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Indigenous Research and Academic Freedom: A View from Political Scientists

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Abstract

Over the last several decades, scholars working on Indigenous topics have faced increasing pressure to engage in research that promotes social justice and results in formal partnerships with Indigenous communities. In this article, we argue that non-community-based research, in which the researcher exercises academic autonomy over the project, still has a role to play in Indigenous-focused research, depending on the research question, topic, and situation at hand. We explore this argument from the perspective of political scientists who study Indigenous–settler political relations in Canada.

Keywords

methodology, political science, autonomy, academic freedom, ethics

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Indigenous Research and Academic Freedom: A View from Political Scientists

The question of how to conduct ethical social science research involving Indigenous Peoples and communities has been a topic of international academic debate for some time (Ferreira & Gendron, 2011; Porsanger, 2004; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 1999; Zavala, 2013). In previous decades, Indigenous Peoples were often not part of the research conducted within universities, which were comprised overwhelmingly of White settler scholars. As such, the majority of university-based professors designed, conducted, and published their studies on Indigenous Peoples with little regard to what participants and communities wanted. Researchers were encouraged to exercise their academic freedom to pursue research questions that interested them, using methods that privileged one or more of the following principles: objectivity, neutrality, autonomy, generalizability, reliability, and falsifiability.

The results have been mixed. Some of the research has been beneficial, helping to contribute to settler understandings of Indigenous Peoples and, in many cases, to promote Indigenous cultures, histories, and place within Canadian society. This research has also been employed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders and policymakers to tackle the many challenges facing Indigenous communities (Asch, 2014; Kulchyski, 2005; Miller, 2000; Russell, 2005; Slowey, 2008). On the other hand, some research has been harmful and exploitive of Indigenous Peoples, with some academics profiting from Indigenous traditional knowledge, spreading stereotypes and negative images of their communities and lives, and even directly harming them through health and nutrition experiments (Gaudry, 2015).

As a result of these negative outcomes and a number of other developments within and beyond the academy, there has been a strong push from governments, funding agencies, ethics boards, and Indigenous communities for university scholars to form research partnerships with Indigenous communities that promote social justice (Castleden, Morgan, & Lamb, 2012; Louis, 2007; Tri-Council, 2014). Within universities, scholars and scientists have slowly begun to recognize that in the past some of their studies had harmful effects on Indigenous communities and that new approaches were necessary for research involving Indigenous topics, or what some might refer to as settler or societal issues projected onto Indigenous contexts (Gaudry, 2015; Smith, 1999). Outside of these institutions, some political elites and members of the general public have begun to acknowledge their place and role in the exploitation and oppression of Indigenous communities. They are slowly realizing that they must change how they interact and work with Indigenous Peoples if they want to establish a more just relationship. All of these trends have been driven by several high profile commissions and inquiries on Indigenous issues, as well as enhanced coverage in the popular media of the problems and challenges facing Indigenous communities in Canada and in other settler countries (Australia & Wilkie, 1997; Crichton, 2012; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996; Treaty of Waitangi Act, 1975; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015; UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues [UNPFII], 2015).

Consequently, there has been an increased demand for community-based research focusing on partnership and a corresponding decline in non-community-based approaches that emphasize the autonomy of researchers. An important consequence of these trends is a decline in the diversity of perspectives as researchers are putting aside their academic freedom to share authority over the research with participating communities. Should researchers writing about Indigenous topics today abandon non-

community-based approaches and principles in favour of community-based participatory research models?

In this article, we investigate this question by looking at the conditions under which non-community-based research, with its emphasis on academic freedom and autonomy, should be used in research projects involving Indigenous Peoples and how it can be used ethically. We approach this issue mainly from our perspectives and experiences as non-Indigenous political scientists who write on issues related to Indigenous–settler political relations in Canada. We are thus engaging in a broader theoretical and methodological discussion regarding ethical research with Indigenous Peoples. Although the topic we address in this article is one that is occurring in other countries and more broadly at the international level, we approach this debate by focusing on Canada, which is our area of expertise. Our analysis suggests that non-community-based research, by which we mean projects in which the researcher exercises his or her autonomy rather than sharing authority through formal partnership with the community, may still have an important role to play, depending on the research question, topic, and situation at hand; in short, not all Indigenous-focused research should use a community-based research partnership model.

