

Aboriginal Health Roundtable Discussions: “Why We Accept Your Invitation to Join You”

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In this paper, we focus on two individual instances where non-Aboriginal scholars have invited us, as Aboriginal community leaders, to help guide their studies about Aboriginal peoples. We provide primary-sourced evidence of our socio-personal experiences within Eurocentric ideologies of control, power, and racism. By critically analyzing the colonial comments made during these non-Aboriginal-led roundtable discussions about Aboriginal peoples' health and well-being, we unearth fundamental reasons why we continue to “accept your invitation to join you” during such projects. It is through our experiential reflections that we witness and resist oppressive discourses that still linger throughout some parts of academe today. From within our collective understanding of Indigenous worldviews—our ancestral/spiritual connectedness—we are able to explicate what these particular discourses mean to us, as authors, and speculatively, to many other First Nation peoples. Finally, we propose suggestions that may potentially be of value to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' health research and relationships.

Introduction

In June of 2009, I (Donna, of Algonquin and Métis heritage) invited my close friends and mentors, Roberta Price (Coast Salish, Snuneymuxw, Cowichan Tribes) and Musqueam Elder, Rose Point, to lunch. Beyond planning for a lunch between friends, I was also following traditional Aboriginal protocol¹ by asking Elder Rose for her permission and blessing upon my doctoral studies. The land-based origin of my collaborative relationships between the University of British Columbia and greater community members is situated on unceded Ancestral Musqueam Territory. Aboriginal protocol and relational ethics strongly intimate that I respectfully acknowledge this positionality, ask for, and honour Elder guidance. During our visit, and quite spontaneously, I also asked Rose, “How do I continue to work in an environment in which I feel my values are being challenged?” She placed her hand on my forearm, looked into my eyes, and then informed me, “There is a word called ‘discourse’—go learn what this means so that you can find the right words to speak up, to say what and why some things are not acceptable, and to speak about what you believe in.” It is with Elder Rose’s guidance, and Roberta’s and my personal/professional experiences, that we articulate our concerns about some Eurocentric attitudes, discourses,

and practices still prevalent in small compartments of academic, non-Aboriginal-led research on behalf of Aboriginal peoples today.

Scholars researching with Aboriginal peoples are usually aware of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS) and that it

interprets how the value of respect for human dignity and the core principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice apply to research involving Aboriginal peoples. It accords respect to Indigenous knowledge systems by ensuring that distinct world views are represented wherever possible in planning and decision making, from the earliest stages of conception and design of projects through to analysis and dissemination of results. It affirms Aboriginal rights, interests, and responsibilities as reflected in community customs and codes of research practice in order to better ensure balance in the relationship between researchers and participants and mutual benefit in researcher-community relations (Interagency Secretariat on Research Ethics, 2009, p. 101).

In accordance with TCPS guidelines specific to Aboriginal rights and codes of research practices, the two example discourses we illuminate in this article: originated from studies inclusive of Aboriginal participants living in Aboriginal communities; produced findings that involved co-analysis of data by Aboriginal community members; and, discovered findings that refer to Aboriginal peoples' history and culture. While many university and/or community leaders speak of the need to honour marginalized voices and alternative epistemologies (Alfred, 2004; Archibald, 2007, 2008; Cole, 2006; Gill, 2003), our key regard is that research ethics outlined in the TCPS about collaborations with Aboriginal peoples occasionally remain shadowed by the status quo of Western research thoughts and practices. Out of respect for some non-Aboriginal scholars with whom our values may sometimes be challenged, we maintain their anonymity.

