

Construction and Mediation of the “Other” in Community-Engaged Scholarship: The Importance of Not-knowing

Tania Kajner

ABSTRACT In this paper I share and analyze a subset of findings from a qualitative research study on community-engaged scholarship in Canada. I explore how engaged scholars participating in the study conceptualize community in their engagement experiences. I suggest that in articulating their work, participants depict the contradictory tensions of constructing community as an Other in a way that reflects the dominant European legacy of colonial relations while at the same time leaning towards forms of interaction that are decolonial and challenge this model of colonial relations. This leaning is important and, as I will argue, needs to be nurtured if engagement in Canada is going to escape the pragmatic instrumentalism that marks much of engaged scholarship and if Canadian scholars are going to relate to partners in truly reciprocal and equitable ways.

KEYWORDS community-engaged scholarship, Canadian scholars, conceptualizing community, and decolonial relations.

In the time since Boyer (1990, 1996) introduced the term scholarship of engagement, engagement activities and practices have expanded enormously. How scholars understand these practices is subject to debate, informed by the existing traditions of theorizing and critical scholarship within different activity domains. In analyzing individual practices, for example community-based research or experiential learning, scholars can draw from conceptual debates and critical assessments explored in the published literature. In the case of the community-engaged scholarship (CES)¹ as a field of practice, however, there is very little conceptual or theoretical material from which to draw. Further confounding the issue is the fact that scholars’ social and institutional positioning affects how their engagement is understood (Kasworm & Abdrahim, 2014). It is no surprise, then, that community-engaged scholarship is marked by confusion and contested practices, demonstrating the need to move to a more philosophical and theoretical exploration of engagement (Sandmann, 2008) that might overcome the “unclear goals and historical fragmentation” (Shaefer & Rivera, 2013, p. 127) of the field.

¹ I am using the scholarship of engagement, engagement, and community-engaged scholarship interchangeably throughout this paper.

Though many Canadian institutions and scholars are embracing engaged scholarship and working to open up higher education spaces, the few studies that do delve deeper into conceptualizations of community-engaged scholarship do not reflect Canadian scholars' perspectives. At the time of this study, no pan-Canadian research had been done on Canadian scholars' conceptualization of CES. This invites questions about how Canadian scholars understand their work with communities.

In this paper I share and analyze a subset of findings from a qualitative research study on community-engaged scholarship in Canada in order to explore how community-engaged scholars in Canada conceptualize community in their engagement experiences. I suggest that in articulating their work, scholars depict the contradictory tensions of constructing community as an Other in a way that reflects the dominant European legacy of colonial relations while at the same time leaning towards forms of interaction that are decolonial and challenge this model of colonial relations. This leaning towards decolonial relations is important and, as I will argue, needs to be nurtured if Canadian scholars are going to relate to partners in truly reciprocal and equitable ways.

Background

Despite the lack of conceptual clarity in the field of community-engaged scholarship, many explorations of engagement explicitly call for partnerships marked by reciprocity and mutual benefit. For example, Holland (2005) suggested that community-engaged scholarship could be understood as the intentional collaboration between higher education institutions and their larger communities for mutual beneficial exchanges of knowledge and resources in the context of reciprocity and partnership. The National Centre for Outreach Scholarship at Michigan State University views outreach and engagement as scholarship that involves generating, transmitting, applying, and preserving knowledge for the direct benefit of external audiences in ways that are consistent with university goals (Glass, Doberneck, & Schweitzer, 2010). Similarly, the Kellogg Commission (1999) envisioned engagement broadly, as reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships: two-way streets defined by mutual respect for what each brings to the table. Saltmarsh, Hartley & Clayton (2009) pointed to distinctions between two forms of engagement: civic engagement and democratic engagement, and made a case for democratic engagement because it better captures the principles of reciprocity and bidirectionality. It is these principles that Sandmann, Kliever, Kim and Omerikwa (2010) cast as two core values of engaged scholarship in their emphasis on the importance of attending to power and the underlying philosophical constructs in engagement. Using the theories of Freire, Foucault, and Rawls, the authors examined engagement and offered a relational engagement framework as a tool for thinking deeply about issues of power in engagement.

With an eye to power, Watson, Hollister, Stroud and Babcock (2011) asserted that engagement in higher education, as a global phenomenon, is very much marked by differences in North and South that call for attention to the interconnection of epistemic and social exclusions. Smith (1999) argued that reciprocity in education implies a way of being together that includes an emphasis on a shared journey, rather than just the accumulation of knowledge.

