northern Canada, they were precedent-setting in that they were the first institutional guidelines that explicitly sought to increase the involvement of community members in all aspects of the research process (for a comprehensive exploration of the evolution of policy for research involving Indigenous people see Castleden et al., 2012). However, critics of institutional ethics review have argued that review boards often lack the expertise in participatory methods to adequately assess responsible practice (Cahill et al., 2007; de Leeuw et al., 2012; Steigman and Castleden, 2015) and that the social and cultural distance of reviewers from the realities of Indigenous community partners and participants can lead to problematic policy interpretations (Berg et al., 2007). As important as these critiques are for the advancement of ethics for research involving Indigenous peoples in Canada, it cannot be ignored that these policies have significantly contributed to a national conversation on the importance of forging ethical research relationships with Indigenous people and that they signal a clear commitment on the part of national funding bodies and the scholarly research community with respect to promoting responsible research (Brant Castellano and Reading, 2010).

Geographies of Responsibility

The growing literature on geographies of responsibility and care offers new engagement with responsibility as embedded in the power-geometries of relational space (Bosco, 2007; Lawson, 2007; Massey, 2004; McEwen and Goodman, 2010; Sin 2010). In imploring us to think space relationally, Massey (2004) critiques reactive ways of thinking about how place is constructed and maintained that conceive of local places as being bounded against an intruding outside (be it the global or other locals) and formed predominantly through internal relations. Rather than viewing place (and its inherent politics, cultures, and responsibilities) as constituted solely through complex sets of internal relations, Massey implores us to consider that places are also fundamentally constituted through their multiple and complex political, economic, social, and cultural connections to other places. The question she poses is: How does such a way of conceiving of place begin to trouble dominant configurations of responsibility as necessarily a product of propinquity?

Such a move sensitizes us to forms of relations that are obscured within simplistic two-dimensional topologies that construct spatial binaries such as, for instance, center and margin. It demands that we admit the myriad ways in which places that are produced as “marginal” and places that are produced as “central” are always already co-imbricated in the (re)production of each other.⁵ Therefore, for Massey and others (e.g. Castree, 2001; Lawson, 2007), certain places, by virtue of their positioning within this topology, must assume a political responsibility for their complicity in the (re)production of the inequalities and exclusions that work to produce their own relative privilege. Thus, responsibility, as conceptualized within this body of literature, has been framed as a collective responsibility rooted in a structural complicity to injustice rather than being regarded as simply an individual’s personal responsibility for those same injustices.

While extending a sense of responsibility beyond local boundaries is no doubt an important task, as Sin (2010) notes, much of the writing from this perspective consists of the privileged ascribing responsibility to the privileged and, in doing so, constructs the distant, voiceless ‘other’ as impoverished, marginal, powerless and incapable of responsible action. Through this monologue, Sin charges that constructing responsibility (re)produces the distant ‘other’ as a passive, receiving subject, placing the ‘cared for’ in a subordinate position to the carer. Similarly, Barnett and Land (2007) highlight the ‘wrong-headed’ and moralistic assumptions held by many geographers who maintain that the key to motivating responsible action “lies in justification and explanatory knowledge” about the causal relationships of global inequality. These forms of responsibility for an agency-less ‘other’ have tended to (re)produce, rather than deconstruct, dominance, exclusion, and violence (Noxolo et al., 2012; Barker and Pickerill, 2012; Pickerill 2009a). By contrast, intersubjective approaches to constructing responsibility roots the imperative to act in listening and responding to the call of the ‘other’ rather than in the assumption that elucidating causal relationships will create both sufficient knowledge of how, and the moral imperative to, act responsibly (Pickerill, 2009a; Popke, 2006; Sin, 2010). Listening is one thing, responding is another. But ‘responding’ is not typically code for taking the lead. Instead, it may often mean stepping away or using one’s privilege to play a supporting role and having the humility and wherewithal to learn from Indigenous communities and partners one seeks to engage.

In a recent series of articles (Madge et al., 2009; Raghuram et al., 2009; Noxolo et al., 2012; Noxolo 2008; Noxolo 2009), Clare Madge, Parvati Raghuram, and Patricia Noxolo offer an extended post-colonial engagement with the concept of responsibility seeking to further unsettle it. They draw attention to how complex post-colonial intersubjectivities produce relations of responsibility that are contested, complicated, and productively unsettling, so that the practice and

⁵ For an exceedingly brilliant engagement with this in practice see, for instance, Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s (2009) work on the California carceral state.

formations of relational responsibilities cannot, by virtue of such relationality, be pre-figured or certain, but instead should be conceived as evolving, open, and always unfinished (Raghuram et al., 2009). This openness is emblematic of the *enigmatic and risky* aspects of post-colonial relationality, where relationality may be uncomfortable and difficult, where the ‘other’ may withhold and remain opaque to the scrutiny of the western gaze, and where refusal to both issue a call and accept forms of responsibility means that responsible action comes “without final guarantees” (Noxolo et al., 2012, p. 424, citing Hall, 1996). Risk and enigma work against the neo-colonial impulse to intervene and repair through the unilateral ascription of responsibility (and by corollary, action) which assumes the transparency and legibility of the ‘other’. Admitting and accepting opacity as a precondition of seeking to relate (and articulate responsibility) across difference forecloses the possibility that the outcomes of this kind of work can be in any way predictable or certain. This entails significant risk, not only in terms of colonial (mis)recognition and unintended acts of irresponsibility, but also for researchers embedded within sets of institutional expectations whose logics and demands may conflict with and disrupt the forms of responsibility born out of these forms of relationality (Castleden et al., 2015). Such a conception of responsibility necessarily de-centres settler academic researchers⁶ within the research process and can open up new spaces for across and through colonial difference in a manner which does not merely reproduce colonial, racist, and patriarchal categories and relations.