The organization of our article is as follows. We begin with a brief yet broad overview of non-community-based social science research and community-based models in order to provide some context and to help explain why the latter models have become more prominent in university-based research projects. Next, we focus on the questions of when, why, and how non-community-based approaches might be ethically used in research projects involving Indigenous communities from our perspectives as political scientists. Finally, we end by outlining some of the methodological and theoretical implications of our arguments for scholars interested in conducting research with Indigenous communities.

How (Most) Political Scientists Study the World: A Brief Overview

Generally speaking, social scientists have long been interested in generating descriptive and causal inferences about the world in which they live. Social science research has traditionally relied upon a wide range of theories and tools to describe how the world should (normatively) and does (empirically) work, and the forces that underpin the various phenomena that we see or experience across time and space. In political science, scholars have developed a variety of theories that focus on ideas, interests, institutions, and human behaviour, as well as a wide range of quantitative (surveys, content analysis, experiments) and qualitative (interviews, focus groups, field observation, archival research) methods. Most political scientists use what we term a non-community-based approach in which the researcher exercises sole authority and autonomy over a project to generate theories and empirical findings that are reliable, falsifiable, and broadly applicable and generalizable across communities, cases, and phenomena. Although many political science researchers adhere to the scientific method and these associated principles, some only do so partially while others do not at all, believing that post-positivist approaches and qualitative methods produce equally valid research results to those produced by scientific ones (Brady & Collier, 2010; King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994).

In Canada, political science researchers working on Indigenous issues focused much of their early work on the legal aspects of Indigenous rights and citizenship, describing and analyzing Canadian laws,

constitutions, and legal judgments (Boldt, 1993). However, as time progressed, they became more normative in their approach, providing philosophical arguments for and against the recognition of certain types of political, legal, and economic rights, sometimes perpetuating colonialism and racism, and sometimes resisting these phenomena (Borrows, 2002; Cairns, 2000; Flanagan, 2000; Macklem, 2001). These legal and normative perspectives continue to dominate the literature (Alfred, 2008; Asch, 2014; Coulthard, 2014; Turner, 2006), but have been augmented by a new generation of scholars interested in explaining variation between communities as well as stability and change as they relate to Indigenous political mobilization, public policies, and institutions (Alcantara & Wilson, 2013; Morden, 2013; Papillon, 2012; Slowey, 2008).

At the heart of almost all of this non-community-based work is the notion of autonomy. That is to say, it is likely that the majority of these researchers exercised their academic freedom to study an important political phenomenon from a perspective that is outside the object and community of study. While the range of control exercised by Indigenous Peoples has varied across these studies, from passive participant to full partner, most non-community-based studies have involved researchers having significant and final control over the project. This control has in many cases empowered the researchers to produce a diversity of perspectives and arguments about the place of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. It is precisely this diversity of perspectives and approaches that have helped advance knowledge and understanding of Indigenous-settler relations in Canada. For instance, the publication of books and articles that have been critical of Indigenous rights, self-determination, and studies has opened up space to directly and effectively challenge that work and the colonial nature of Canadian laws and mainstream political thought (Asch, 2014; Flanagan, 2000; Timpson, 2009; Turner, 2006). Without the inclusion of diverse views formulated by researchers exercising their academic freedom and autonomy, widespread yet unarticulated colonial and racist opinions are more likely to fester and remain unchallenged among unengaged academics (e.g., academics who do not specialize in Indigenous issues) and the general public. While creating space for a diverse range of perspectives to emerge, including ones that perpetuate colonialism and racism, may have short-term effects that are harmful, but in the long run may have greater positive effects by providing an intellectual foil, which social justice minded scholars can criticize and engage. In that sense, the work of Tom Flanagan (2000), and Widdowson and Howard (2008), for instance, may have unwittingly and unintentionally advanced the decolonization movement further than if such work had never been published in the first place.

Despite these advances, there has been a slow but persistent shift away from non-community-based methods towards new models that more thoroughly locate or share power with the community of study. In the next section of the article, we provide a brief outline of the most prominent of these models, community-based participatory research, and how it has been used to guide researchers in their work with Indigenous communities in Canada and elsewhere.