Purpose

Jo-ann Archibald (2008) describes Aboriginal storytelling (narratives) as: oral traditions and storytelling from traditional times to the present; the making of meaning from personal experiences via a process of reflection in which storytelling is the key element; and, that in which Indigenous learning takes place (2008). Following Archibald, this narrative paper focuses on two brief commentaries that arose during meetings with non-Aboriginal-led research projects about Aboriginal peoples' wellness, to which we had been invited. Our socio-personal distress during roundtable discussions has guided our reflections about why we accept such invitations. Consequently, our objective is three-fold. It is to (1) evaluate two colonial-based spoken examples during university-led roundtable dialogues; (2) explicate how the racial discourses (perceived by us) might impact Indigenous peoples' connectedness to spirit; and, (3) offer recommendations that might transform injurious ideas, words, and actions into ways that could, instead, honour our Indigenous collective spirit. While doing so, we situate each example with inter-contextual information. At

hand, here, are issues of racism and power suggestive of some non-Aboriginal researchers whose beliefs remain ongoing challenges to us in some present-day learning institutions. Lisa Delpit (2002) makes clear that, "These institutions do not have our best interests at hand because if they did, there would be a space in them to nurture the spirit" (cited in Gill, 2003, p. 32).

Our selves, families, communities, and spiritual nurturing toward that which Delpit speaks signify a fundamental epistemology for many First Nation peoples. Our selves strive for wholism, as Joseph Couture (1979) suggests: "'full-mindedness', the union of mind and heart, of intellect and intuition" (p. 12). The philosophy of the self is paramount to Indigenous peoples because we think with our whole being (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2000; Brown, 2004; Gill, 2003; Urion, 1999). From within this Indigenous philosophy of inter-connectedness to our selves, to First Nation peoples, and to our ancestors, we unearth some of the various reasons we continue to partake in Aboriginal health roundtable discussions. But first, what do we mean by "roundtable discussions?"

In the context of this article, we refer to meeting room settings inclusive of round, oval, square, or rectangle placement of furniture, as a space for exchanging of views. From our collective knowledge of Aboriginal teachings, we hold that roundtable—or any physically-shaped meeting room-formations—are traditionally meant to provide a safe and respectful space in which members can be afforded their points of view with opportunities to learn from one another without fear of criticism.

The cornerstone of this paper upholds our perceptions that racism still lingers in small subsets of academic research discussions. However, we preface here that our intent is not to generalize or to be adversarial. We provide the following analogy about the multiple, moderate ways of Indigenous research:

While making my first walking stick, I have come to realize that the angle of the blade matters. When gently smoothing out embedded knots to create somewhat of a textured, non-adversarial surface along the walking stick, I have learned to work my knife modestly along the wood's plane. This method affords me better results. In other words, by approaching the wooden piece as an opponent and making deeper cuts into it would only cause greater difficulty at a later stage; I would then need to apply more pressure in sanding to a cleaner finish. I have learned from this craft that I am not superior to the wood, but am relationally in tandem with it. Lastly, in making my stick, I have learned to approach this task collaboratively—inclusive of myself, the wood, the artistry, and the assistive tools. This teamwork strategy engages Mother Nature; a "de-barking" knife; an exacta-knife; sandpaper; linseed oil for curing the wood; the rubber cap for the stick's bottom end; and finally, the animal hide and beadwork with which I will be adorning the top six inches of the stick's grasp-handle. (D. Lester-Smith, personal field note, August 3, 2010)

The particulars of carving a walking stick, such as the *angle of approach*, *pressure*, and *collaboration*, can assist us to discover ways of being in touch with our ancestral thoughts and actions. Similarly, Douglas Cardinal and Jeanette Armstrong (1991) teach:

In the past Native Aboriginals of North America lived their lives in harmony with nature and their own nature. It was a way of thinking, a way of being. It was not a way of adversary, of being adversarial to nature and one's own nature. Their ways were to understand human nature and the environment and their part in it. Aboriginal cultures evolved into a way of being in touch with the earth, and experiencing the reality of being part of the earth." (p. 12)

By mobilizing Cardinal and Armstrong's wisdom, and the experiential knowledge gained from our woodcraft story, we feel better able to highlight pockets of ongoing racial dialogue that disquiet us. The living stories about which we re/present in this article evidentially lead us to consider some of the integral reasons we contribute, when asked, to non-Aboriginal-led research intended to benefit Aboriginal peoples' health.