Responsibility, the Settler-Colonial State, and CBPR

But what of all this talk of responsibility in the context of academic research in the settler colony of Canada? As Patrick Wolfe (2006) argues, settler colonialism is not an event; it is a structure, a structure that actively privileges settlers (settler academics included) to the exclusion of Indigenous peoples. Much of the discussion of unsettling responsibilities to ‘sometimes distant others’ takes on a different flavour in the context of the settler colony. The post-colonial engagement with the geographies of responsibility, described above, contends that responsibility in the academic context must take active steps to recognize the complex spatial relationships between researchers and the publics they engage (Madge et al., 2009). In Canada, many of the institutions where researchers are based are located on unceded Indigenous land (Asch, 2014) Additionally, research funding in Canada, generated through government revenues is either directly or indirectly tied to the exploitation of lands that are either untreated, unceded, or treated lands but where the Canadian state continuously ignores its treaty obligations (Asch, 2014; Daschuk, 2013), making the legitimacy of claims to, and sovereignty over much of the land known as Canada tenuous at best, and

⁶ Here we specify “settler academic researcher” in order to signal our awareness that for Indigenous researchers, seeking to negotiate relationships and responsibilities in research makes these geographies significantly more complex (for an excellent discussion see Hunt (2014)).

maintained only through structural racism and colonial violence (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005). As Razack (2015) argues, in exploring how settler-colonial violence is legitimized within the settler colonial state, settler emplacement necessitates a national imaginary wherein Indigenous people are constructed as always already dead or dying. This is because “Indigenous people stand in the way of settler-colonialism, contesting settler entitlement to the land and throwing into question settler legitimacy as the original and rightful owners... The land is occupied and continues to be stolen. Colonialism continues apace” (Razack, 2015 p.6).

Noxolo and colleagues (2012) astutely observe that “there is no pure space within and from which responsibility can be enacted” (p. 422). Agents are not free actors; they are socially constituted so that locational imperatives always taint and circumscribe responsible action. Given historical and contemporary relationships between Indigenous people and the settler-colonial state, one can see how mutually constructing the boundaries of responsible relationships in CBPR is an important means by which colonial dominance is diminished (but perhaps never really voided) in research relationships. In fact, while relationally constructed forms of responsibility may seem somewhat novel to many geographers, Indigenous scholars have long described how concepts of relational accountability are central to Indigenous epistemologies (see, for instance, Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). However, the power-geometries in which academic researchers - who remain primarily members of the (largely white) settler population in Canada - find themselves embedded extend far beyond their relationships with Indigenous community partners and organizations. CBPR researchers must navigate the norms, practices, and regulations of a number of different institutional sites. As we demonstrate in earlier work (Castleden et al., 2015) with our discussion of tenure and promotion, specific localities create barriers to particular ‘responsible’ practices, and a researcher’s career and position in the academy is often contingent on their embodying, to varying degrees, many of these institutional discourses. In what follows we extend our analysis further to explore how researchers at Canadian universities engage with, and navigate both community spaces and the institutional structures that administer research ethics and research finances. We are interested in elucidating what researchers’ experiences with these institutional spaces say about the nature of responsibility as it is articulated in the different sites that CBPR researchers must necessarily engage. We ask: in what ways does the production of institutionally mediated responsibilities at once disrupt the construction of relational forms of responsibility and the enactment of agency in research? Moreover, how does the performance of settler-subjectivities in institutional settings shape acts of interpretation of policies in a manner that works to (re)inscribe colonial dominance into research relationships?

Methods

The findings for this paper are drawn from a larger study which sought to: 1) explore how established researchers who conduct Indigenous health research conceive the key features of enacting ethical and responsible research with Indigenous peoples, 2) identify the bridges and barriers associated with operationalizing a program of CBPR research in the context of the Canadian academy, and; 3) draw from the experience of these Indigenous health researchers, offering modest advice for early career researchers or those new to Indigenous health research on how to navigate common challenges. The senior (second) author, a white settler scholar, health geographer, and CBPR researcher, identified a candidate pool of NEAHR principal investigators from across the nine NEAHR centers situated throughout Canada. As noted earlier, NEAHR investigators are widely considered to be among the leaders in Canada for the field of Indigenous health research. We recruited 20 respondents from 9 universities, situated across 5 provinces, representing all of the four pillars of health research established by CIHR (biomedical; clinical; health systems and services; and social cultural, environmental population health). Fourteen respondents identified as non-Indigenous with six identifying as either Metis or First Nations; sixteen identified as female, four as male; all respondents save one (who identified as an independent scholar) had earned tenure (See Table 1).