To ensure scholarship is relevant to those outside the academy can be an act of anti-oppressive education and research (Strega, 2005); it can transform the structure of self-other relations that underpins activities of co-creating knowledge. However, without this attention to how we are co-constituted, intersubjectively positioned by our interactions with one another, community engaged scholarship might lead to knowledge that seems to be co-created, but in reality is a relationship of exploitation and oppression.

Given the centrality of reciprocity and mutual benefit in understandings of community-engaged scholarship, and the recognized importance of asking questions about power in the co-creation of knowledge, engagement provides fertile ground to explore questions of identity and difference in scholar-community relations.

About the Study

In this paper I share results of a pan-Canadian qualitative study on the scholarship of engagement. The study received research ethics approval in the fall of 2012. Positioning the study within a hermeneutic framework, which focuses primarily on the meaning of qualitative data and development of an interpretation of the phenomena in question (Fleming, Gaidys, & Robb, 2003), I sought to address gaps in the research on Canadians scholars' conceptualization of CES and develop a deep understanding and conceptualization of community-engaged scholarship in Canada.

Hermeneutics is an important research framework particularly well suited to this interpretive study. In undertaking hermeneutic research, the researcher creatively interprets, creating meaning, not just reporting on it (Smith, 1991). Hermeneutic inquiry begins with a recognition that we are born into a pre-existing world, born into traditions and language systems within which we come to know others and ourselves. While at first this world might seem complete, we soon learn that the languages we inherit cannot fully articulate what we mean and that "reality is always reality for us, but it always opens out into a broader world which serves or can serve to enrich our understanding of who we are" (Smith, 1991, p. 197). It is by seeking to understand both the world we inhabit and ourselves within it, that we interpret and create them.

Given the hermeneutic recognition that understanding is always incomplete, it was impossible in this study to unpack all of the complexities of engaged scholarship. What I offer here is an interpretation and since all interpretations are partial, my study findings are also partial. Because of this partiality and because interpretation is shaped by the researcher's interpretive horizon, the direct empirical transferability of these research findings is limited. It is my hope, however, that the interpretation and ideas explored in this paper might be useful in their theoretical transferability, that the ideas here might resonate with engagement scholars and inform interpretations of community-engagement.

Data Collection

Three research questions guided this study. How do scholars in Canada conceptualize engaged scholarship? How do engaged scholars position themselves and Others in the engagement

experience? How does the changing context of higher education interact with the growing interest in community-engaged scholarship in Canada? These three questions were explored through a qualitative research design that included two semi-structured interviews with each of nine scholars occupying varying social, institutional, disciplinary and geographic locations within Canadian higher education.

For the first semi-structured interview, I developed a list of guiding questions and conversation prompts to ensure the interview conversation maintained an orientation to the phenomenon of engagement. After conducting the first interview I undertook a preliminary identification of emerging themes, writing them up in a summary that included a second set of questions as conversation prompts. This document was shared with participants in advance of the second semi-structured interview. Two participants were recruited late in the study and only available for one longer interview. In these cases, I shared the commentary and questions developed for the second interview but used conversation prompts intended for both the first and second interviews.

The audiotapes from participant interviews, conducted between January and June of 2013, were transcribed and, along with my notes and the literature, formed the basis for my interpretation.

Participants

Participants were selected for inclusion in the study through two forms of purposive sampling: intensity sampling, whereby participants are included on the basis of having rich information and experiences that manifest the phenomena intensely (Creswell, 1998) and snowball sampling, a method of developing and expanding a sample by asking one participant to recommend others (Babbie, 1995).

Fourteen participants were selected for inclusion. Nine participants agreed to participate in the study, a number that Boyd (2001) suggested is sufficient for a study of this nature. Of the nine participants, six identified as female and three as male. Geographically, four participants worked in Western Canada (Manitoba westward), three in Central Canada (Ontario), one in Quebec, and one in Eastern Canada (all provinces east/south east of Quebec). Participants worked in various faculties/ areas including: arts, humanities, education, extension, business, science, planning, social work, and history. Two participants were in their early career (0-9 years working fulltime in higher education), four in their mid career (10-20 years working fulltime in higher education) and three later in their careers (20+ years working fulltime in higher education).

The following profiles offer a brief glimpse of each participant. All names have been changed to protect participants' anonymity.

