Community Co-Authorship in Academic Publishing: A Commentary

Audrey R. Giles
University of Ottawa

Heather Castleden
University of Victoria

Examples are beginning to emerge in academic literature that suggest that sharing ownership of the results of research through co-authorship with First Nations and/or Aboriginal communities and organizations in Canada should become accepted practice. This practice has yet to be fully embraced in academic publishing, in part due to ignorance of or reluctance to follow this practice. In this commentary we draw on personal examples to identify and problematize the dominant discourses that inform the debate about community co-authorship, specifically, privilege and participation.

Although some progressive journals (e.g., *Arctic* and *Human Ecology*) have accepted manuscripts from academics and their community co-authors (Kendrick, Lyver, & Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, 2005; Nichols, Berkes, Jolly, Snow, & the Community of Sachs Harbour, 2004; Parlee, Berkes, & Teetl'it Gwich'in Renewable Resources Council, 2006; Parlee, Manseau, & Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, 2005), the second author (Castleden) found that at least one journal was hesitant. Recently she submitted a manuscript to a journal in the social sciences identifying a First Nation as a co-author. The journal's managing editor indicated that although he was interested in the manuscript, two conditions needed to be met before he could subject the manuscript to peer review: the word count needed to be reduced, and the authorship needed to be changed. Specifically, the editor noted that the journal adhered to the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' guidelines, and suggested that either the First Nation be listed in the acknowledgments section or that individuals from the community (up to six authors in total) be identified. This editor's response provided the impetus for this commentary. Here we (two Euro-Canadian academics) identify and problematize the dominant discourses that inform this debate about community co-authorship: expressly, privilege and participation.

Aboriginal individuals, organizations, and communities as a whole play key roles in every part of community-based participatory research (CBPR) projects from conceptualization to dissemination (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). In terms of author-ship, academics have begun to recognize contributions from individual Aboriginal community members through co-authorship practices. For ex-

ample, the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project (2007) serves as a model that both academics and Indigenous communities can turn to as a point of departure for individual authorship guidelines that are found in its Code of Research Ethics. Although these guidelines are important and useful in the ethical practice of academic authorship, the focus of this commentary lies in the less common practice of community/collective co-authorship.

Certain national organizations have recently produced guidelines to try to facilitate the ethical conduct of research with Aboriginal communities, and they have begun to create space for the opportunity to consider community co-authorship in academic publishing. Specifically, they have stated that First Nations and Aboriginal communities can and should decide how they would like to be acknowledged for their contributions and that authorship agreements should be negotiated at the outset of a project. For example, Article 15 of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's (CIHR, 2007) document *Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People* states:

> An Aboriginal community should, at its discretion, be able to decide how its contributions to the research project should be acknowledged. Community members are entitled to due credit and to participate in the dissemination of results. Publications should recognize the contribution of the community and its members as appropriate, and in conformity with confidentiality agreements. (p. 28)

The National Aboriginal Health Organization's (NAHO, 2005) document *Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) or Self-Determination Applied to Research: A Critical Analysis of Contemporary First Nations Research and Some Options for First Nations Communities* clearly states expectations for community co-authorship: "What lies ahead for OCAP ... First Nations communities and organizations being identified as authors or co-authors in publications" (p. 13). Despite these guidelines, in practice few university-based researchers include First Nations communities or community organizations as co-authors. As a result, we ask, Why does the participatory aspect of participatory research typically end at authorship?

Academia has been an inhospitable realm for Aboriginal peoples and their communities, and the issue of the perceived legitimacy of community co-authorship in academic publishing has proved to be no exception. Academia has made itself inaccessible to so-called laypeople, maintaining universities and academic publishing as a preserve for those who have had the privilege of attending postsecondary institutions. Aboriginal peoples in Canada have historically been marginalized in education; indeed the percentage of Aboriginal peoples (8%) receiving university degrees is disproportionately low compared with non-Aboriginal peoples (23%, Statistics Canada, 2007). Increasingly, however, Aboriginal groups are beginning to argue for the rightful representation of their own interests, including playing larger roles in depictions of their communities

and ways of life. Thus CBPR has become an increasingly popular research methodology in research with Aboriginal peoples (CIHR, 2007). Key principles of CBPR include sharing decision-making power and ownership in all phases of the research, building capacity in the community participating in the research, fostering trust and promoting co-learning between partners, and integrating and disseminating knowledge for the mutual benefit of all partners (Delemos, 2006).

