

## **Co-Producing Community and Knowledge: Indigenous Epistemologies of Engaged, Ethical Research in an Urban Context**

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**ABSTRACT** Until recently, the specific and unique ethics considerations of research with the large and diverse populations of Indigenous peoples living in cities have not been adequately addressed. With its emphasis on respect, responsibility, and beneficial outcomes for research participants, community-based participatory research (CBPR) has been described as intrinsically ethical, and in many cases, consistent with a generalized understanding of Indigenous moral values. Through a retrospective reflection on community-engaged research in the urban context of Toronto, this essay examines critically transformations in the conceptualization of ethical research and of CBPR with Indigenous peoples. Historical analysis of urban Indigenous community epistemologies is presented as a dynamic process which informs ethical practice in the production of both community and of knowledge. Community-initiated and implemented research highlights the complexities in urban Indigenous authority-making, complicates contemporary iterations of CBPR, and offers insights for ethical research in an urban Indigenous context.

**KEYWORDS** Urban Indigenous community; research ethics; community-based participatory research

“Epistemology is the understanding of knowledge that one adopts and the philosophy with which research is approached. This issue cannot be disentangled from history or from the social position one holds within society as a result of that history” (Cochran et al., 2008, p. 24)

Very little attention has been given to the specific and unique ethics considerations of research with Indigenous communities in cities, although two-thirds of the Indigenous peoples in Canada and the U.S. do not live on reservations (Howard & Lobo, 2013). Some scholars writing on Indigenous research ethics recognize the importance of addressing diversity in Indigenous identities and frameworks, and note that urban contexts present particularly complex problems because of the presence of multiple stakeholders and competing agendas (Ball and Janyst, 2008, p. 48; Ferreira and Gendron, 2011, p. 153; Laveaux & Christopher, 2009, p. 5). However, often these concerns appear as issues “beyond the scope of this article,” and stop short of

tackling the dilemmas of applying Indigenous ethics protocols in urban communities. Even the *First Nations Urban Aboriginal Health Research Discussion Paper* devotes only one quarter of a page to “Ethical Issues in Research in Urban Contexts,” where the main focus is the need to “explore in future research” questions that include the following:

What constitutes the “community” in urban settings? How is the diversity of people in urban settings accounted for in relation to “community consent”? What does community consent mean in urban contexts? and is it possible? How is community or individual ownership of data addressed when diverse communities of people, leadership and organizations are involved? Who can reasonably be involved in community reviews of research protocols in urban contexts? Once community is defined, how are the relevant authorities within the community to be ascertained when multiple authorities may be involved? (Brown, MacDonald, & Elliot, 2009, p. 41)

While all these questions cannot be answered within the scope of this article either, I suggest that historicizing the production of knowledge by and with Indigenous peoples who have formed urban communities is key to addressing research ethics in these complex contexts. Researchers who aim to act as ethically engaged scholars with urban Indigenous communities can look to the ways in which Indigenous epistemologies have taken shape within these communities. That is, research should be prefaced by local Indigenous “understanding of knowledge and philosophy with which research is approached... not disentangled from history” (Cochran et al., 2008, p. 24).

In this article, I examine the historical conceptualization of engaged and ethical research in Toronto where Indigenous people have a long-standing interest in research since the 1960s. In this history, research has been situated in Indigenous principles and articulated through movements to draw attention to issues specific to the urban population. It has involved strategic collaborations with non-Indigenous researchers to further community-defined agendas, and sometimes correlated to broader activist and social movements. In the city, Indigenous community epistemology is a dynamic process which intersects with the ways in which community, politics, social order, and ethical practice are produced (c.f. Tuck, 2009). It is also negotiated through multicultural Indigeneity and diversity, the re-territorialization of place, and state-Indigenous relations around social concerns. These are particularly invigorating contexts for the elaboration of Indigenous epistemology and co-productions of theory about the conceptualization of community and ethics of research practice. Indigenous epistemology thus provides researchers with perspective on local meanings of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity, just as it does for and by community members.

My main purpose in emphasizing research driven by local Indigenous epistemology is to encourage engaged scholars to critically assess community-based participatory research (CBPR), often represented as a panacea approach to conducting ethical research with Indigenous communities. With its emphasis on respect, responsibility, and beneficial outcomes

for research participants, CBPR has been described as intrinsically ethical, and in many cases, consistent with a generalized understanding of Indigenous moral values (Kaufert, 1999; Harrison, 2001; Hudson & Taylor-Henry, 2001; Brown, 2005; Smith-Morris, 2007; Fleurh-Lobban, 2008; Guta et al. 2012). However, I contend that CBPR should also be historicized in relation to its applications in urban Indigenous research.