Community-Based Participatory Research and Indigenous Communities

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) first emerged out of anti-colonial and feminist projects in South America, Asia, and Africa during the 1970s (Darroch & Giles, 2014; Minkler, 2004; Zavala, 2013). CBPR focuses on recognizing and fostering the autonomy of the community that is participating in the research. Meredith Minkler (2004) defined CBPR as:

A collaborative process that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings to the table. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change. (p. 686)

This sharing of power between the researcher and the community necessitates a certain amount of flexibility since the researcher and the community may have different conceptions of what is good research and what would benefit the community (Stoecker, 1999). Reflecting that flexibility, there is no hegemonic or dominant methodological tool in CBPR—projects can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method.

Many scholars and community leaders see CBPR as being uniquely situated for research with Indigenous Peoples due to its relational and decolonizing focus (Castellano, 2004; Castleden et al., 2012; Holkup, Tripp-Reimer, Salois, & Weinert, 2004; LaVeaux & Christopher, 2009). However, some express doubts about the application of any Western research paradigm to Indigenous matters (Coombes, 2012; Kovach, 2009). Margaret Kovach (2009) argued that Indigenous research should not exclusively use CBPR nor should it be subsumed under CBPR because of two important difficulties. First, Indigenous languages cannot easily be translated into other languages without a subsequent loss of meaning.¹ Second, Western research, including CBPR, is not built upon a tribal epistemology and so it tends to miss or understate important concepts that are relevant to Indigenous Peoples, such as the relationality between humans, animals, and nature. Given these challenges, “Indigenous methodologies and qualitative research at best form an insider/outsider relationship” (Kovach, 2009, p. 17) in that CBPR researchers may sometimes have difficulty in giving up control of the research and fully engaging their Indigenous partners.

Yet, there are some scholars who disagree and suggest that Indigenous methodologies and CBPR are in fact compatible. According to Kathy Absolon (2011), areas of commonality include the use of focus groups and talking circles and the likeness between storytelling and personal narrative. These and other commonalities have encouraged researchers to find new and innovative ways to link Indigenous and CBPR methodologies through a number of guiding ethical principles. The most common set of principles is the four Rs of research: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. These principles have been used by a variety of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars in their research with Indigenous communities (Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR], 2009; Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Castellano, 2004; Harris & Wasilewski, 2004; Kirkness & Bernhardt, 2001; Smithers Graeme, 2014).²

Being respectful involves earnestly listening to the desires of the community, while recognizing their right to decide on the nature of their involvement in accordance with its traditions, laws, and procedures. In respecting the community’s autonomy and power, the researcher recognizes the rich knowledge that the community already holds and its right to deploy that knowledge as it sees fit.

¹ There have been several efforts to create a mixture of English and Indigenous languages (Absolon, 2011; Cole, 2006).

² There are some who define the 4 Rs differently from Kirkness and Bernhardt (2001). Harris and Wasilewski (2004), for example, described the four Rs as relationship, responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution. In comparison, Renee Louis (2007) defined the four Rs as relational accountability, respectful representation, reciprocal appropriation, and rights and regulation. While there are differences between these authors, they are all fairly similar in goal and method.

The principle of relevance recognizes that Indigenous communities are likely to know what is relevant to them and that they do not need a researcher to determine for them what kinds of research questions and topics are pertinent to their members. Instead, research topics should emerge out of a shared discussion and vision between the researcher and the community. CBPR aligns very well with this principle given its focus on including the community in conceptualizing, actualizing, and sharing research results (Christopher, 2005; Letiecq & Bailey, 2004).

Reciprocity addresses the importance of having the project benefit both the researcher and the community (Bishop, 1996; Irwin, 1994). Instead of producing gains for only one side of the research partnership, ethically sound research should involve the research partners “going back and forth between the problem, the practice, and the community” (Hermes, 1997, p. 23). Doing so ensures that the needs and desires of all are always “top of mind” and that power is diffused among all partners and participants.

Responsibility entails honouring the promises and commitments made to the community throughout the project. Looking further toward action and research outcomes, a responsible researcher will promote the goals of Indigenous self-determination within and outside of the community throughout the entire process. Again, these principles are also at the core of CBPR given its focus on action and social justice (Ferreira & Gendron, 2011; Minkler, 2004).