To maximise the depth and breadth of the data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), we developed a semi-structured interview guide that solicited perspectives from five broad categories: 1) research approaches and processes; 2) research ethics guidelines and policies; 3) institutional policies and practices pertaining to tenure and promotion, research ethics boards (REBs), and financial services; 4) decision making in a ‘publish or perish’ climate and; 5) advice for early career researchers or researchers new to the field of Indigenous health. The senior author conducted all 20 interviews via telephone. Interviews took between 60 to 75 minutes, were audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were returned to those respondents who requested an opportunity to verify accuracy. The first author, a white settler male and doctoral trainee, developed a structural codebook by way of a preliminary inductive thematic analysis using the constant comparative method, and facilitated by Nvivo 10TM qualitative data management software (QSR, 2010). Structural coding is a topological analysis of interview data, (in this instance using the interview script as an analytic scaffold around which to organize responses), where the purpose of analysis is a simple reporting of what was said by respondents (Charmaz, 2006). The lead and senior author held a series of meetings to discuss the analysis and the entire research team met to discuss the preliminary coding results (the third author is an Indigenous (Inuk) scholar and the fourth author is a white settler scholar). A series of themes of interest were identified by the research team, resulting in the creation of thematic codes. The lead author then returned to the interview data to conduct a subsequent round of thematic coding where structural codes were knit together into latent and more theoretical themes.

Table 1: Participant characteristics

Respondent	Gender	Indigenous/non-Indigenous	Tenured
1	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured - Professor Emeritus
2	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured - Associate Professor
3	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured - Professor
4	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured - Associate Professor
5	Male	Non-Indigenous	Tenured - Professor Emeritus
6	Male	Non-Indigenous	Tenured - Professor Emeritus
7	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured - Associate Professor
8	Female	Indigenous	Independent Scholar
9	Female	Indigenous (Metis)	Tenured - Associate Professor
10	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured- Associate Professor
11	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured-Associate Professor
12	Female	Indigenous (Metis)	Tenured-Associate Professor
13	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured-Professor
14	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured-Professor
15	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured-Professor
16	Female	Indigenous (Metis)	Tenured - Professor
17	Female	Non-Indigenous	Tenured-Associate Professor
18	Female	Indigenous (First Nations)	Tenured-Associate Professor
19	Male	Indigenous (First Nations)	Tenured-Associate Professor
20	Male	Non-Indigenous	Tenured-Associate Professor

The themes that inform this paper’s findings (how conceptions and practices of responsibility are enacted across the various places that constitute the spatialities of CBPR; what form agency takes within these sometimes conflicting types of responsibility; the role of settler subjectivities in shaping acts of interpretation play in shaping institutionally mediated forms of responsibility; and advice for navigating conflicting responsibilities), began to coalesce over the course of these meetings and took on a cohesive form through two subsequent engagements between the lead and senior authors. A comprehensive audit trail regarding our coding decisions as well as the evolution of various codes and themes over the course of the analysis was developed using in Nvivo 10™. Where requested by participants, quotes used in this paper were returned to them so that they could be reviewed in the context in which they were being used to further enhance our rigour.

Findings

Our findings are organized around three important modal sites that represent the common places that CBPR researchers must engage. Referring to these sites as modal is an attempt to highlight that whilst researchers necessarily engage with a variant of a particular mode of locality, the people, the histories and trajectories, their physical locations, and a number of other characteristics lend them a significant amount of diversity. For instance, community-based health researchers working with Indigenous peoples all engage with some idea of community, but in the Canadian context this varies widely (for example, from northern, fly-in, Inuit hamlets to the heterogeneous Indigenous urban populations of downtown Winnipeg or Vancouver.) Some Indigenous nations have treaties, some do not. Sometimes, projects are organized through Chiefs and Councils, and in other instances, sub-community groups reach out to form partnerships. There is a tendency to essentialize⁷ Indigenous perspectives in research and speak of communities as having one cohesive voice. This is simply untrue. Issues of representation are always a challenge. In highlighting the modality of our categories we hope to draw attention to the diversity inherent to these localities while at the same time using our analysis to draw out similar and/or conflicting experiences that occur across what are sometimes significant differences. Moreover, organizing our findings around different sites rather than themes helps us to better ‘place’ responsibility in a matter that illustrates how geographies matters for how responsibility is conceptualized and enacted. Building from our previous work that explored similar themes drawn from experiences navigating the departmental structures that inform tenure and promotion processes in health

⁷ The same can be said (but to a far lesser extent) of REBs and Finance offices as “communities of practice” where national level policies may be in place but institutional and departmental cultures and norms can shape practices differently within and across institutions.

sciences and studies, we expand our analysis to explore what researchers' experiences say about: how responsibility is constructed within the modal sites of Indigenous communities, Offices of Research Ethics, and Financial Services; how the agency of Indigenous community partners is expressed/suppressed across all localities; the role of settler subjectivities and acts of interpretation in the creation of conflicting responsibilities; and finally, advice for navigating the inherent challenges of all three localities.