While CBPR may align with policy and guidelines recommended for research with Indigenous peoples, truly ethical practice involves researchers becoming familiar with and understanding local complex epistemologies. These inform the production of community and the authority-making structures within which researchers must operate. CBPR has also been generally represented mechanically as a process of methodology rather than as one registered with community production of authoritative knowledge. There is little critical discussion of the positioning of CBPR in relation to the political dynamics within community, nor of the structural inequities which often define the need for research. As I describe first below, CBPR has evolved from a research practice originally shaped by social justice change goals, to one which glosses over Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination and often focuses on internal community or behavioral change. The historical legacy of Indigenous-led research in Toronto re-centers the production of knowledge on critical transformation of the structures of oppression. I begin with a critical review of the shifting conceptualization of CBPR in relation to research with Indigenous peoples, and through the Toronto example, raise cautionary concerns about the political sanitization of engaged research employing this model.

### **CBPR, the TCPS-2, and Urban Indigenous Research**

CBPR is seen as commensurate with Indigenous political, cultural, and social perspectives on the production of knowledge, and represented in much of the literature as a solution to the generalized Indigenous malaise with and rejection of academic study, often referred to as “parachute” or “helicopter” research (Harrison, 2001; Brown, 2005; Sahota, 2010; Castelden, Morgan, & Lamb, 2012). “Gold standards” of CBPR, as most appropriately matched to the expectations of Indigenous communities, include the goal of mutual beneficence and the conscious equitable distribution of power between university researchers and community-based partners over research design, methods, data collection, ownership, and dissemination of findings. CBPR is an iterative process which recognizes, privileges, and fosters community strengths and resources; aims for community life improvement; and utilizes a holistic framework for understanding health, social and other targeted topics of research, all actions that correspond to Indigenous community interests (Laveaux & Christopher, 2009; Sahota, 2010).

CBPR is recommended in the Canadian federal ethics guidelines for research with Indigenous peoples promulgated in Chapter 9 of the *Tri-council Policy Statement-2 Canadian Federal Guidelines on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Government of Canada, 2010), or TCPS-2 for short. Collaboration and “engagement” are loosely defined as ranging from review by and approval of community authorities to complete shared leadership (p. 108).

It makes building capacity, reciprocal learning, and skill transfer more achievable, and can serve to document circumstances which facilitate communities to communicate their needs to relevant authorities, and allow for greater opportunity to anticipate risks and benefits (p. 124). The guidelines are clear that they are not intended to provide communities with the power to block publications but rather to be given the “opportunity to contextualize the findings” (p. 128). Participatory research is further delineated as not only including “the active involvement of those who are the subject of the research” but also recognizing the action-oriented purpose of the research, and the need to involve subjects in the definition of the research question, research design, data collection, interpretation and dissemination (p. 123).

### ***CBPR and Tempering of Critical Examination of Power***

TCPS-2 also references the unique cultural and governing structures of Indigenous communities, requiring further that research respect Indigenous peoples’ governing authorities, recognize the role of Elders and knowledge holders, and be respectful of community customs and codes of practice. The engagement of Indigenous knowledge for benefit in contemporary community uses is a critical factor in research in the sense that the policy, “acknowledges the role of community in shaping the conduct of research” (Government of Canada, 2010, p. 107). The guidelines call on researchers to critically examine how colonial structures and systems can exercise authority over Indigenous peoples, and to recognize the complex authority structures and diversity within Indigenous communities, although these politically-charged precepts are not elaborated with the same degree of analysis as other aspects of the TCPS-2 collaborative imperative.

With few exceptions (e.g., Fletcher, 2003; Mariella, Brown, & Carter, 2012), CBPR in Indigenous contexts is represented as a relatively contemporary approach which has emerged primarily in the areas of public health and education since the 1990s (Ferreira & Gendron, 2011; Sahota, 2010; Laveaux & Christopher, 2009; Peterson, 2010; Wallerstein & Duran 2006; Harrison 2001). The earlier roots of CBPR in North America are usually traced to non-Indigenous social justice movements rather than to earlier Indigenous community-based research experience (Ferreira & Gendron, 2011, p. 154-155). While a nod is given to Columbian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda’s attention to the fact that “the roots to participatory research can also be found long before in the applicative combination of theory and practice as evidenced in the individual and collective lives of those from indigenous societies” (p. 155), Ferreira & Gendron’s extensive review discusses no comparative legacy for CBPR in Indigenous peoples’ social movements in North America. Likewise, Laveaux & Christopher’s (2009) review assumes no CBPR or precursors to CBPR in Indigenous community practice.