An underlying, but not explicitly noted element of ethical research with Indigenous Peoples is a fifth R—relationality. Carjuzaa and Ruff (2010) noted, “[t]he four Rs, as discussed earlier, are practices that provide entry to the relationship building process; however, it is relationality that . . . is the key to understanding and embracing Indigenous ways of knowing” (p. 76). Indeed, relationality is seen by many to be at the core of Indigenous knowledges (Chilisa, 2012; Gaudry, 2015; Wilson, 2008). Inclusive of our relations are human bonds, but also our relations to the land, spirits, and the universe. One can build relations through a variety of means, such as by attending cultural events, visiting the community, speaking with community members, and learning about the community. Building these relationships can require a lot of time and energy for both the researcher and the community members (Castleden et al., 2012; Israel, 2005). According to proponents of CBPR, many of whom are based in disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, and whose research has been based around strong, grassroots connections at the community level, it may be necessary for researchers to spend significant time in the community before the study begins given that Indigenous consent is sometimes provided on the basis of knowing people in the community, as opposed to seeking permission through non-community-based means such as “cold calling” participants (Smith, 1999). However, this reality may not be the case for some research projects.

Tracking the Trend Towards CBPR Models in Canada

Community-based research as it relates to Indigenous communities in Canada has become more prominent over the last 10 years for two main reasons. First, previous research on Indigenous communities was viewed by some as being exploitative, harmful, or indifferent to Indigenous participants. Second, Canadians, including researchers, policymakers, and citizens have started to become more aware of and accept the reality of their colonial history and to recognize that they must fundamentally change how they view and relate to Indigenous communities across a variety of settings (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2016).

It is true that some academics have exploited Indigenous Peoples by treating them as mere objects of study (Smith, 1999). Rather than empowering them and their interests, some researchers have used Indigenous Peoples to further their scholarly careers and the broader colonial and racist interests of settler society (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000; Harvey, 2003; Porsanger, 2004). Ian Mosby (2013), for instance, has cast much needed light on the highly exploitive and damaging nutrition experiments conducted by Canadian researchers within residential schools and Indigenous communities during the 1940s and 1950s. In these experiments, malnourished children and adults were subject to study without their knowledge or consent, and left in deplorable conditions while researchers presented papers and posters at academic conferences. In another case, a researcher stole Haida texts and published them without the community's consent (Davis, 2004). Although these are just a couple of extreme examples of academic researchers exploiting Indigenous communities for their own interests, we feel it is important to make a distinction between these types of invasive, racist, and even criminal activities, and the majority of the research, both community-based and non-community-based, that has been conducted by academic researchers in the name of advancing knowledge for building public understanding and informing public policymaking by Indigenous and Canadian leaders.

At the same time that these studies were being produced and shared within scholarly circles, Canadian society was beginning to change in ways that would encourage researchers to recognize their sometimes exploitative practices and to shift how they conducted research with Indigenous communities. In some respects, researchers were key drivers of these changes, both through their privileged place as educators within Canadian academic institutions and as so-called "experts" in the popular media. For much of our country's history, Canadian federal policy has focused on two main goals: assimilating Indigenous Peoples into mainstream society and dispossessing them of their lands for economic development. According to some scholars, historical treaties and modern treaties were designed to dispossess Indigenous communities of their traditional territories and convert them into land tenures that were recognizable under Canadian law (Alcantara, 2009; Alfred, 2008; Coulthard, 2014).

Other government initiatives, such as the residential schools system, the 1969 White Paper (formally known as the Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, 1969), and the 1876 Indian Act, were disguised as means to socialize and integrate Indigenous communities into the political, economic, and social structures of Canada. In reality, they were colonial policies that perpetuated racism and practices of cultural genocide. The Indian Act and the various amendments to it over the years imposed quasi-Western property rights, membership codes, and government structures (e.g., municipal-style band councils), among other things, on Indigenous communities across Canada in hopes of preparing them to eventually become fully integrated into Canadian society (Flanagan, Alcantara, & Le Dressay, 2010; Poelzer & Coates, 2015). Residential schools, for instance, involved Indigenous children being removed from their homes to learn Western values in settings where physical, emotional, and sometimes sexual abuse were common. In 1969, then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau hoped to wipe away long-standing political and legal differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples with the now infamous White Paper. Ironically, this proposal was one of the factors that mobilized Indigenous Peoples and their supporters, and set the stage for a decades-long struggle for self-determination.