Community: Relationally-negotiated responsibilities

For respondents who self-identified as doing deeply collaborative work with Indigenous communities, it was identified that taking the time to build meaningful and respectful relationships was foundational to forging the necessary trust in which subsequent engagement was grounded. The comment below is indicative of this and echoes similar experiences by all respondents who self-identify as doing deeply collaborative work:

My relationship has been through Elders and secondarily through educators, and it's been based on personal relationships and a lot of conversations and storytelling that goes on in very much what you might regard almost as a social setting. For example, at the kitchen table of [two Elders withheld] in [place omitted] or in the home of [Educator name withheld] in [place omitted] (R1)

For this respondent, 'personal relationships', 'conversations', and 'storytelling' work to inform research relationships in such a way that responsibility is not unilaterally ascribed, but learned, negotiated, and dynamic, as illustrated here where Respondent 1 goes on to note that:

What I came to understand as a result of that experience is that the Elders were much more interested in the back-end ethics of the research relationship. [The Elders would ask] "Is the information, is the product, is the outcome [of the research], is it authentically based in our understandings or is it something that you have warped beyond belief so that we can't even recognize ourselves in anymore?" (R1)

Here 'back-end' ethics is juxtaposed against procedural or 'front-end ethics' of the Research Ethics Board (REB). Enacting responsibility in the context of this relationship, as noted here, is to ensure that outcomes reflect and speak to the Indigenous context from which they are emerging and not '*warped beyond belief*' to make them more recognizable to Western eyes. This is clearly not responsibility that is arrived at solely through abstracted reasoning carried out in an academic office (though without a doubt many authors on the subject do provide important

reflections) nor is it a responsibility unilaterally dictated by an institutional body; rather, it is arrived at through bodies meeting, sometimes across great distance (both socially and physically), sitting at ‘kitchen tables’, to listen and learn in places that de-center the academic- in the messy world of imperfect interactions. For virtually all of our respondents, the actual physical presence of bodies meeting in Indigenous places is essential to overcoming the inherent distrust that is the product of generations of settler-colonialism:

I think doing [research] ‘in a good way’ is constant communication with communities and that means being out there physically – not just emailing, not just phoning. That doesn’t work in my view with the communities I worked with, in the rural communities or in any community. But especially in [Indigenous] communities because I think you’re adding on almost an automatic sense of distrust – rightfully placed – in university researchers (R13)

Negotiated, co-constructed forms of responsibility are often, but *not always*, formed within the spaces of relationality. However, it is equally important to note the legitimacy of the ‘*not always*’, when rather than research emerging out of pre-established relationships, researchers reach out:

...it actually took me about four years to achieve the first engagement with the [Indigenous organization], and it’s simply because they did not have the resources to even think about health and the health sector and health research. [Reference to particular group] generally don’t receive a huge amount of funding for that kind of thing. My intent was to put in place a process for ongoing engagements that wouldn’t depend on me to continue it running (R9)

In this instance, trust was established throughout the course of an initial pilot project, which demonstrated to community partners the sincere and respectful intent of the researchers. This subsequently led to more projects and the eventual creation of a regional initiative to facilitate community involvement, engagement, and collaboration in health research. In many situations similar to this, researchers speak of the usefulness of adopting formal research agreements or memorandums of understanding (always developed collaboratively with community representatives) to outline “primary roles and responsibilities and expected outcomes and agreed-upon understanding of expected outcomes” (R17) to help ensure accountability and foster understanding where relationships are still nascent or where researchers are working with larger community-based entities.

In either instance, the mutuality (or dialogical foundation) that makes relationally negotiated forms of responsibility possible is largely rooted in the reclaimed agency and/or voice of community partners, which are so often missing from paternal, liberal-humanist conceptions of responsibility. Responsibility

arrived at through listening and trying to understand, rooted in messy and often imperfect interaction is always “in constant negotiation, and [requires] constant attending to” (R11). Here, agency is perhaps most pointedly illustrated through the act of refusing forms of responsible action, as R11 notes of approaching a First Nation’s Council as a research team well-intentioned but presumptuously already knowing how to help:

Oh, we're here to do this research, and we'll just take care of this, and we know what we're doing" kind of thing. Chief [Name Withheld], who happens to still be the chief, looked at us, and he said, "Thank you very much. You can leave our community now. (R11)

The power to refuse help, to dictate the terms of care, or the form responsibility will take is essential to working towards balancing power in relationships. Therefore, responsibility is risky, it is nebulous, and it cannot be pre-figured or researcher-ascribed so that even despite the best of intentions, research projects that are investigator-driven may be refused.