The volumes by Chilisa (2012) and Denzin, Lincoln & Smith (2008) describing Indigenous methodologies frame research practices in constructive and invaluable analyses grounded in decolonizing, critical race, queer, and feminist theories and pedagogies but separate current practice from traditional historical CBPR origins or distinguish between transformative types of participatory research ranging from those aimed at altering research practice to those focused on community behavioral, and social change. The broader critical assessment of structural

inequalities and social justice aspects of CBPR (Fluehr-Lobban, 2008) is largely sanitized and privileges methodological issues with social processes such as trust-building over long-term commitment and shifts in the balance of power between researchers and researched. This reflects a general trend in the public health application of CBPR that Smith-Morris (2006: 85) refers to as “hackneyed.” As I elaborate below in describing the Toronto case, Budd Hall (1981), often credited with originating Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Canada, emphasized the ultimate goals of PAR as “fundamental structural transformation... community control of the entire process of research... focus on exploited or oppressed groups... [and] support to mobilizing and organizing” (p. 7-8). These are generally absent in the current upsurge of CBPR in favor of focusing on the iterative nature of the method, and its objectives to draw on and strengthen community resources, as noted in the oft-cited review of CBPR for public health by Israel et al. (1998).

Attention to structural and historical relations of oppression, including colonialism and racism, is advised as an “additional” principle for CBPR practice particular to Indigenous experience (Laveaux & Christopher, 2009; Brown, 2005). Aimed primarily at the implementation of intervention, programs, and community services, CBPR is framed as a process which produces more accurate, and therefore scientific, knowledge because the voices of those most impacted are at the center. Generally, transformation is aimed at behavioral change in the community rather than at structures of power (Harrison, 2001; Burhansstipanov & Schumacher, 2005). CBPR is politically de-charged and represented mainly as a methodological mechanism. Thus, for example, “empowerment” is a crucial principle; however, its meaning and implications for power shifts within community which emerge from the CBPR process itself are not fully explored (Harrison, 2001, p. 38). Smith-Morris (2006) cautions that more careful consideration should be given to the meaning attributed to both core concepts of “community” and “participation” with attention to how political, cultural, gender, economic and other forms of diversity impact their deployment in CBPR practice.

The impact of historical relations of power on the contemporary relationship of Indigenous people to research is also a pivotal consideration, but it is rarely demonstrated in the intervention or outcomes of CBPR practice in Indigenous communities. Sovereignty and self-determination are vital additional political considerations in the application of CBPR in Indigenous communities although other than understanding tribal government standing and protocols, or who the gatekeepers are and how to work with them, the deeper implications of researcher recognition and alliance with Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination goals, as for example a challenge to the very existence of the nation-state, are not elaborated. As the Toronto context illustrates below, Indigenous epistemic framings of research are fundamentally grounded in relational understandings of power and self-determination which are inseparable from responsible and respectful practices. To be truly shaped by local Indigenous epistemology, contemporary CBPR must also prioritize broader structurally transformative goals which re-center Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

Recognizing the inadequacies, contradictions, and inappropriateness of several of the guidelines of the earlier tri-council policy statement (1998), Chapter 9 of the TCPS-2 is the

result of more than a decade of consultation and discussions with Indigenous communities, scholars, and other stakeholders. During the process, a number of critiques by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars emerged. These analyses range from appraisals of the instrumentality of the earlier guidelines in ongoing internal and external colonizing processes and cooptation of Indigeneity, to positive reflections on collaborative research experiences guided by the developing principles. Some draw attention to an increased sloping rather than leveling of the research playing field due to the ways research practices may further formalize and ensconce the inequalities of existing elitist and exclusivist power structures within Indigenous communities and in the relationships between them and outside forces such as non-Indigenous governments and funders (Ball & Janyst, 2008; Brown, 2005; Cole, 2004; Stairs, 2004; O'Riley 2004). While there is no doubt that TCPS-2 improves on earlier guidelines and is far more comprehensive, broader structural inequalities remain concerns, particularly in urban contexts.

### ***Urban Challenges Are Also Opportunities***

In a policy paper prepared for the National Congress of American Indians, Puneet Sahota suggests that the models used for American Indian and Alaska Native community research review committees can be replicated in urban communities, where tribal jurisdiction is assumed to extend to tribal citizens living in cities (Sahota, n.d.). The TCPS-2 recommends that regional or urban Indigenous organizations should be considered “organizational communities” vested with the authority to vet and sanction research to be carried out with individuals for whom they have a mandate to serve (Government of Canada, 2010, p. 107-115). However, in addition to problems with the allocation of resources, recognized by Sahota, her suggestion does not consider the diversity and autonomy of urban Indigenous communities with long-standing histories and inclusivity of Indigenous people who are not members of federally recognized tribes or First Nations in Canada. In Toronto and elsewhere, these histories also include reference to the specific exclusion of off-reservation First Nation band/tribal members from equity in distribution of resources or participation in leadership electoral procedures, for example, as well as the record of conscious building of urban community as I detail below.

The TCPS-2 concedes that “prospective [research] participants may not necessarily recognize organizational communities or communities of interest as representing their interests” (Government of Canada, 2010, p. 115), yet this does not preclude the researcher from the obligation to engage with the organizational community. That is, research cannot be carried out strictly with individuals; collaboration with organizations or communities of interest is a requirement and individuals are to be informed of the collaboration. While most of the organizations to which the TCPS-2 refers are non-profit organizations with elected boards, the guidelines extend an understanding of power which problematizes the individualist prerogative for consent and considers the consequences for broader communities of participation in research (c.f. Smith-Morris, 2007). However, these may also contradict the processes by which authority is constituted in organizational communities.