As these developments were occurring, non-Indigenous Canadians and governments began to recognize that a new approach was needed to repair their relationships with Indigenous Peoples. This new attitude among Canadian elites, including many academics and citizens, was the result of international norms

relating to human rights, Indigenous participation in World War II and in Canadian society during the post-war period, as well as a variety of constitutional and legal developments in Canadian courts and at the constitutional negotiating tables during the 1980s and 1990s. Major government studies and reports by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) and the more recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) (see also Abele, 2000) reflected and entrenched this attitudinal change.

These various developments have encouraged researchers to pay attention to the forces that are shaping Indigenous communities and societies, as well as to explore new models of research that privilege Indigenous power and authority at the expense of their own. One of the most important developments for the rise of community-based or similarly inspired models was likely the Tri-Council³ Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), which has the guiding principles of respect, concern for welfare, and justice at its core (Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR], the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada [NSERC], and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [SSHRC], 2010). In particular, there is a chapter on Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada (CIHR, NSERC, & SSHRC, 2014). Although the provisions in this chapter were technically guidelines rather than requirements, researchers quickly realized that their grant applications to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council had to abide by these rules if they wanted to increase their chances of receiving funding. As a result, some academic researchers have started to move away from non-community-based methods towards community-based models or ones inspired by them (Castleden et al., 2012; Kovach, 2009; Minkler, 2005).

Control over academic involvement with Indigenous Peoples is enshrined in a larger political struggle by Indigenous Peoples for self-determination (Stiegman & Castleden, 2015). As such, the shift towards ethical relations with Indigenous communities is more than a matter of method. Instead, it is part of a broader movement towards political equality, Indigenous difference and autonomy, and/or solidarity. Harmful research in the past stemmed from the belief that Indigenous Peoples were passive subjects with no power. In comparison, CBPR is part of a broader change wherein the balance of power is recognized and the involvement of Indigenous Peoples is required. Nonetheless, CBPR has been seen by some as only one option when ideally Indigenous Peoples should hold greater control over research affecting their interests (Koster, Baccar, & Lemelin, 2012; Smith, 1999).

This turn towards CBPR has been a welcome development that continues to offer an important perspective when used ethically and for appropriate research topics. In particular, the five principles of ethical Indigenous research are a valuable gain for the research community. While these principles align nicely with CBPR, they may also be applied to other approaches. As such, we do not believe that CBPR is always necessary for any and all research projects involving Indigenous communities, or that non-community-based approaches should be abandoned altogether. Indeed, there may be certain instances or cases where non-community-based research methods, in which the researcher exercises autonomy rather than engages in a partnership with the community, may be more appropriate or useful, depending on the research question, topic, and situation. Below, we investigate these issues based on our

³ The Tri-Council is made up of three federal granting agencies that fund research in the social sciences and humanities, the natural sciences and engineering, and health. The first edition of the policy was published in 1998 (TCPS). The policy was revised substantially for the second edition, released in 2010 (TCPS2) and subsequently updated in 2014.

experiences working with Indigenous communities on topics related to Indigenous-settler political relations in Canada.

The Case for Non-Community-Based Approaches

CBPR and Indigenous approaches have played an important part in redressing the imbalance between researchers and communities, and are part of a broader political and social process of empowerment and decolonization. At the same time, however, it should not necessarily be a foregone conclusion that academic researchers should abandon non-community-based approaches in favour of CBPR models when working with Indigenous communities. While there are a number of reasons (which we discuss below) why researchers might choose non-community-based approaches over community-based ones, we also think that non-community-based research can be done ethically in accordance with the TCPS2 and the five Indigenous principles of respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationality. We focus on these five principles because the TCPS2 states that its guidelines are not meant to “override or replace ethical guidance offered by Aboriginal peoples themselves” (CIHR, NSERC, & SSHRC, 2010, p. 105; see also Stiegman & Castleden, 2015). Although the literature is replete with criticisms of non-community-based research and support for community-based models, there has yet to be any work that we know of that tries to defend the use of non-community-based approaches (e.g., projects in which the researcher exercises his or her autonomy rather than engaging in partnership with the community) for Indigenous research. In the next section, we attempt to clarify why non-community-based approaches should still have a place in the toolkit of researchers despite the rising popularity and demand for formal research partnerships with Indigenous communities.