Offices of Research Ethics: Research Ethics Boards and operationalizing TCPS2 (Chapter 9)

Respondents’ experiences with navigating institutional research ethics reviews were decidedly split. To a significant number of participants (n=9), REBs represented an impediment to moving community-based projects forward. This was advanced as the perception of REBs adopting for themselves the role of both police and protector in response to the Chapter 9 of the TCPS2. As one respondent notes since the release of TCPS2:

It has become much more... well, I'll be kind and say "rigorous" in terms of getting Aboriginal-related work through the REB, but at the same time much more frustrating because it is my feeling that... some members of the REB, have misinterpreted or self-defined the role of the REB with respect to Aboriginal-linked research and are imposing unnecessary hurdles that in some sense convey almost a sense of distrust of the researchers and the research teams (R5)

Unknowingly or unwittingly, adopting such a role can be seen as assuming a paternalistic stance vis-à-vis agency-less Indigenous other. The implicit assumption is that the ‘*vulnerable population*’ is at risk of being exploited by researchers and are themselves unable to articulate what responsible action ought to look like within the context of the research relationship. This is not necessarily a critique of Chapter 9 per se, when in fact the majority of our participants “... think it was really good” and were “really happy to see the rewrite and happy to see it

tackled as head-on as they did" (R7). The TCPS2 represents a general set of guidelines where the authors, aware of the dynamic nature of research with Indigenous peoples, intentionally leave space for interpretation. The challenge faced by most researchers in this group is around the kinds of bodies who engage in acts of policy interpretation. As this same respondent described later in their interview:

I honestly feel like none of the people sitting on that ethics committee - consistently since I've been in my position, and which has turned over many, many times - I don't feel like any of them have the knowledge base necessary to review my ethics applications. And that's a real problem (R7)

The problem of course being the reality, as one Indigenous respondent notes, that REBs are "just trying to follow their understanding of the guidelines but they don't know enough about what [our] world is really like" (R18). Research Ethics emerged out of critical transgressions performed in highly controlled lab environments and not field settings that are known for being 'messy' and 'uncontrolled', making rigid ethical frameworks notoriously difficult to apply. This is a continued problem. Regardless, Research Ethics personnel may choose to exercise the power to compromise negotiated research agreements between researchers and Indigenous partners. This may take the form of minor delays in advancing research as a result of a REB's ignorance of particular cultural protocols:

There have been a number of occasions where gifting of tobacco has been raised, and where there have been a whole variety of responses from the ethics review committee members. From "Well, we don't advocate the use of toxic, noxious substances, and addictive..."
There was no sense of any precedent being set (R19)

Or, more significant setbacks, as respondent R18 illustrates, speaking of a situation where a group of women from a First Nation approached the researcher to form a partnership:

The research, taking place on a reserve, was with women in the community and it was focusing on women's needs. That group didn't feel that the Chief and Council represented them. And so because it was on a reserve, the Tri-Council is really clear. But it was very delicate and took a long time to sort out just how to go about addressing the needs of the research participants and the ethics (R18)

In actuality, the TCPS2 is unclear in this respect. In article 9.2 of the TCPS2 the policy clearly states that “Diversity among and within communities makes generalizations about the form of community engagement inappropriate”. Such rigid engagement with policy is less an issue with the *guidelines* than it is about narrow or dogmatic interpretations by REB personnel. This adds significant delays and in many instances draws the ire of community members who are rightfully “offended that people from outside their region should be telling them what they can and cannot do” (R1), reinforcing the paternal and disempowering conception of Indigenous people as wards to be cared for rather than agentic participants in research, potentially disrupting relationally negotiated responsibilities. There are few mechanisms for the community to refuse the REB’s refusal and researchers can rarely access research funds prior to REB approval. Moreover, because CBPR is already time-intensive and community needs are often pressing, lengthy delays can be a significant challenge to both community partners and researchers.

It is particular forms of settler subjectivity, which are repaired and reproduced by their being embedded in particular places, that contribute to settlers perpetuating potentially paternalistic discourses of responsibility in research. This is further evidenced by the stark contrast between the other respondents (n=11) who reported highly positive experiences engaging with REBs, often framing their relationships to the REB as having evolved over time, often from more paternalistic orientation to much more facilitative and supportive roles. As one respondent explains:

Well... I'm not sure if this is the board or if it was the staff member in the research office who works with the ethics board, but it's always been presented as a process of enabling and helping to do it right rather than a gatekeeper (R16)

Many of these respondents speak of the importance of employing the same approaches to relationship building and engagement that have made them successful in CBPR. As another notes:

Sometimes I think I would love to take those guys with me for a month, a week, or even a day, or to one of my meetings to see what happens there, to have the experience of what it's like to do this kind of work... Yeah, and I guess that's what I was getting at... communication as the foundation of relationship building (R10)

Reaching out to the REB, meeting people, and educating and building trusting relationships, while admittedly time consuming, were by far the dominant strategies advanced by researchers for changing the way that their individual REBs dealt with Indigenous health research, as one respondent astutely observed: “What constitutes trust? You think it's with the community but in fact it's with your own

in-house" (R4). Given how relational community-based Indigenous health research is meant to be, it is perhaps no surprise that extending that impulse for relationality into different localities at the university is noted as being an excellent means of navigating many of the challenges associated with conducting this sort of research in the academy.

Financial Services: Interpretation in a black box

While responses were split in terms of discussing how responsibility was experienced and framed in research ethics spaces, the vast majority (with a few notable exceptions) reported parallel experiences navigating what many perceived as the opaque and inflexible bureaucracy of financial services. As one respondent noted of these challenges "It's just the nature of the corporate, the necessary bureaucracy. [U]niversities are huge corporations, and we are dealing with public funds... accountability is being responsible for public dollars" (R19).