FitzMaurice & Newhouse’s (2008) study of urban Indigenous research identified a

number of ways in which to address these and other concerns. These include privileging flexibility and local understandings of ethics; participatory methods that strive to transcend power hierarchies (between researchers and respondents, and within community structures); involvement, training, benefit to local researchers with understanding of larger institutional implications of the research; local urban Indigenous process for determining the ethics of research when there are multiple layers of ethical review; research that is initiated in response to local research interests; recognition that not all Indigenous people are vulnerable or readily identifiable with a particular collective body; and a flexible interpretation of the requirement for collective consent (FitzMaurice & Newhouse, 2008, p. 25-28). I turn now to share some aspects of the historical evolution of Indigenous-led knowledge production in Toronto to illustrate how research which is justly community-based and participatory should draw on the intellectual traditions of the local epistemological context. The section emphasizes the co-production of community and knowledge through intersubjective and iterative processes of relationality and practices of responsibility, and described first and foremost in the voices of community Elders.

### **Intersubjective and Iterative Knowledge and Community Production in Toronto**

Experience is the foundation for learning. Understanding experience develops over time through dialogue. Learning is a process that is accomplished through interaction with others; it is always a shared, cooperative venture. The foundation of interaction with others is expressed through respect, feeling, a good heart, good intentions, kindness, sharing and a knowledge of self...The community and the individual have reciprocal responsibilities. Learning... is a process that goes through the stages of "seeing" (vision), relating to what it is, figuring it out with heart and mind, and acting on findings in some way (behaviour). Everyone has a responsibility to give back and to consider their actions in light of their effect on generations to come. Elders of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (Stiegelbauer, 1997, p. 82-83).

Since the 1940s, the urban Indigenous community in Toronto has grown from a few hundred people to approximately 70,000 today. While the predominant Indigenous cultures of the immediate region – Anishinaabe and Haudensaunee – and of other areas of Canada figure significantly in this number, Indigenous persons from throughout the Americas may be considered members of this community, making it perhaps the most multicultural Indigenous community in the world. Of course, community is not a stable, geographically fixed, or readily legible object. It is a dynamic process in which people produce and reproduce combinations of meaning and social action in their everyday life "not by rules, but through experience and circumstance" (Halperin, 1998, p. 307). Further, this process is mediated by changing power relations among Indigenous people, as well as between Indigenous people, their institutions, and the state. These power relations constantly reify and modify the ideological frameworks of community.

The most visible structure of the Toronto community is in its complex network of several dozen Indigenous-run social service, health, and cultural programming agencies. Organizations play a significant role in the production and control of knowledge about culture and community. In Toronto, service organization authority is vested in their accountability to community in ways which mirror the intersubjective and iterative reconstitution of community described in the Elders' quote above, and not simply by their non-profit mandates. As I have written elsewhere, organization leaders and employees may be highly scrutinized, including in their "private" lives, on their everyday practice of community (Howard, 2004; Howard, 2011a). Drawing on its long-standing history in the community and distinctive identity as a sacred space, the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT) generates cultural models utilized by its programs, which may in turn be elaborated on or challenged by other Indigenous organizations and by individual community members. Moreover, the ways in which the NCCT plays a role in the generation of a sense of unity among the diverse, multicultural Indigenous community while serving as an ambassador to non-Indigenous people who are curious and interested in "Indigenous culture," creates a politically-charged space of complex competing discourses that reify, reinvent, and adapt concepts of community identity, membership, and self-determination (Howard, 2011a). As Rapaport (2008) has described for the Indigenous organizations in her research, they are "palimpsests of multiple ethnic boundaries that are continually negotiated and renegotiated... culture, particularly as a self-conscious process of construction is fundamental to indigenous discourses" (p. 20), an idea which also resonates in the words of the Elders above.

The NCCT is the oldest Indigenous community and social service delivery organization in Toronto, established in 1962. As a social movement organization which has moved from a social, justice, volunteer-based community center to a professionalized service delivery institution over five decades, the NCCT has played a central role in Indigenous community and knowledge production (Howard, 2011a). The NCCT is, thus, also the custodian of a wealth of community-generated historical material in the form of serial publications, photographs, reports, and administrative documents. Because of its long legacy in the production of knowledge from Indigenous perspectives, I focus primarily on the NCCT and early related organizations to historicize Indigenous epistemology for research purposes.