Respect and Relationality

Two of the most important principles underlined by CBPR and some Indigenous methodologies are respect and relationality (Gaudry, 2015). In many regards, these two principles go hand in hand. In the not too distant past, certain academic researchers often had little respect or concern for the needs of the communities they studied. But it is important that we do not paint all academic researchers with the same brush. Many researchers spent decades “studying” communities while exercising their academic freedom and, in the process, developed strong and lasting relationships (but not formal partnerships) with community members (Hicks & White, 2015; Russell, 2005). Most contemporary academic researchers, who do not necessarily consider themselves to be adherents of the CBPR or Indigenous approaches, have a much deeper respect for the communities where they work while at the same time exercising autonomy over the research question, data collection, analysis, and publication. Moreover, this respect should not solely be measured in terms of the amount of time a researcher spends in a community. Indeed, depth of engagement, perhaps measured in terms of transparency, humility, trust, and/or respect, can be equally as important as length of engagement.

Even though some non-community-based researchers do not forge formal partnerships or spend long periods of time in the urban and rural communities where they work, they can still be transparent about their research questions, theories, methods, and goals. They can still approach community leaders and members with humility, acknowledging that they are not the experts on the issue or community but instead bring different yet important knowledge and expertise to the table. They can earn trust and respect by conducting themselves and their research in a way that is consistent with what they said they

would do and the attitude of humility that they demonstrated at the beginning of the project. They can also earn trust and respect by becoming attuned to the problems and issues these communities face by accessing the wealth of information online (e.g., community newsletters, minutes of meetings, and annual reports) and in existing studies. Academic researchers can furthermore get a good sense of community needs and desires from the interviewees themselves.⁴

Actualizing respect and relationality additionally mean that researchers must recognize the fact that Indigenous leaders and community members lead very busy lives. Accordingly, research relationships must take into account this reality. The same might be said about Indigenous community members, as research for them may be labour intensive and so they do not have the time for or interest in a formal partnership with the researcher. Instead, they may prefer delegating or simply providing information to the researcher rather than participating as co-investigators. Maguire (1987) noted, “while researchers may be able to invest their total work time in a PR [participatory research] project, participants continue their regular life activities” (p. 46). Respect and relationality in this context, therefore, means understanding that relationships must be tailored to the realities of the day-to-day lives of the participants and this may mean fostering brief relationships, rather than long-term partnerships.

Respect and relationality can also mean fostering a much more passive relationship than the one typically embodied in community-based research. According to Stoecker (1999), “as a graduate student academic . . . when community members first got me thinking about PR, I was of little use to them. I had no expert knowledge in anything that they did not have more of. How I ended up being relevant was in documenting the neighborhood’s struggle and spreading the word of what happened so that the neighborhood could remember itself and others could adapt their model” (p. 851). As opposed to a community-based approach, the role of non-community-based academics in these situations is to simply document the struggle or provide criticisms and lessons learned for that community and others in their current and future efforts. Formal partnership may not be necessary or desirable in these situations.

In short, academics can employ non-community-based research approaches in ways that embody the principles of respect and relationality. Surveys, archival research, and one-off elite interviews conducted autonomously by the researcher, but which are sensitive to Indigenous goals and perspectives, may be the most appropriate methodological approach for those community members and leaders who are too busy to engage in a formal partnership. The same may be true for research topics where communities prefer someone who works passively in the background to provide an outsider’s perspective to an on-going political or social process. In these cases, non-community-based research approaches may be more useful and appropriate than CBPR.

⁴ We should note that all research involving human beings must go through some sort of ethical oversight. We are not arguing that non-community-based research should be exempt from ethical review prior to the research taking place.

Relevance and Reciprocity

In many respects, relevance and reciprocity go hand in hand. They both speak to the notions of balance and mutual benefit for all concerned. The overriding question is: Are the goals of communities and academic researchers compatible? There are a lot of misconceptions about what academic researchers do. Much academic research is perceived to be esoteric and largely irrelevant to non-specialists or the public at large. Indeed, the commonly used phrase, “it’s academic,” reinforces this notion in popular discourse.