Sandy works in a tenure track position and describes her work as “community-engaged scholarship”. Though she completed a “traditional dissertation project”, she states, “I always wanted to do my work in this [engaged] way.”

Amy describes her work in a variety of ways including “public involvement, public

engagement, community engagement.” Amy began her engagement journey as a research coordinator at a university, which motivated her to continue her studies: “So, got the bug and did the PhD and then still wasn’t sure if I wanted to come into a traditional academic setting.” She found academic work in a unit that supports community engagement.

Corey is a mid career professor who completed a “very traditional [discipline] master’s degree” and then secured a job working with a community. This exposed Corey to community-based approaches and motivated him to do a PhD: “I was doing [topic] research in the community...that made me decide, I gotta go back and get my PhD but I’m going to do it in [discipline] that is community-engaged.”

Denise is a tenured professor who describes her area as “education and research involving the First Nations and Aboriginal people.” After graduating with her PhD, Denise wanted to develop educational programs that were “more responsive to the learning ways of Aboriginal people.” This desire exposed her to community engagement, which resonated with the approach already embedded in her academic work.

Henry is a tenured professor who worked for many years doing research in community. He joined the university at a time before community engagement “was allowed, let alone semi-fashionable.” Henry describes himself as a “knowledge worker” who is “interested in ways in which construction of knowledge can be done that makes it more likely that we would have social change.”

Jen has been in both administrative and tenure track positions and is currently working as an administrator. She describes herself as a “practitioner of community-university engagement.” and describes her work in the following way: “I write about it [engagement], and I think about it, and I am a critical advocate for it”

Jim is currently in a significant administrative position in higher education and is in the middle of his career. He has a doctorate, but has not worked as a tenure track professor: “I have a PhD...but I’ve never really wanted to be a faculty member.” Jim sees himself as someone who bridges different sites/ideas/ways of thinking and has spent his life trying to link the university and community.

Mary is a tenured professor who describes her research area as “social movements, globally and locally, grass roots, with a definite focus on feminist movements.” Mary does not identify herself as a community-engaged scholar, though she works extensively in community. This is because “the academic field doesn’t define me.” That being said, Mary is clear that the academy fits with her own interests: “what I like to do is to think.”

Mona is a tenure track professor early in her academic career. In describing herself she notes, “there are times that I do more traditional research, teaching, and service. But more generally I’d consider myself a community-engaged scholar.” Mona worked extensively with community before beginning her academic career.

Findings

In the following section, I summarize research findings relating to how scholars understand community. I share examples of the ways in which participants constructed community

through difference, and how they sometimes problematized this dichotomous construction. I also share how participants sought to navigate their relationship with community, particularly as it relates to difference, and their emphasis on the importance of openness and listening in the engagement endeavor.

How Community is Understood: Variable Ideas

Participants in this study recognized that when talking about community in community-engagement there is “enormous variability amongst people’s understanding of what that means.” One participant pointed out that community is an entity that “could be defined in any kind of way” and another asserted that it “can mean different things.”

Despite this definitional openness, participants described communities as held together by some unifying factor, be it culture, interests, class, geography, or even political values. For example, one participant described community in the following way: “Like a First Nations community, an agricultural community, you know, a class identified community, a rural-urban community, a northern community, whatever it might be.” Another asserted:

It [community] can be: it can be local, it can be national, it can be international, and it can be a much smaller concept. It can be referred to something much larger. So, you know, I think it’s important that the notion of community have some variability to it.

While a third shared: “The community that I identify with are those people who are, you know, on the left, or social change people, or activists, or whatever.”

Community Constructed as ‘Outside Academia’

While the concept of community may be variable, mean different things, and perhaps even be impossible to define, in community-engaged scholarship community is conceptually positioned as “outside of academia.” For example, one participant asks, “For people in the academy, why don’t they understand that people out there in the community understand things?”

The binary positioning of community as outside university, while sometimes questioned by participants themselves, is consistently present in their discourse on community-engaged scholarship. The irony of this is not lost on one participant who points out that despite scholars’ desire for “a partnership that really integrates our work”, when discussing community-university engagement “we are using language to put ourselves in one or the other of those places.”

The conceptual positioning of community as outside the university is perhaps best captured by the way in which differences are described. The differences between community and university partners in community-engaged scholarship are expressed as a series of opposites: expecting practical results vs. research and knowledge-based results; working on the front lines vs. having some distance from the issues; possessing practical, contextualized knowledge vs. global or theoretical knowledge; and finally being part of different knowledge cultures.