Of significance to Aboriginal peoples' well-being, when we witness overt, covert, or simply a lack of awareness about racial undertones, we feel led by our connectedness to spirit, and then compelled to explore how some of our roundtable experiences have failed to nurture Aboriginal past and present spirits. For example, Roberta and I connect and honour one another's spirits in multiple ways as demonstrated in one of her recent e-mails to me:

[This weekend] I was head cook for my cousin's funeral in *Tsartlip* Reserve in Victoria, there is so much to sit up and catch up on with you in regards to my classes, happenings, etc. I am so happy that you are calling and leaving me good messages to keep my spirits up and ground me in my thoughts. (R. Price, personal communication, January 27, 2009)

Often our ancestral guiding and respectful ways involve the unseen, as Roberta highlights. We each have busy lives, yet, intrinsically, we know of each other's *thoughts, happenings, and spirits*, our overall connectedness to one another. Hartej Gill (2003) helps us understand: "The richness and multiplicity of personal discourses and experiences also has the capacity to inform as well as reform [and transform] not only mis/re-presented lies but also mis/re-presented lives" (p. 30). While affirming that a collective transformation of racially-based ideas can be a slow and reticent journey, our current discussion may be worthy of our efforts to understand racism, spoken accidentally or otherwise. No matter the mode of communication, racism has become a strong disconnect from Indigenous spiritual ways of being.

Connectedness to Spirit

We believe that our relational connectedness to spirits means accepting *good medicine* with the *bad*. For instance, when I first began experiencing a growing sense of futility at some of the non-Aboriginal-led research meetings Roberta and I attended, I later asked her, "How have you dealt with condescending attitudes about Aboriginal peoples for so long?" and, "How can I continue in my own work, in the mindful ways that you do?" She explains:

When I'm invited to research meetings, I usually share my ancestral *good medicine* with all. But some people give me *bad medicine* like thick air, tension, looks, body language, and hurtful words. It is those times that I stroke my Eagle Prayer Feathers for protection from Western

views. The truth is, I am not there for them. I am there for my children and my grandchildren. And when deciding which Aboriginal health projects to honour, I choose the better-ness of each [study invitation]. I decide where I want to contribute my knowledge. These are just some of my reasons for co-writing this paper with you: racism, and why I continue to assist non-Aboriginal decision-makers who conduct research about us. (R. Price, personal communication, January 30, 2010)

As authors, we maintain that our awareness of protective *good medicine* is innate: we already know how to protect ourselves and treat kindly those around us. It is through our most difficult experiences of *bad medicine* that we gain the strength necessary to sit at roundtable discussions and calmly offer insights about Aboriginal peoples and health research. Yet, ultimately, we must concede that there is no singular formulaic process to ethical, respectful research. Scholar Jo-ann Archibald, of the *Stó:lo Nation*, taught me (Donna) that differing ways do not necessarily imply polarity, as in the familiar adage, *my way is better than your way*. Indigenous Knowledge Keepers such as Archibald exemplify that our ancestors stay near us to guide us in their/our traditional ways.

As authors, we pensively reflect about the directions toward which our traditionally-based work is moving, beyond its steeped parallels within, and outside of, Western frameworks. The resurgence of stronger, committed Indigenous peoples, both in and outside of academe, may be akin to a contemporary, Indigenous Renaissance. We briefly explain: In his book, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1844), Edward Gibbon documents how the Dark to Middle Ages (roughly, 410 AD-1066 AD and 1066-1485) of Western civilization marshalled in a period of Roman empirical, cultural, and economic decline. Gibbon theorizes that the powerful influence of Christianity was instrumental in suppressing advances in the sciences and the arts. For instance, Galileo Galilei took on the controversial task of supporting a Copernican heliocentric view of the universe: that the Sun was the centre of the universe, and not the Earth, as early church officials expounded (Drake, 1976, 1981; Shea, 1977; Theodore, 1942). However, the dawn of the Renaissance saw the waning of Christian influence as intellectual progress in philosophy and the humanities brought a new enlightenment to Western thought (Franklin, 1982; Perry, 2004). How does this brief survey of Western science assist us? On the one hand, the 15th through 20th Centuries can be likened as some of the darkest ages that First Nation peoples in Canada have experienced. The Canadian Government's prohibitive assimilation policy, begun before the official *Indian Act* of 1876, stripped Aboriginal peoples of their knowledges, languages, spirituality, traditional beliefs, customs, and ceremonial practices (Haig-Brown, 1988; Lawrence, 2004; Leslie, 1978). Duncan Scott, head of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1913-1932, makes transparent his goals of power over First Nation peoples: "Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question and no Indian department" (Jamieson, 1978, p.