The documents of the NCCT collection were first organized in 1995 by the Toronto Native Community History Project (TNCHP), and of which I was a founding member. Indigenous community members and allies came together with the common interest of preserving the documentary record accumulated by the NCCT, but also with a vision to apply this record in generating research for popular education activities and youth training opportunities. This vision aims to promote Indigenous perspectives on history, develop respect and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and reverse racism and popularly-held stereotypes of Indigenous people. The TNCHP rebranded itself in 2012 as First Story Toronto, which is composed primarily of a volunteer committee of "history activists," who provide one mechanism through which the NCCT is held accountable in its relational responsibilities within the community, beyond the usual accountability of non-



profit organization membership. Ongoing First Story Toronto activities include bus tours of the city (Johnson, 2013), the First Story Toronto smartphone application (Howard, 2015), and specific projects such as “Indigenous, Women, Memory and Power” (Abel, Freeman, Howard and Shirt, In Press), and Memory, Meaning-Making and Collections (Howarth & Knight, 2015; Krmpotich, Howard, & Knight, 2016). These research-action projects are informed by the original vision of the TNCHP and understanding of local Indigenous epistemological framings of the city as a site of self-determining reclamation, which I explain further in the next section.

### ***First Story Toronto: Engaged Research for Indigenous Reclaiming and Representations of Urban Place***

Urban places are characterized by their thorough transformation of the landscape and complete erasure or control of nature, and epitomize settler society predicated on not only the physical but also the social displacement of Indigenous peoples, who are in turn positioned by dominant discourses within the untamed world of nature (Peters, 1996). As stereotypically “natural” beings, Indigenous peoples have historically had no place within colonial society unless destroyed or utterly transformed (Wolfe, 1999). Indigenous people in Canada have resisted this paradigm in many forms including in urban contexts, where they have rejected being defined in diametric opposition to the ‘civilized’ urban environment. From a longitudinal perspective, there is continuity in the negotiations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people over the meaning of place, identity, and sovereignty, which extend the Canadian colonial encounter into the present, and into spaces like cities.

In Toronto, acts of production of knowledge such as those engaged by First Story Toronto actively re-territorialize the city as an Indigenous place, physically as well as socially and culturally. While the landscape is changed, its fundamental elements may be reinterpreted in Indigenous understandings of value. The pre-contact history and sacred nature of the area is a significant part of contemporary discourse and in the production of knowledge which frames the conceptualization of the Toronto Indigenous community (Howard, 2011b; Bobiwash, 1997a; 1997b). First Story Toronto engages in research which revises history toward social justice outcomes, challenges settler society to reformulate relationship to the urban landscape in new ways, and in the process, generates an Indigenous epistemology of the production of knowledge.

The historical and continuing socio-cultural processes engaged in the production of urban Indigenous community (Howard, 2011a), depend on the “practice” of community (Halperin, 1998) described by the Elders above and extend organically to shape CBPR practice as one which first necessitates that researchers learn how to be community members. The research engaged to bring to fruition these actions comprises productions of knowledge about the topical subject matter (urban Indigenous history) as well as the constitution of urban Indigenous community. This includes concomitant ethics of research practice which hinge on understanding how community is conceptualized in relation to the evolution of Indigenous epistemologies of ethics in research practice. I turn now to these details.

### ***Relationality and Control in Toronto Indigenous Community Research History***

As the First Story archive was organized and we unpacked dozens of bankers' boxes that had been in the NCCT basement since 1976, it became clear that research, in various forms of community-based inquiry, had been for some time a vital part of the organization and development of the urban Indigenous community in Toronto. These were articulated since the 1960s through movements which have drawn attention to issues specific to the urban population, and which re-positioned rather than displaced scholarly engagement with Indigenous peoples.

In 1969, NCCT board member Harvey McCue coordinated an Indigenous-controlled research project called *Indians in the City*. Among other significant roles, McCue was also a board member of the *Indian Historian*, the publication of the American Indian Historical Society, established in San Francisco in 1964, which played a crucial role in the development of critical perspectives as well as in an analytical dialogue between Indigenous scholars, activists, and academics (Howard, 1999). *Indians in the City* originated with the collaborative advocacy and action research work of the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada (IEAC),<sup>1</sup> a citizens' organization formed by the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) in 1957. The project evolved the conceptualization of PAR from one in which largely non-Indigenous experts led, and Indigenous people were employed or were used as field researchers, to an approach in which Indigenous people assumed control over the full scope of the research with non-Indigenous academics and other professionals volunteering as advisors (*Toronto Native Times*, 1970, p. 1).

Based on a "pioneering" earlier action research project called "Indians and the Law," led by the Canadian Welfare Council, in 1967 the IEAC called for a research project in which Indigenous people "should be involved in the planning, organizing, and conduct of the study" (Indian Eskimo Association of Canada, 1967, p. 7). As sponsorship for the project was sought, questions were raised by Indigenous people about the power dynamics and control of the project. Finally, in 1970, when the Union of Ontario Indians<sup>2</sup> provided lead sponsorship of the project, non-Indigenous professionals involved had been warned that it could not be a "sterile project: one that could not rock the boat," nor one that was just "another interview project for some non-Indian to earn further merit degrees, and not really benefit Indian people" (*Toronto Native Times*, 1970, p. 1).<sup>3</sup> "Action-research," the Union noted would, "use political pressure to change such legislation [which negatively impacted Indigenous peoples

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<sup>1</sup> The Indian-Eskimo Association was renamed the Canadian Association in Solidarity with Native Peoples in 1973.