Although researchers have started to embrace the benefits that can be accrued from meaningful community collaboration, reciprocal benefits have not been fully extended to community organizations and their members. Although we note that some academics are responsive and ethically responsible in terms of citing community members and research participants in the list of authors, most allocate community involvement to the acknowledgments section of journal articles despite their contributions that have shaped all phases of the research project. This omission results in authorship remaining the privileged domain of academics, who know all too clearly the possible implications of adding co-authors. For example, in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Ottawa, where the first author (Giles) is an assistant professor, professors are asked to fill out a "workload grid" that is used to assign points to their research activities. In the category of authorship, single-authored articles receive a full point, multiple-authored only half a point. The rigorous demands of the pre-tenure process as well as the practice of merit pay at some universities whereby the most "productive" are assigned larger sums of money than their apparently less productive colleagues, may result in researchers hesitating to acknowledge community members or entire communities and their organizations as authors. Doing so would result in diminished academic privilege.

An important aspect of CBPR is capacity-building and full participation (Corbie-Smith, Moody-Ayers, & Thrasher, 2004; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003); however, capacity-building and participation must not be limited solely to the development of advisory groups or research assistants. CBPR should include building capacity and participation in terms of authorship. It would be relatively easy to argue that Aboriginal groups cannot be co-authors (or, for that matter, thesis committee members) because co-authors must be individuals and not groups. Such an argument, however, relies on a weak tautology that "it is that way because it has always been that way," which highlights the academy's reliance on journals and their policies and its general resistance to change.

Although we acknowledge that this is an issue of substantial complexity, we also feel that the discussion should move beyond the idea that it is impossible for communities to be co-authors. We argue that resistance to community co-authorship is a denial of the notion that communities can generate or have the rights to knowledge.[1] Our perspective on the idea of

community co-authorship stems from our understanding of liberal (individuality and individual knowledge) versus communitarian assumptions (communal knowledge). Indeed communal knowledge is the idea behind the understanding of much of what we know about the oral tradition: knowledge does not belong to just one person, but is co-constructed among many people (Augustine, 2008). In listing communities as co-authors, it affords the opportunity to recognize this co-construction and calls into question notions of singular ownership of knowledge. Thus the idea that only individuals can author papers becomes complicated and can move us toward the idea that perhaps communities can be co-authors.

One of the most common objections about community co-authorship is the identification of the apparently problematic nature of having one person (or several persons) speaking on behalf of others. Yet we see one person speaking on behalf of others in many aspects of research. For example, in the NWT, Nunavut, and the Yukon, one must undergo a community consultation before having a research license signed. In this process it is understood that a group of people, or one person, is empowered to make a decision on behalf of others (i.e., to allow the research to take place or not). Such a decision-making process does not guarantee that everyone in the community has been consulted, but rather that one person or several people have been placed in a position of trust to make a decision that is seen as being in others' best interests. Although we may view such a position as paternalistic, it has become an important part of the research process and has been demanded by northern Aboriginal groups. If we extend this discussion to authorship, then we can see that having a person or several people (e.g., co-authors who are given the authority to speak for the community) speak on behalf of a group is not really a departure from what is currently considered a best practice in some areas of research. Clearly it is a complicated issue.

An additional complication of community co-authorship is about how *community* can be defined. CIHR's (2007) *Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples* dedicates five paragraphs to how Aboriginal communities may be understood and defined and includes the following.