Community is defined against the work and focus of scholars in a whole host of ways.

For example, participants assert that “the distinction is really clear”, community members hope for different products out of the partnership than their academic partners. Communities want “something very practical” and “might want publications, but they want accessible communications”, while scholars want “to publish in this critical reflective way in a peer reviewed publication where my publication is going to potentially help me get a promotion or a merit increment.” One participant draws the distinction by pointing to the immediacy of the situations faced in community as opposed to the luxury of reflection without the pressures of doing:

Working on the front lines... their [community] focus is so immediately grabbed by the immediacy of the situations that they are in. Like, they're fighting fires everyday, every moment. So they don't have the luxury to sit back and say, gee, I'm noticing this trend.

The emphasis on doing in community is also captured by a participant who describes community as “people who work in the field” and yet another who notes that community members “have their own expertise. They have very hands on, very practitioner focused [expertise]” while university partners “can bring new concepts, new theories, you know, a lot of the stuff that they [community] don't have the time to do or the expertise.”

Echoing this statement, another participant states:

It's the marriage of the, of what is academic, the value of the academy at its finest, where it is taking a large perspective and a broad perspective and a long perspective and is able to say, 'this is what we've learned collectively over time and over space and how it can be applied to this particular set of circumstances' and where the community comes in saying 'we know what is going to work in our location or what is not going to work in our location. Let's bring together our instrumental local knowledge and your more academic, theoretical, more macro level knowledge and try to build something that is going to solve the problems that we're facing that neither of us could have done on our own.'

The practical knowledge held by community and the critical, theoretical knowledge held by scholars are described by one participant as different “knowledge cultures” while yet another suggests community is “a different world.”

Dichotomous Positioning of Community is Problematic

Though participants in this study tended to use dichotomous language in describing community and university, some recognized that “as much as we are talking about partnerships and mutual benefit and reciprocity, we continue to make a distinction between community and university and I think there is a problem with that.” this description is problematic and fails to capture the complexities of the relation. For example, one participant points out:

... because they happen to be scholars, I don't think they would dissociate themselves from being part of the community. And vice versa, that because you are, quote, 'community' means you don't have a clue about research or scholarship and you need somebody over in that other camp called university in order to engage in this process that is going to give you this great outcome.

The struggle, this participant suggests, is to talk about differences between community and university, and recognize "there is a history of work done within institutions of higher education that has missed a whole lot... the institutions have created this very insular world", while not constructing a dichotomous conceptualization of community and university scholars:

So, if we just said engaged scholarship... that opens itself up for, to hmmm... to miss the invitation to those who historically have not gotten an invitation to participate... But the language of community... I can tell you that there are people that I have engaged with for research purposes who would now be considered community, who are also academics. And so what the heck do we do with them... There is lots of folks working in what we define as community that are also scholars, that also have an academic background/experience whatever... all academics in some way or another are also part of community... I understand that there are differences, but I also think that sometimes solely talking about these places as though the people in these places are totally different, I think it is a problem.

The distinctions between community and university do not have "such clear-cut parameters", which points to the ways in which participants' understanding of community as outside academe is a construction, one that constructs a scholar's role in opposition to community. Though many participants in this study were sure to talk about the strengths that communities bring, their "practical", "local", "contextual", "front lines" knowledge, at the same time they described community as lacking in "research skills, macro perspectives", and "critical, theoretical knowledge". This lack is sometimes attributed to ability, sometimes to time constraints or interests. Nonetheless, communities need help to research their own issues, to develop better policies, to refine practice, to be more strategic in addressing community issues.

While some participants explicitly recognized that there is an academic community to whom they are accountable, they did not identify this community as the central entity to engage with in terms of the focus of their work. That said, in virtue of being located in a university, they recognized that some level of attention to the community of peers is important, particularly as it relates to tenure and promotion.

Navigating Relations with Constructed Community

Given the construction of community as outside academia, and community partners as different according to the various binaries invoked above, it is important to ask how participants

understand their interactions with, and orientation to, community partners. Study participants asserted that when working with community partners it was extremely important to mitigate differences by approaching community from a position of openness, and being willing to listen and learn from community. Participants stressed the importance of not operating from a place of knowledge when engaging community, not assuming the power to define the issue or situation, but approaching the engagement endeavor with curiosity.

Difference in Community-Engaged Scholarship

Difference is an important element of learning in community-engaged scholarship. For example, one participant points out:

You just keep learning and learning and figure out new things, and then get confused by what you thought you knew... it develops as we learn and as we are exposed to different situations with different opportunities and different people in different contexts.