Academic research in the social sciences, as well as in other disciplines, can be roughly divided into two camps. The first is theory-driven and seeks to advance knowledge by confirming, disconfirming, or modifying theories and hypotheses about different phenomena that have been developed over time and through the observation and study of many cases (Alcantara & Nelles, 2016; Morden, 2013; Papillon, 2012). The second is more practical in orientation and seeks to describe and effect change, mainly through a social justice agenda (Alfred, 2008; Coulthard, 2014; Turner, 2006). Both approaches have their merits and both make a significant contribution to our collective understanding of the world around us. The production of knowledge thus benefits from a plurality of perspectives and approaches, including those provided by CBPR and non-community-based approaches.

Non-community-based academic research tends to fall into the theory-driven camp. In this sense, the research is driven by broader debates within academia, rather than the concerns identified by a particular community (Macklem, 2001; Turner, 2006). Ideas are the key points of contention. This does not mean that researchers are blind or inconsiderate to the practical needs of the community or that the research they conduct has no relevance to the community; on the latter point, hegemonic and/or transformative ideas such as neoliberalism, Indigenous resurgence, and nation-to-nation relations have had a powerful effect on the lives of individuals and communities. Theory driven and ideational work provides policymakers and practically-oriented scholars with an overarching framework for evaluating and generating useful policy and political solutions for a variety of real world problems (Alfred, 2008; Poelzer & Coates, 2015; Slowey, 2008).

Academic researchers are constantly criticized for churning out academic publications that no one outside the academic community reads and so academics are painted as irrelevant or out of touch with reality. CBPR arose partly in response to these criticisms as the close partnership between community and researcher was meant to ensure that relevant results reached the community. Yet, academic publications, whether they are produced through non-community-based, CBPR, or Indigenous methodologies, serve as an important means for disseminating information, not only within the academic community, but also to key decision-makers within governments and society. Politicians, civil servants, non-governmental organizations, students, and the media look to academics to help them understand the processes and issues that are shaping the world around them. Academics will typically produce shorter summaries of their research and share those summaries through newspaper columns, television and radio interviews, presentations at conferences and at other public venues, and sometimes through more unconventional means such as social media and animated videos. Through these various mechanisms, academics receive and address feedback from a variety of sources and through a variety of mediums. Many academics receive letters in the mail or emails from citizens reacting to research results and these reactions can and should drive our future research in these areas. Engaging in these various

dissemination practices is a way of ensuring that researchers respect the principles of relevance and reciprocity even if formal partnerships are not at the heart of the research project.

Non-community-based research approaches also foster relevance and reciprocity by encouraging graduate students and non-tenured faculty members to engage with and focus on the issues facing Indigenous communities. One of the difficulties inherent within CBPR is that it requires a significant time investment before researchers can produce outputs that are valued by the academic community (Castleden et al., 2012). In today's academic job market, candidates are expected to publish articles and book chapters early in their academic careers if they want to have any hope at a tenure-stream position. The disincentives to pursue Indigenous topics are significant unless early career researchers can turn to non-community-based approaches and employ them in respectful ways. Encouraging graduate students to use non-community-based approaches in an ethical way, therefore, may be one way to foster more research that is relevant and useful to Indigenous communities.

Responsibility

As noted above, most academic researchers, whether they employ non-community-based or CBPR approaches, feel a degree of commitment and responsibility to the communities and regions they study. Visits to communities can make a deep impression on researchers, regardless of whether that visit lasts three days or three months. The responsibilities to a community and to the research do not end as soon as researchers leave the community. For the responsible researcher, they continue into the classroom or in conversations with the media, government, and non-governmental organizations about the research that they are undertaking.

What is the responsibility of researchers to the communities in which they work? Proponents of CBPR argue that their primary purpose should be to advocate for a particular community and seek to help solve the problems that the community faces. A strong current of "social justice" underlies the CBPR approach in which academic researchers become part of the process of seeking action to redress harms committed against a community or people. However, many academic researchers who have employed non-community-based approaches feel that they have a responsibility to remain an "outsider," as in someone not working in formal partnership with the community, when conducting research. While it is true that all academic researchers have agendas, biases and preconceived notions about the topics they study, trying to remain autonomous and view all sides of an issue is a critical part of academic research. The outsider will never be completely objective or all-knowing, but they will bring different and comparative perspectives to the issue based on their observation, data, and past experiences. Doing so not only advances the goals of the researcher and the wider community, but also benefits the community by providing new and diverse perspectives rather than simply reflecting what the community already knows about itself and the issue under investigation.