<sup>2</sup> The Union of Ontario Indians, now the Union of Ontario Indians Anishinabek Nation, was formed in 1949 as the Ontario regional branch of the National Indian Brotherhood (today Assembly of First Nations, a political advocacy organization made up of the elected leadership of First Nations) <http://www.anishinabek.ca/union-of-ontario-indians.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> Sociologist Mark Nagler had conducted a study based on participant observation and interviews with one hundred and fifty Indigenous people in Toronto between 1963 and 1964, published in 1970 as a book called *Indians in the City: A Study of the Urbanization of Indians in Toronto*. He worked closely with the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada and was involved in their efforts to develop the action research project. However, as critical voices were raised about too much non-Indigenous control of research, Nagler stepped back from working on Indigenous topics of research, although he found the concerns raised to be understandable (personal communication, July 18, 2012).

in cities]... Action-research can make changes that will affect Toronto, Ontario, and perhaps all of society. The project will be about Indians, By Indians, for Indians” (*Toronto Native Times*, 1970, p. 1, emphasis in original).

*Indians in the City* estimated the Toronto Indigenous population at 15,000 with a growth rate of 1,500 per year. The Native Concerned Citizens Committee (1971-1975) was formed as a result of this study to define the needs of the Toronto Indigenous community and assert Indigenous control over the design and delivery of social services by creating culturally-specific structures necessary to the autonomy and economic development of the community (Obonsawin, 1987, p. 26). The Committee helped establish such programs as Indigenous-controlled housing, legal services, and a drug and alcohol rehabilitation residence. They discussed Indigenous/non-Indigenous exploitative and unequal power relations in addressing the research needs of urban Indigenous people. These discussions framed a number of needs assessment reports and found their way into a publication crucial to local Indigenous organizing in the 1970s, the *Toronto Native Times*. This tabloid-size monthly newspaper was started in 1968 by the Youth Group of the NCCT and an Indigenous research center which existed for a brief period called the Nishnawbe Institute.

The Nishnawbe Institute set up a publishing house which, like the *Indian Historian*, attempted to establish a dialogue between Indigenous activist/thinkers scholars, and non-Indigenous academics. One such publication was edited by Wilfrid Pelletier, a past president of the North American Indian Club, a forerunner to the NCCT. His *For Every North American Indian Who Begins to Disappear I Also Disappear, Being a Collection of Essays Concerned With the Quality of Human Relations Between the Red and White Peoples of This Continent* was published in 1971. The Nishnawbe Institute, or Institute for Indian Studies (IIS), was founded in 1967 in connection with the establishment of the (in)famous Rochdale College, which emerged from the long-standing Campus Co-operative Residences of the University of Toronto. Named after the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, a cooperative commissary organized in England in 1844, Rochdale College was a short-lived utopian community in which the members “envisioned a ‘democratic and community oriented’ school where ‘individuals and groups of people can create their own educational experiences’” (Rochdale College Education Project, 1971). This “free university” was particularly notorious with its opening appearing on the front page of the *New York Times*, and *Newsweek* running a story on its “intentionally mixed bag of radicals, revolutionaries, hippies, and fairly straight people” (quoted in Treat, 2003, p. 97). The curriculum, determined by the students, was carried out in spontaneous discussion sessions inspired by invited “resource people.” As reported by the CBC Radio program *Concern* in 1969, among various foci, “it could be an encounter in the Institute for Indian Studies where Indians and non-Indians can explore together the values and culture of the North American Indian.” One student at Rochdale described what was going on as “social action sort of things – the work with North American Indians... that kind of work is action-theory, learning processes” (CBC Digital Archives, 1969).

Wilfred Pelletier, who presided over the opening ceremonies of the NCCT’s first building in 1962, along with Bob Thomas, the Cherokee anthropologist, and Ian MacKenzie, a priest,

organizer and educator in the Anglican Church, were Rochdale resource people who established the IIS (Treat, 2003, p. 83). The ISS provided a space in which Indigenous-led collaboration transcended Indigenous and non-Indigenous conflict through intellectual pursuits. On the inside cover of his “Two Articles” (Pelletier, 1969), a booklet published by the IIS, Pelletier described it as “an educational-residential centre which provides an opportunity for Indian people to study and teach their own languages, histories, and cultures in their own way.” Pelletier, like many other Indigenous people in Toronto, saw solutions and the basis for Indigenous organizing in terms of the need for self-determination, particularly over Indigenous education and cultural development.