> Community in the context of Aboriginal research constitutes a structure of support mechanisms that includes an individual's personal responsibility for the collective and, reciprocally, the collective's concern for individual existence. Importantly, Aboriginal conceptions of community often encompass relationships in a very broad sense, including relationships of human, ecological and spiritual origins. (p. 15)

In certain situations the question of who can speak for whom is relatively clear in that—as noted above—governance structures prescribe a person who is in the position to represent a community's interests. Nevertheless, given the above definition, it is possible for Aboriginal peoples to be in multiple communities. For example, Aboriginal women living on a reserve might be represented by a male chief, yet at the same time might

not feel that their interests are being represented. The case of Aboriginal people living off-reserve provides yet another complex example of the potential difficulties of community representations. We know that community co-authorship, if it is to be implemented effectively, needs to be pursued such that it is sensitive to populations of Aboriginal people (e.g., women and urban-dwelling) who are often marginalized in research.

We accept that community co-authorship presents both logistical and philosophical challenges to academia. Nevertheless, we suggest that these are exactly the kinds of challenges that need to be addressed. As academics we have an ethical social responsibility (Pimple, 2002) to push the boundaries of exclusionary practices of privilege, paternalism, and participation that permeate postsecondary institutions. We thus hope that this commentary will serve to spark both community and academic interest and advocacy for community co-authorship.

Postscript

After invoking the guidelines set forward by CIHR (2007) and NAHO (2005) in correspondence with the journal's editor, Castleden's paper was eventually accepted with the First Nation identified as a co-author in the social sciences journal (Castleden, Garvin, & Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008).

Notes

[1]We are grateful reviewers of this article for suggesting that we make this point, along with many others, which strengthened the article.

References

Augustine, S.J. (2008). Preface: Oral history and oral traditions. In R. Hulan & R. Eigenbrod (Eds.), *Aboriginal oral traditions: Theory, practice, ethics* (pp. 1-6). Halifax, NS: Fernwood.

Canadian Institutes of Health Research. (2007). *CIHR guidelines for health research involving Aboriginal people.* Ottawa: Author.

Castleden, H., Garvin, T., & Huu-ay-aht First Nation. (2008). Modifying photovoice for community-based participatory Indigenous research. *Social Science and Medicine, 66,* 1393-1405.

Corbie-Smith, G., Moody-Ayers, S., & Thrasher, A. (2004). Closing the circle between minority inclusion in research and health disparities. *Archives of Internal Medicine, 164,* 1362-134.

Delemos, J. (2006). Community-based participatory research: Changing scientific practice from research on communities to research with and for communities. *Local Environment, 11*(3), 329-338.

Israel, B., Schulz, A., Parker, E., & Becker, A. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Health Behavior and Health Education, 19,* 173-202.

Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project. (2007). *Kahnawake schools diabetes prevention project code of research ethics.* Retrieved September 30 from: http://www.ksdpp.org/i/ksdpp_code_of_research_ethics2007.pdf.

Kendrick, A., Lyver, P., & Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation. (2005). Denésoliné (Chipewyan) knowledge of barren-ground caribou (Rangifer tarandus groenlandicus) movements. *Arctic, 58*(2), 175-191.

Minkler, M., & Wallerstein, N. (2003). *Community-based participatory research for health.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley.

National Aboriginal Health Organization. (2005). *Ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) or self-determination applied to research: A critical analysis of contemporary First Nations research and some options for First Nations communities.* Ottawa: First Nations Centre.

Nichols, T., Berkes, F., Jolly, D., Snow, N.B., & Community of Sachs Harbour. (2004). Climate change and sea ice: Local observations from the Canadian Western Arctic. *Arctic, 57*(1), 68-79.

Parlee, B., Berkes, F., & Teetl'it Gwich'in Renewable Resources Council. (2006). Indigenous knowledge of ecological variability and commons management: A case study on berry harvesting from Northern Canada. *Human Ecology, 34*(4), 515-528.

Parlee, B., Manseau, M., & Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation. (2005). Using traditional knowledge to adapt to ecological change: Denesoline monitoring of Caribou movements. *Arctic, 58*(1), 26-37.

Pimple, K. (2002). Six domains of research ethics: A heuristic framework for the responsible conduct of research. *Science and Engineering Ethics, 8*(2), 191-205.

Statistics Canada. (2007). *Educational portrait of Canada, 2006 census.* Catalogue No. 97-560-X. Ottawa: Author.