Academic researchers walk a fine line between getting to know the communities and regions they study (and supporting those communities and regions by trying to understand and reflect on their issues and problems) and maintaining a sufficient distance from those communities so that they can preserve a level of autonomy and reflection that is important to producing diverse and useful knowledge (Hicks & White, 2015; Kulchyski, 2005; Sider, 2014). It is completely understandable that Indigenous Peoples are wary of past outsiders who unethically engaged in "soaking and poking" around and in their communities.

However, ethical engagement using an outsider perspective generates greater understanding of what is going on in those communities and, by extension, greater appreciation for the opportunities and challenges facing those communities; in this sense, the long-term benefits could be significant. A good example would be the issue of the division of matrimonial real property on Canadian reserves where Indian Act rules relating to property ownership and patriarchal forms of power combine to disempower Indigenous women from being treated equitably during divorce proceedings. In these types of cases, research partnership with communities may be impossible; for instance, there were some Indigenous women and women's groups that wanted certain Canadian laws to apply so as to protect their matrimonial property interests. Some Indigenous leaders, however, opposed these demands because acting on them would have violated their communities' rights to autonomy and self-determination. Outsiders contributed to overcoming this impasse by pointing to various causes and solutions that were being overlooked in the rhetoric (Alcantara, 2006; Cornet & Lendor, 2002). Policymakers and leaders did not adopt these outsider perspectives wholesale, but they contributed to broader thinking about how to address this problem at multiple levels.

Outsider perspectives have long been valued across the disciplines of social science. Outsiders, such as Alexis de Tocqueville (2000) on American democracy, Gunnar Myrdal (1995) on race in the United States, and Seymour Martin Lipset (1991) on Canadian political culture, have provided valuable insights into domestic phenomena in ways that domestic scholars had yet to provide. Indeed, the subfield of comparative politics within political science is premised on the idea that important insight can come from direct or indirect comparison of countries. The comparative work of John Borrows (2010) on Indigenous constitutionalism within Canada clearly falls into and supports that tradition.

As academic researchers, embedding oneself too deeply in a community can interfere with one's ability to critically⁵ assess a topic. In some cases, communities may be divided along gender, age, economic, family, and/or political lines. These lines are particularly clear, for instance, in issues relating to membership, status, and the division of matrimonial property as it relates to Indigenous women. In those situations, an embedded scholar may find that a CBPR approach can only tell one part or a version of a larger story. In reality, there is room (and a need) for a diversity of approaches to research. However, as the pendulum swings towards CBPR approaches, the danger is that only a partial picture will be produced and crucial knowledge and perspective about the policy issue or problem will be overlooked and missed.

In short, there is value in encouraging multiple perspectives, something which non-community-based academic research is well positioned to provide, as long as it is done in accordance with the TCPS2 and the five principles of ethical Indigenous research. Taking into account the needs of the community requires flexibility for how the community prefers to be involved, which may be limited due to the need for an outside perspective or due to a lack of time. Another relevant consideration is the research topic at hand, such as when a research design is comparative in nature or limited to particular interviewees. Non-community based approaches are well situated to address these situations.

⁵ The term "critically" or "critical" as used in this context should not be interpreted as "negative." It simply means the ability of an academic researcher to view an issue or topic perspectives that might be different from those held by the community.

Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that non-community-based research approaches can and sometimes should be used when conducting research with Indigenous Peoples. The decision to use a non-community-based approach depends partly on the research question and the nature of the participating individuals and communities, but there is also value in the approach in and of itself. In particular, non-community-based research approaches are desirable because they tend to generate a plurality of perspectives, which is useful for spurring and advancing academic and political debate and for producing a broader range of knowledge and understanding for policy and political action. Although the emergence of research driven by a social justice perspective is a welcome development, researchers should be cautious about homogeneity and instead embrace the inevitable discourse, debate, and benefits that come from adopting a plurality of approaches. However, as history has taught us, these approaches must respect and acknowledge the kinds of concerns emerging out of the literature on CBPR and Indigenous methodologies. In that sense, ethical oversight and guidelines such as those found in the TCPS2 and the five principles of ethical Indigenous research are still necessary for all research involving Indigenous communities. Our point is simply that such oversight and guidelines should permit and encourage researchers to use both community and non-community-based approaches.

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