As with research ethics policies, it is the Tri-Council that also establishes policies concerning financial administration. Researchers are responsible for the grants they are awarded but they do not actually hold research funds; rather, their institutions hold and administer them. Eligible institutions sign a Tri-Council agreement for the administration of agency grants and awards and will construct financial policies in concordance with Tri-Council guidelines and be subject to Tri-Council audits of research spending. Echoing some of the challenges noted in navigating research ethics application procedures, respondents speak to how their experiences with financial services (generally populated by non-Indigenous bodies like every other corner of academe) highlight the lack of understanding of the realities of working with Indigenous people:

There's certainly things about working in [Indigenous] communities that Finance doesn't get. You know, it's different and they don't want to have a different process in place for a different population or for a different set of researchers in the institution (R7)

The inability or unwillingness to recognize and respect difference of the lived realities of Indigenous partners and participants poses two significant challenges. The first is a constant struggle with the financial minutia of paying salaries, honorariums, advances, and what are considered eligible expenses. As the same respondent goes on to note:

We wanted to take the honorariums in cash. We'd also been told by the community that in the past when people were promised a cheque... it took months and months and months for people to get them. So they allowed us a cash advance, but now I've been told... that they've changed... [Finance is] not allowing people cash advances anymore (R7)

Seemingly minor policy changes like cash advances may seem inconsequential from an institutional perspective but from a community perspective, this can truly impact – for example – the part-time community-based Research Associate who is counting on the cash in hand in order to pay a local community member for preparing soup and sandwiches for an Elders’ meeting with the research team. While these may seem like minor inconveniences or small logistical hurdles to be overcome, following another respondent who, in recounting one of their experiences, touches on a common line of thought among other respondents around this issue: “So if they come into a hotel, I have to pay, but then I have to get a letter from them saying that [R11] paid and you can give her the money back, which is really dehumanizing” (R11).

Respondents often articulate how adhering to institutional financial protocols in the field, routinely visits small humiliations on both research partners and participants. Rather than being innocuous, these forms of violence may be viewed as social performativity that works to (re)inscribe colonial dominance into research relationships. These commonplace, everyday interactions work to illustrate/remind who is dominant and who is subordinate in these interactions. In fact, many respondents noted how what they perceived as the narrow interpretations of policy has at times placed them in situations where they are feel forced to choose between being ethically compromising themselves in the face of such interpretations or risk acting unethically or inappropriately (and thus irresponsibly) toward community members and community partners. While respondents note working with communities and partners to navigate these challenges, this speaks to a persistent problem noted by most respondents that control over the financial capital that enables research (which is allocated by the university and controlled by the researchers) represents a highly important power imbalance, as R11 notes “There is still a power burden or a power barrier, and that is ‘who holds the money?’ And we have not been able to get over that completely. When it comes to the money, the university gets it, right?” Indeed, this becomes especially relevant given the reality that universities receive substantial indirect funding for every Tri-Council grant. Suggesting that all community partners or organizations presently have the desire or capacity to hold and administer research funds would be incorrect. Regardless, as another respondent notes, when and where this is possible it is important that we work to make this a reality: “But that's one of the really, really important things that needs to happen, that community-level organizations need to have the capacity to hold research funding” (R20). However, in Canada, the sheer onerousness of the application process and the stringent criteria for eligibility clearly favour large institutions, making it unlikely that community-level organizations would even be considered (See CIHR, SSHRC, and NSERC, 2014).

The challenge that emerges is that in the absence of control of research funds, community partners’ ways of enacting agency may be constrained. That is not to say that ethical researchers do not negotiate around the appropriate use of

funds with community partners, but that the fact of being the final authority in the allocation of research funds, an authority which itself is highly circumscribed by institutional policies, poses very urgent questions as to whether power can ever realistically be equitably distributed. This is clearly problematic in terms of relationally negotiated forms of responsibility where the space to refuse a particular formation of responsible action may become closed if a refusal means equally the refusal of funds to carry out research that may be urgently needed.

While 'struggle' was the dominant perspective for researchers with respect to their interactions with financial services, there is an important counter-position to note. Three of the twenty respondents reported having open and facilitative relationships with financial services.

I've had very good success with our financial services unit. I get assigned a particular person in financial services who is my officer that I deal with, right? And that makes it a whole lot easier... [I] actually get to know the person (R11)

For the three respondents who shared these sorts of experiences, the common trait was that they all had the opportunity to build relationships with the people/person who audits their research expenditures. As with the suggestion above to build relationships with REB personnel, building relationships with financial services has equal importance.

It's interesting, you know, here we are so worried about the trust relationships with [Indigenous] communities and [Indigenous] peoples that we work with, and it's the same dynamic going on with the research accounting folks (R4)

This relationship-building also provides the opportunity to educate non-Indigenous institutional staff about the ways in which doing research with Indigenous peoples is distinct from other research participants (and we would add that lessons drawn from conducting respectful research with Indigenous partners has applicability with respect to work with other non-dominant populations), as the respondent goes on to state:

You see, to me those are the kinds of things - I know, it's those little tiny details that life is very different in communities outside of urban or suburban centres and it's a whole other research reality, and it has to be acknowledged and people made sensitive to. One shouldn't have to worry about whether a receipt is legitimate or not when you know damn well it is... [financial services] is now acknowledging the distinction of northern research in that process (R4)

Much like the general ignorance that can be found amongst the non-Indigenous Canadian public, educating institutional actors about Indigenous realities is a constant and highly energy intensive challenge which health researchers participating in this study were all too familiar with. As one participant notes:

They called it ‘the Red Man's burden’. Every time you get one Dean up to speed, [they] move on to another job. You've got to start with the next dumb bunny. So those are all things that weigh on both Indigenous people and non-[Indigenous] people working in the area (R16)

Regardless, for the majority of our participants, building relationships with people in the institution was a consistent strategy used to navigate the conflicting responsibilities of academic spaces.