Another participant notes the when scholars enter community, “there is, I think, a realization that they are entering into a different world.” This difference can invoke a fear response, leading scholars to fall back on their privileged position as the possessors of knowledge:

“The fear that they’re carrying about, ‘oh my goodness what am I getting myself into? I have no idea what I am doing here!’ The reaction to that is people falling into this expert role which then offends people in the community...I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen professors who think of themselves as highly engaged, highly capable community-engaged scholars coming into community environments and, for example, in an hour long meeting, taking 45 minutes to introduce their topic... their conditioned response in environments where they’re afraid, and they don’t quite know what to do, is to talk, is to present themselves as experts.

One participant, who does not identify as an engaged scholar, highlights the kinds of complications that arise when students and researchers work on a project where difference is embedded within the idea of a definable Other:

Other times there is research money for some project that is absolutely contrary to everything they said they wanted to try to achieve, and so they go in and they take the money for that research. You see what I mean, because they don’t have a real experience of a real research relationship that really is mutual. So they don’t know the distinction between that kind of research relationship and a research relationship that is, you know, a paid piece of research to explore those Other people over there... There isn’t the context within the academy these days... Even a notion that a mutual research relationship of [topic] for a common cause could be attempted... and that’s

very different from thinking ‘oh, we’re all in it together, we’re all the same... It’s being able to be there differently and in fact to appreciate each other really.

This same participant explains her sense of connection with the community she engages as coming together in a way that creates a “rich stew” of knowledge and strength:

I was a lot better off financially than a lot of the women, but those differences were not just me, the academic researcher, in this community of poor women. We were all women coming together to use our resources to make the [Project]... we understood we had interests in common. We had to be aware of those differences of course. But it wasn’t me as the researcher who was in a very privileged position. There were all kinds of diversity in terms of women’s needs and circumstances and there was, everybody was giving. And those are lovely contexts, when you get a project where everybody is committed and everybody is giving what they have and people have various things they can give, in a really, in a woman, a woman defined space, which is a very unfashionable term now, very unfashionable, essentialist term supposedly. When you can create that space, and I think many people have never even experienced it or can’t even imagine it... it’s a fabulous rich stew of women’s knowledge and power, strength not power, strength.

Another participant shares the hope that community partners will come to see him/her as an ally: “...In good relationships you will be in service to each other. So I would like them to see me as their ally.”

Openness and Listening as a Response to Difference

In navigating difference, study participants emphasized the importance of openness, listening, and not-knowing. For example, one participant explained: “I mean you basically, you lay yourself out and you open yourself up. Like, you have to.” Another participant describes a mentor, a scholar whom he/she respects, and that scholar’s way of interacting with others as important to engagement:

He was absolutely open to others, to learning from others, absolutely porous. He just had this capacity for, he had this capacity for friendship, you know? You felt like a friend of his, which meant that you shared. You talked easily to him and he listened and all of that. Listening is the main thing.

Listening, explained one participant, is an important part of being open to community: “part of that openness is really being able and interested in listening for and looking for what is needed, what makes sense, what is sort of the way to proceed.” Another participant explained that engaging community respectfully “means listening to people and framing the research... and using their language and playing it back and not saying, ‘oh well we better put it

this way because this is the way we do it.' Listening is important and might also be a mutual endeavor, suggested another participant: "I think what is important is that there is time and an interest in hearing about what is going on for both of us."

The need to listen and learn as a starting point for community-engagement can be difficult for those who experience privilege. One participant asserts:

I think the biggest challenge for us, and the more education we have the bigger of a challenge it is, the more White you are, the more male you are, the more straight you are, and all of that stuff, the more of a challenge it is to learn to listen.

Without the important step of listening and learning, scholars might make assumptions about community needs, such as in the case of a community-focused approach described by one participant:

What is missing in a community-focused approach is that you're making a lot of assumptions about the organization, about the need, and about what you think might make a contribution... I think it can actually get us, lead us to some of what has been really problematic and been criticized about the work and the history of university and community involvement.

Part of the reason that listening is difficult is because it assumes one does not know and, as one participant explains, not knowing is discouraged in the academic culture:

What the academy is missing at this stage in its evolution is that allowing of not knowing, the allowing of ignorance and the allowing of confusion and the allowing of the discomfort of not having the answers. That has kind of been eliminated from the culture of the academy... in the sort of dominant norms of the culture, you are not supposed to talk about magic and you're not supposed to talk about inspiration, you're not supposed to talk about um, the power of ignorance, you're supposed to talk about the power of knowledge.