However, Pelletier’s assertion of Indigenous control is grounded in a complex relational framework that links the production of community and of knowledge. Writing on the co-authored autobiography of Wilfred Pelletier with Ted Poole, *No Foreign Land* (1973), literary scholar Carolan-Brozy (1995) argues that the book’s emphasis on collaboration is in part because Pelletier viewed his identity as relational and not autonomous. Similarly, Tuck (2009) describes an Indigenous notion of collectivity that does not merely extend the needs and goals of the individual to the group, but rather begins with the collectivity to “include, celebrate and support the diversity of its members” (p. 61-62). This relational quality of the self and community, also reflected in the NCCT Elders’ words above, is examined in depth by Pelletier as he contemplates how the urban experience in particular brought this into relief for him. The city, he explains, requires Indigenous people to work to stay Indigenous and form community, or as he puts it to become “even more Indian” than the ones back home (Pelletier, 1973, p. 137) and later he concludes, “That whole Toronto thing was a way to find our way home” (Pelletier, 1973, p. 139). Pelletier describes community as a corporate or communal consciousness, which is based in “a kind of trust that people outside the community can hardly imagine and which the people inside cannot name” (Pelletier, 1973, p. 198). Understanding this trust is the basis for community membership but also for “outsiders” to learn, earn, and apply in the intersection of Indigenous and non-Indigenous experience particularly inevitable in the city. These early examples of scholarly engagement, and the nature of the relationships which shaped them, speaks to the co-productive processes of community and knowledge significant for truly transformative research in the urban setting. They also provide evidence of early CBPR and PAR projects in the city, which emphasized Indigenous leadership and outcomes which transformed structural inequalities.

### **What took the “Action” out of Participatory Research?**

As described above, Budd Hall is often credited with originating Participatory Action Research in Canada. Although not directly involved in the collaborations initiated at Rochdale or from within the Toronto Indigenous community at the time, his work, and that of other PAR practitioners provide vital evidence of early practices that were also framed in terms of Indigenous epistemologies of community, knowledge production and ethical research (Hall, 2005, p. 15). In his 1982 co-authored introduction to a special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* that is focused on community-based research, the self-determination

of Indigenous peoples globally is the collective interest which frames the discussion. This is described as the “right to exist as distinct peoples and to prosper in their own cultures and traditions” at the local level and as part of an international movement (Jackson, et al., 1982, p. 1). Contributors emphasized the importance of connecting CBPR practice with Indigenous sovereignty movements and the critical transformation, even eradication, of the structures of oppression which sustain and legitimize the nation-state and growing global inequalities. They warned that to lose the lessons of the history of community-based research in Indigenous communities and separate this socio-political justice imperative from community-based research would signal a failure on the part of researchers which “the struggle cannot afford” (Jackson, et al., 1982, p. 8). Critical social movement discourse is described as essential to the way knowledge production is understood in these early examples of Indigenous CBPR (Jackson, et al., 1982, p. 6).

These activist-researchers were perhaps feeling the change in momentum that accompanied the waning of social movements which occurred in no small part as a result of government initiatives aimed at their suppression (Cunningham, 2007). As I have examined elsewhere (Howard, 2011a; Howard, 2014), in the Toronto Indigenous community, this shift occurred in the 1980s and into the 1990s as government funding strategies of Indigenous affairs transformed social movement organizations like the NCCT from social justice, volunteer-activist based practice to professionalized and bureaucratized service provision. This transformation was marked by the ways in which community need and identification responded increasingly to funder-driven priorities and gave rise to intra-community competition. The institutionalizing transformation of Indigenous social movements into professionalized social and health service delivery organizations in Toronto illustrates a shift in the form and distribution of cultural capital from one centered on anti-colonial action to a more apolitical, reified deployment of culture (Howard 2014; c.f. Smith-Morris, 2007). This displacement of relational responsibility from community to non-Indigenous forces remains at the center of calls to urban Indigenous organizations to be accountable to community and challenges their authoritative power. This is an important consideration that bears on contemporary research within the community. However, the “new” CBPR which has since emerged appears soft in the domains of structural change, perhaps reflecting what Tuck (2009) refers to as the “con-testy” quality of research (p. 57) when it contests hegemony, linearity, and unilateralism. As she explains,

Folks are fine (even if uncomfortable) when groups of youth or first peoples or disenfranchised peoples educate themselves; but when these groups begin to openly and creatively challenge dominant assumptions, rhetoric, and colonial infrastructure, the groups are discredited as unintelligible, undeveloped, and unpatriotic. (Tuck, 2009, p. 57)

On the other hand, the expansion of CBPR across a broader disciplinary spectrum has formalized and entrenched the implementation of regional and national Indigenous research ethics guidelines and protocols, which have in turn contributed significantly to a much-needed

shift in the power relations and dynamics of research with Indigenous people more broadly (Castelden, Morgan, & Lamb, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