Discussion

In settler-colonial states, the unilateral enactment of settler-state “responsibility” toward Indigenous peoples has often been a source of colonial and racist violence (Flowers, 2015; Howitt and Suchet-Pearson, 2006; Pickerill, 2008). Responding to the ‘other's call’ by unilaterally constructing and enacting forms of responsibility can be as pernicious as abrogating one's responsibility. Respondents illustrate that respectful and anti-colonial research relationships requires a commitment to listening and learning how to construct relationally negotiated forms of responsibility within (and in many instances beyond) the context of research relationships. For respondents in this study, responsibility is dialogical in nature, it is “in constant negotiation, and [requires] constant attending to” (R11) and is built in places, in the messy realm of imperfect intersubjective interactions. While caring at a distance may work to mobilize forms of political responsibility (Lawson, 2007; Massey, 2004; Milligan and Wiles, 2010), for many of the respondents here, understanding the substance of responsible relationships requires working to bridge distances. The face-to-face meeting of people is a key component to building relationally negotiated forms of responsibility that may work to form alternative subjectivities. This creates spaces for community partners to affirm and express their agency, as illustrated here through acts of refusal. These findings broadly parallel and very much anticipate a great deal of the post-colonial writing about responsibility in the ‘geographies of responsibility’ literature (Noxolo et al., 2012; Raghuram, 2009).

Nevertheless, the power-geometries in which CBPR practitioners find themselves embedded can work to circumscribe and disrupt the practice of relationally negotiated responsibility. This can no doubt be partially attributed to the institutional policies and practices that frame and structure the relationships between researchers and institutional players and, therefore, dictate, to varying degrees, the activities of researchers. As Levinas and Kearny (1986, p 29-30 as

cited in Popke 2006 p. 505) contend: “[ethics] hardens its skin as soon as we move into the political world of the impersonal ‘third’ – the world of government, institutions, tribunals, schools, committees, and so on.” The locational imperatives expressed through institutional forms of accountability necessarily compel researchers to embody different sets of responsible practices (Noxolo et al., 2011). For respondents of this study, operating within the settler-colonial realities of Canada, co-constructing responsibility in research is essential in order to limit the ways in which the colonial project is perpetuated through research. The discursive power embedded in the policy prescriptions of the “impersonal third” that (re)produce already existing formations of responsibility are likely closing off alternative possibilities of learning how to be responsible together, in places. There is little ability for Indigenous partners to enact an ability to refuse the refusal issued from REBs (Stiegman and Castleden, 2015) and to an even greater extent from refusals issued in Financial Services. In fact, the assertion of agency that is inherent in the ability to refuse particular practices of institutional responsibility can be considerably blunted if refusal means loss of funds to carry out research that is meant to respond to pressing needs.

The perceived and/or actual inability or unwillingness of Financial Services to recognize difference has resulted in small humiliations which work to produce situations wherein settler-researchers may inadvertently visit colonial micro-aggressions upon Indigenous partners and participants. While seemingly minor in scale, we contend that these are the everyday social performances that (re)inscribe colonial relations in settler society by reminding Indigenous peoples where power and control reside. On the other hand, researchers and community partners also resist by, as noted above, working together to find creative ways of enacting ethical research relationships. Researchers regularly grapple with the inherent conflicts of adhering to institutional rules for financial rules and regulations versus acting respectfully and ethically with their community partners. More flexibility is required on the part of bodies that administer research funds in terms of honoraria, allowable expenses, and how funds can be moved and transferred. This is of course a micro-element of the broader question of shared control of research funds. Money is power. Advancing the anti-colonial aspects of community-based Indigenous health research in Canada requires finding creative policy solutions that allow for a more equitable control of research funds. Institutional rigidity, as we outlining here, parallels challenges in community-based research broadly; that is, it is not exclusively a challenge faced when working with Indigenous communities (Flicker, 2008; Stroecker, 2008). Clearly however, institutional policies/structures represent only part of the story.