Analysis

The findings shared by study participants are complex and invite exploration of a number of themes. Given the limited amount of space here, I focus my interpretation on two key dynamics: the Othering of community and participants' experiences of and leaning towards decoloniality. Both dynamics, seemingly contradictory, are present in participants' conceptualization of community. I begin with an overview of Othering as understood by G.C. Spivak, an analysis of how this dynamic is visible in CES, and the resulting silencing of community desire. I then turn

to the potential for shifting relations through decolonial ways of interacting, arguing that it is within decolonial relations that the potential for reciprocal and equitable relationships resides.

What is Othering?

In articulating their work, study participants engaged in an othering of community, both on an organizational level, and at the more specific level of individual attributes, skills and abilities. othering both creates and subordinates difference, simultaneously excluding and including the Other (Morton, 2003).

A number of theorists have contributed to the concept of ‘othering.’ Said, for example, in *Orientalism* (1979) wrote about the problematic and oppressive process of creating and maintaining a dichotomy between the Self as a Western identity and Others as identified with the East in European colonialism. He explained, “Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”) (Said, 1979, p. 43). The Other here can only be understood as not-us, as the binary opposite of the European identity. Fanon (1963) also emphasized the necessity of binary constructions to the colonial view of the social world and to the dynamics of Othering. Spivak (1985) explored the logic of othering in her analysis of the ways in which Europe created itself as a sovereign subject by othering its colonies while simultaneously creating these colonies in its own image. She asserted that Europe’s identity was secured by the simultaneous exclusion of the Other, as non-European, and the inclusion of the other as a subordinate being, as those against whom the European identity is established. To be European becomes understood as not being one of “them”, a move that positions the constructed non-European at the foundation of European self knowledge. Jensen (2011) describes Spivak’s conceptualization of othering this way:

To sum up, the theory of identity formation inherent in the concept of othering assumes that subordinate people are offered, and at the same time relegated to, subject positions as others in discourse. In these processes, it is the centre that has the power to describe, and the other is constructed as inferior. (p. 65)

Spivak (1988) questions the extent to which those who are othered can speak and be heard, an important question for scholars working with community. Battiste (2011), in her exploration of the colonialist project embedded in Canadian educational systems and practice also drew attention the silencing of the constructed Other when she stated that “Aboriginal people continue to be invisible” (p. 198). Battiste is one of a number of theorists who point to the othering of Indigenous people in Canada, further expanding on understandings of othering in imperialist and colonial histories (e.g., Stewart-Harawira, 2005 & Henderson, 2000).²

² I am grateful to the reviewer of an earlier version of this paper for pointing me towards these particular thinkers.

Though the dynamic of othering is complex, the heart of the matter is one of self-validation through the creation of an Other who is not seen in their specificity but only as the binary opposite of oneself, and the subsumption of that difference within a unity of self-understanding.

Organizational Boundaries and Othering

At the broad level, community is constructed as Other for scholars in higher education by their invoking of organizational boundaries. As the logic of othering reveals, this both excludes those outside higher education and includes them. It both affirms the organizational boundary of institutions of higher education by pointing to what is outside that boundary as a binary opposite, at the same time as bringing what is outside within. The binary opposite, the Other or outsider to the organization becomes that against which the institution and scholars in it understand their work and their role. Thus the Other is a necessary part of their self-understanding and it is in this way that the Other comes to be included inside, as an outsider. This has the effect of shoring up institutions of higher education and, despite the call to co-create knowledge and share power on behalf of some engaged scholars, reaffirms higher education's role in granting legitimacy to knowledge even while recognizing that legitimate knowledge rests in multiple locations.

By embracing multiple sites of knowledge and working toward knowledge co-creation and mutual benefit, CES reaffirms the role of institutions of higher education as central to knowledge legitimacy and the knowledge validation process. As a result, even while scholars might critique the organizational discourse of CES (e. g. Fear, Rosaen, Bawden, & Foster-Fishman, 2006) and scholars might see themselves as working quite apart from the interests of administrators in their institutions, they construct community in a way that serves to solidify the organizational identity and boundaries of higher education.