CBPR is not a new concept to Indigenous people in rural or urban Canada as many seem to contend, but rather one which originates with them. The complexities of trust as an ongoing relational process integral to the practice of community are reflected in the historical examples described here, and expressed best in the words quoted earlier of the Elders of the NCCT and in Wilfred Pelletier's collaborative autobiography. Indigenous community in Toronto is made and remade from the social ordering concomitant with the processes of the production of knowledge evolving from infinite intersections of diverse social actions. As FitzMaurice & Newhouse (2008, p. 16) have summarized, "Building meaningful and trusting relationships can lead to a sense of community and common interests which has much less to do about our rights against each other, than it is about our responsibilities towards each other and a sense of mutual accountability." Community membership is defined by practice: the choices of individuals to actively contribute to collective social responsibilities. This is highlighted in the cultural diversity of the Toronto Indigenous community where conflict (in terms of class, gender, cultural and other ideas and actions) and the attempt to synthesize varied Indigenous perspectives into a multicultural Indigenous (as opposed to pan-Indigenous) framework for action, are part of a continuous process that builds community. Further, this process is mediated by changing power relations among Indigenous people as well as between Indigenous people and the state. These power relations constantly reify and modify the ideological framework of Indigenous social action in the city, and the shape of engaged scholarship.

The urban "community" is more relational than physical, drawing individuals into practice with each other through processes that generate multiple avenues for oscillating layers of resistance and creative adaptation, and provide for varying degrees of independence and autonomy (c.f. Lobo, 2001). As any Indigenous person must work at community membership in the city so too do community leaders. The flexibility, and the principles of "reciprocal responsibilities" between the individual and community which are integral in the production of Indigenous community align with a number of the tenets of ethical and CBPR practice described here. This therefore provides an opening for researchers to engage in a form of community membership conditioned by their relational participation in the community-producing process, where they can, as Rapaport (2008) describes it, "inhabit a kind of inside in concert with indigenous activists" (p. 13).

A key factor in the successful application of Indigenous ethics to research according to numerous scholars is open identification of a researcher's personal subjective position and recognition of the power dynamics which flow from this position in relation to the Indigenous community with which she conducts research (Schnarch, 2003; Harrison, 2001). Ball & Janyst (2008) state, "researchers who hope to engage with Indigenous people need to be able to account for themselves, for example, by providing details of their ancestry, family life, scholarship, and intentions, not only during initial introductions, but throughout the project" (p. 38). It is

unlikely, but not fully off the mark that a requirement be written into an ethics protocol that researchers do the work of establishing trust not just for the sake of conducting research but because we make a life-time commitment to Indigenous justice and self-determination, and provide “evidence of political solidarities” (c.f. Speed, 2006). Issues with the establishment of trust are not reducible simply to an Indigenous/non-Indigenous divide, but reflect historical relations of dominance, oppression and resistance which both defy this divide and create dissonances and inequalities within Indigenous communities. In this context, researchers must also practice community.

The urban research setting highlights a number of complexities of researcher subjectivity in relation to the Indigenous community. Bases of knowledge collapse as boundaries between personal, field, and academic circles may overlap and flow into each other, and the opportunity arises to explore and negotiate the ethics of research (Howard-Bobiwash 1999). In the city, there may be considerable overlap and continuity, or conflict and incommensurability between the researcher’s academic institution, Indigenous community organizations, persons, and activities, which contribute to diverse and continually changing perceptions of research and individual researchers. Moreover, researchers have opportunities to participate in regular Indigenous community events, open programs, and activist activities. Some develop kin relationships through long-standing involvement in the community, which comes with its own sets of responsibilities, including nomination to leadership positions, which may in turn present further ethical dilemmas. Thus, when I entered the Indigenous community, I entered a complex context of historically established and elaborated Indigenous epistemology of the production of knowledge and the role of CBPR. My role as a researcher and member of First Story Toronto, a person who is engaged in the production of knowledge, and continues to engage with the politics of ethics and practice of community. At the local level urban Indigenous community, there is significant conscious, vigilant understanding of these processes and politics of knowledge production, as well as of the value of research and its impacts on social order. Hopefully, this will have a greater impact in the dialogue on the elaboration of Indigenous ethics and the utilization of CBPR approaches as we move forward in engaged Indigenous scholarship.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge and thank First Story Toronto and the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. This article draws on research carried out since 1995, and I am very grateful to the many members of the Toronto Indigenous community who have shared their knowledge and experience over this time. Numerous sources of financial support made this work possible and include: Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Historical Foundation, City of Toronto Access & Equity Community Grants Program, Canadian

Heritage Foundation, Miziwe Biik Native Employment Training and Development, Ontario Graduate Scholarship, FCAR (Formation des chercheurs et aide a la recherche, Quebec) Doctoral Fellowship, University of Toronto Graduate Studies Bursary, Open Fellowships, and Dissertation Completion Grant. Thank you to Michael Cavanaugh for his research assistance generously supported by the Native American Institute at Michigan State University, which contributed background for this article. I am also very thankful to the anonymous reviewers and to the editors for their careful attention and helpful comments.

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