As much as policy may structure action, actors often have the ability to exercise agency in the interpretation and application of policy, even when such policy is deemed a ‘guideline’. We argue that this is evidenced by the divergence within respondents’ experiences of both Research Ethics Offices and Financial Services and how they interpret the TCPS2. Acts of interpretation are inherently

political and it is often non-Indigenous, settler bodies who are doing the interpreting. The locational imperatives of the settler-colonial state shapes settler imaginaries of Indigenous peoples (Razack, 2002; 2015) and above all else, the settler-colonial state seeks the subjugation, assimilation, and disappearance of Indigenous peoples in order to legitimize their claims to stolen lands and resources (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005; Coulthard, 2007; Smith, 2006; Tuck and Gatzambide-Fernandez, 2013; Tuck and Yang, 2012; Veracini, 2011; Wolfe, 2006). To these ends, through numerous modes of social reproduction, settler-colonial states (re)produce pervasive racist discourses by constructing Indigenous peoples as vanishing, inferior, and less-than-human (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Razack, 2015) or to simply effect their erasure from settler consciousness (Godlewska et al., 2010; Godlewska et al., 2013). This being the social world in which most settler Canadians find themselves, it is no wonder that the application of institutional policies unwittingly disadvantages collaborative Indigenous health research. As a response, respondents consistently spoke to the importance of educating and building relationships within the institutional sites where they must operate as a means of disrupting the pernicious effects of settler racism and ignorance. Indeed, the act of constructing relational forms of responsibility with institutional actors seemed to be an important factor in distinguishing between respondents who had positive experiences with REBs as opposed to those who did not. In fact, by way of inversion, as much as critiques of institutional constraints by CBPR researchers often highlight the reproduction of colonial relations in communities, many respondents to this study note how the lessons and teachings learned in communities and from community partners in how to build trust and relational responsibilities can also be effectively engaged within institutional settings. Rather than essentializing university sites as faceless bureaucracies, coming to know the people who populate these spaces in a manner that expands mutual understanding is in and of itself a small step toward decolonizing the academy⁸.

To be sure, the process of decolonization is energy intensive and the fact remains that when individuals within either site complete work terms or move into other positions, it is highly likely that the entire process must begin anew, creating a perpetual cycle where as one participant noted “You've got to start with the next dumb bunny” (R16). Although we, as researchers too, recognize and have experienced the frustrations of constantly needing to re-educate individuals, we also view re-education as a symptom of a much larger problem concerning the lack of Indigenous historical literacy within the Canadian context generally (Godlewska et al., 2013). The interplay between the inherently limiting, always already existing discourses of responsibility framed by policy text and the invisible political intentions embedded in the act of interpretations of settler-colonialists work in

⁸ See, for example, the second author's short digital story, “All my relations.”

tandem to facilitate the production of structural racisms that limits the emancipatory potential of CBPR partnerships.

Finding more sustainable arrangements is critical. For instance, Allahwala and colleagues (2013) suggest institutionalizing the co-management of research through the establishment of community-university partnerships as a means of shifting the ways that REBs (and we would extend this to financial services) understand appropriate engagement. However, they are unclear on how such institutional partnerships would contend with the inherent diversity within and across Indigenous communities. Coombes and colleagues (2014) question the assumed need for exogenous research and argue that collaborative research with Indigenous people must take seriously the long term goal of transitioning the means of academic production to host communities. Ultimately, for Coombes (2012), if CBPR is to be truly anti-colonial and emancipatory it must be set within a broader context of Indigenous self-determination in research arguing that “the keys to academic offices and publishing houses must eventually be transferred to those who know their own world”.

We applaud Coombes’ fervour and the significant strides made by the Maori in promoting self-determination in research; there are, no doubt, many lessons that can applied in the Canadian context. At the same time, for all the parallels between the historical trajectories of both Turtle Island (North America) and Aotearoa (New Zealand), our stories remain our own. Important ‘historic moments’ that have spanned the last two decades - from recommendations in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996), to the ‘calls to action’ issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada (TRC, 2015), to the important work being undertaken by Kah:watsire with regards to the de-funding of Indigenous health research in Canada (Aboriginal Health Steering Committee, 2014) - can be taken as evidence that (at least presently) there is still very much a need for alliances (or at least cooperation) in health research and beyond. This paper has sought, in a modest way, to contribute to a conversation about the nature of alliances in health research by elucidating the often taken-for-granted ways in which our engagement and enactment of notions of responsibility occurs across considerable difference. By being more cognizant of the partially ungraspable nature of the ‘other’s call’, as well as how institutional actors and structures work to circumscribe what is possible in terms of responding responsibly to that call, we feel there is a greater potential for community-based participatory health research to be operationalized in a way that is not only more effective, but that also works to bridge the health disparities between Indigenous and Settler populations in Canada.

Conclusion

This paper has offered a sustained engagement with the multiple, conflicting responsibilities that shape the power-geometries of CBPR practitioners. Enacting ethical, collaborative, and autonomous research with Indigenous people requires mutually constructing negotiated forms of responsibility. Responsibility is dynamic, and like any form of relationship, it is in constant negotiation and requires constant attention. However, the locational imperatives of the different sites we examine produce their own conceptions that can work to disrupt and circumscribe the development and practice of relationally negotiated responsibilities. This is the product of the interplay between academic policies and the bodies that interpret them.

The irony is that even when well-intentioned policy-based prescriptions of rules and norms that dictate responsible action are created, they are also inherently paternalistic when they are created in a top-down manner. Moreover, in doing so, they may absolve *some* institutional actors from the burden of having to consider the consequences of their actions. This effectively releases them of the responsibility for their decisions and makes the act of interpreting and enacting policy appear apolitical (Popke, 2003). Such abrogation of responsibility is structurally racist at its roots and blunts the emancipatory potential of CBPR partnerships.

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