Thus the embracing of community engagement by institutions of higher education not only offers a powerful rhetorical device for fundraising and building public support, but also solidifies higher education's role in the validation and legitimation of knowledge. Because the othering of community is an othering based on organizational status, it serves to position the institution as dominant in the arena of knowledge and scholarship even as it recognizes and includes community knowledge.

Community Specification and Othering

There is a second dimension of othering that takes place in CES that is important to examine here. When describing community, participants in this study ascribed to them a host of attributes that were the binary opposite of their own attributes: scholars are theoretical, community practical; scholars' knowledge is global and abstract, communities have context specific knowledge. Scholars assert their desire to value community knowledge, yet this binary description is suspect, as are comments about community being "on the front lines" "fighting fires" and "in the trenches" all of which imply that community partners are not only action oriented but also at the command of leaders. The power relations invoked in these examples seem to point to a hierarchy of power. The claims made in CES literature relating to mutually

beneficial partnerships become suspect when we understand the power dimensions in othering at the specific level of community partners.

Despite the emphasis on relationships of trust and working for mutual benefit in CES and in participants' responses in this study, their description of community members interests, skills and attributes reveals an othering that is highly problematic. Community partners are constructed as different at the same time as they are being reconstructed in the model of the scholar, reconstructed as desiring to co-create knowledge. In reality, communities have diverse interests. One participant recognizes this when she notes that community agreement to undertake research is constrained by funding parameters that emphasize research:

The power still remains with us because it is money flowing to their community and so even if they have the power to say no, do they really? I mean, cause if they chose to say no, it's not something this community wants to do, they forfeit hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Would research, course development, or other forms of knowledge creation be the first choice of community partners if funds were not earmarked and could be spent on anything? Community desires, their self-determination and the kinds of projects they might want to undertake as mutually beneficial are obscured by funding policies that shape what is possible, as well as by scholars' assumptions about what communities desire and what they can bring to a partnership.

My point here is not that engaged scholars completely oppress community, nor that they are not genuine in their engagement, I don't doubt that some CES endeavors are very beneficial to community. But it is the way community is constructed in relation to the scholar within the realm of knowledge that is problematic. By othering community in this way, binaries are supported even as they are challenged. Participants' responses in this study reveal an othering that is larger than their individual perspectives. I do not want to suggest that the issue here is a group of individuals who in their written communications are careful, but when speaking freely reveal their own "real" perspectives on community. I think it is far more complex than that. Speaking freely, scholars mediate the dominant discourse on Self-Other relations that many theorists point to as an oppressive European legacy. Without problematizing this discourse, without careful attention to how relations are logically structured in CES, the aims of trusting and reciprocal relations cannot be achieved.

Opening, Listening and Not-Knowing as the Seeds of Non-oppressive Interactions

While participants in this study articulated their relationships in a way that reflects othering, they also talked about their approach to the Other in terms of openness and listening. In adopting a position of not knowing, participants opened up and listened carefully to community. While this may not in itself be enough to lead to non-oppressive forms of interaction, it reflects an almost intuitive orientation towards new ways of interacting with Others. It leads to moments such as the one that one participant described as magic and collaborative knowledge creation that generates power for everyone involved. It is within these moments that scholars are taught

new ways of interacting and co-creating knowledge. Because knowing that takes place outside of colonial relations is embodied, experiential and non-binary, it is difficult to articulate. Thus it gets described as magic, or an another participant puts it, ineffable. From the platform of openness, listening and learning in community engagement, a decolonial approach to collaborative knowledge creation might emerge, one that does not rely on problematic self-Other binaries and the power hierarchies that accompany them.

That being said, good intentions and a desire to listen do not necessarily ensure that scholars are capable of hearing community. Within binary relations of Self and Other, the Other cannot speak, they become invisible, which means that listening in this relationship form may not lead to deeper understanding. Additionally, good intentions towards the Other do not in any way reposition the larger systems and structures of power that are at play in the social world; one's positionality is not so easily overcome and the social structures of inequality remain incredibly resilient. It is only when scholars are willing to start somewhere else, to delink from the colonial structure of binary Self-Other relations that a decolonial listening and learning becomes possible.

The struggle to find a non-dichotomous way of relating, and the desire to expand beyond binary Self-Other relations is evident in participants' insistence on being humble and open, listening to learn from community. In purposely taking a position of not knowing, participants are, I believe, trying to find non-oppressive ways of interacting. While participants tended to fall back into ways of describing their relations with community through an othering lens, they also recognized the limits of this approach as overly dichotomous and contrary to the aims of CES. They described strategies that they use when working with others that reflect new ways of being together and learning together: openness, listening, learning and delinking from the position of knower. They are, I'd like to suggest, learning to unlearn in order to connect with community in new and equitable ways.

Andreotti (2014), recognizing the ways in which Self-Other relations are understood and discussed in literature about essentialism and education, pointed to the importance of mourning the limits of "over-socialization" in "the use of modern reason with its focus on 'knowing' the world and the Other", a process that involves "learning to unlearn, to listen and to reach out" (p. 142). This mourning, Andreotti (2014) asserted, is an important first step in shifting Self-Other relations that have rightly been critiqued as oppressive. She suggests that new ways of interaction can only emerge from residing with the discomfort of provisional understandings, dissensus, not knowing, non-teleological futures, and where difference is positioned as a powerful force that pushes up against the limits of existing possibilities.

As Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) commented, "the decolonial is an option for all those human beings who want to participate and share rather than be managed and integrated to master plans that are not theirs or to be expelled and marginalized" (p. 192). They assert that theories that emerge in the Third World³, such as decoloniality, can be picked up by all those

³ I am using the terms Third World and First World here because Mignolo uses them in his original text. The terms reflect the kind of valuation that has, under coloniality, been given to differing geographical and economic locales.

seeking knowledge. This is not an appropriation, rather, it is a recognition that knowledge emerging in the Third World is just as globally valid as knowledge emerging in the First World:

...there is an unconscious tendency to think that theories that originate in the Third World (or among Black or gay intellectuals), are valid only for the Third World (or Black and gay people) while theories that originate in the First World (and created by White and heterosexual people) have a global if not universal validity. (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 3)

We might add to this idea feminist critiques of patriarchy that are mistakenly thought to apply only to women, and Indigenous critiques of settler-colonialism in Canada that are cast as only a concern of Indigenous peoples, as well as other forms of critique. It is from those whom Western binary logics have positioned as Other, that we might all learn different ways of knowing and being.

Part of the richness of decoloniality lay in its refusal to be positioned as against the dominant logics currently circulating. In their critique of post-coloniality, Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) pointed out the ways in which post-colonial critique cannot be written without a reference to, and therefore a reinforcing of, European history. Positioning a critique in relation to the dominant discourse continually draws us back to that discourse, supporting it even as it is challenged.

Within binary Self-Other relations, the Other functions as a negation, as difference against which the Self learns about itself. To reconceive this relationship would require of community-engaged scholars that they be open to learning from the Other, who ceases to be an Other once they are heard. This learning is not just about local circumstances or experiences of the topic of scholarship, but learning about a different way of being, non-binary ways of interacting with one another. It is about challenging the binary logic underlying exclusionary and oppressive practices; a move that I have previously (2013) asserted is necessary if CES is to enact social transformation. Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) emphasized this point when they talked about needing to create new subjectivities in order to move beyond oppressive relations. These new subjectivities would not be a result of a centered Self, learning about itself by creating and negating difference. Rather, they would emerge from a deep listening and learning that can only develop through a de-linking with the colonial matrix of power. Learning that comes from starting someplace else, and which thus appears to us as magic.

Conclusion

We find in participants' conceptualization of community the contradictory tensions of the dominant Western discourse of othering and a leaning towards decolonial relations that is manifest in openness, listening and non-knowing. I have suggested that decoloniality provides another way of envisioning relations between people. Through decoloniality it is experience, not academic disciplines, that becomes the guide for a narrative that captures how the colonial

matrix is lived (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). This emphasis on experience might resonate well with many community-engaged scholars. Being guided by experience requires taking a position of epistemic equity, not relying on the sanctioning of knowledge by authorities, either individually or organizationally.

The abilities of being open, listening and taking a position of not-knowing are the ground on which learning to unlearn can occur. They are the foundation for delinking from oppressive colonial relations. For this reason, it is important that these abilities be supported, developed, and nurtured. Nurturing decoloniality in CES might disrupt the power of institutions of higher education and the scholars who work within them to legitimate knowledge. Instead, knowledge might be positioned in multiple places and might move towards genuinely achieving the reciprocity and mutual benefit that form the core of community-engaged scholarship.

About the Author

Tania Kajner (*corresponding author*) is a PhD Candidate and Killam scholar in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. She holds a Master's Degree in social/political and feminist philosophy. Tania's doctoral research critically examines community engagement and higher education in Canada, exploring the intersections of scholarship, community action, and difference. Email: Tania.kajner@ualberta.ca

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