50). On the other hand, the 21st Century now resonates with Indigenous synergy of rebirth and reclamation of our tradition, culture, pride, honour, and new direction. Knowledge Keepers speak of the generations through which our Elders had protectively chosen to sleep because of not being welcomed by settlers as the authentic teachers they are, and the multiple repercussions many Aboriginal peoples faced throughout the Residential School era (i.e., punishment, shame, malnutrition, abuse, and cultural forbiddance). But, like the Renaissance years of awakening, our Elders are rebirthing, waking up, and graciously willing to share their wisdom with all who want to listen with an open heart. Comparatively, we suggest that spirituality, wholism, and in particular, potlatches and powwows—once prohibited between the 1700s and late 1900s—are resurging within our contemporary todays and tomorrows (Thornton, 2003). These reclamations have become the breaking of new ground, within Western mainstream views of power and racism, for Indigenous interconnected hearts. This vast, yet, intuitively detailed direction welcomes the work to which Roberta, I, and many other Aboriginal, Inuit, and Métis scholars and community leaders seek to contribute.

Our Perceptions of Racism

We see ethnic prejudice as the belief that inherent differences among people of various ethnicities often lead to assumptions of power, control, and superiority by one group of people over another. Racism limits, excludes, oppresses, and discriminates against people valued overtly and/or covertly by one category of people deemed 'less than' another. "Whatever the form, racism harms" (UBC Equality Office, Racism Pamphlet, 2009, p. 2). Speaking specifically about contemporary racism directed towards many Aboriginal peoples, one community Knowledge Keeper concisely states, "We know they talk about racism, that it's getting better. But we see it's getting worse and it's going underground and our people are still getting the most brunt of that" (personal communication, 2009). Roberta, too, explains, "In many of the places my family needs to go around town, racism drips from the ceilings" (R. Price, personal communication, January 30, 2010).

Threads of control, oppression, and devaluation of Aboriginal peoples remain tightly woven. Aboriginal peoples face a maelstrom of implications with which we/they must contend. Barriers to a higher quality of health include lack of education; poverty; poor living conditions; homelessness; child apprehension (by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, BC Government); limited access to healthcare; lack of medicine (i.e., medicine than can improve the quality of life for people living with diabetes, heart conditions, hepatitis, or HIV); societal condemnation; culturally insensitive and inappropriate mainstream counselling services attempting to facilitate healing from complex historical traumas; violence; substance

misuse; homicide; and suicide (Hill, 2008; Kurtz et. al., 2008; Ship & Norton, 1999; Waldram, Herring, & Young, 1995). The above implications have become alarming motivations to assist research leaders who might invite Aboriginal Elders and emerging Aboriginal researchers to analytical roundtable discussions. In these settings, we understand our roles to be an effective way for ancestral knowledges and connectedness to be shared with those who want to learn Aboriginal time-honoured ways.

Our first key example points to four implicit, yet powerful, assumptions that Aboriginal peoples:

- need Western academic knowledge, skills, and assistance
- depend on non-Aboriginal academic researchers to help with community disharmonies
- believe that fluxed underpinnings are, in fact, Aboriginal community peoples' *problems* needing to be *fixed* by non-Aboriginal researcher
- rely on solutions to Aboriginal community struggles that cannot be found locally, and therefore, might be better solved by non-Aboriginal peoples (CIHR, 2008).

Example One

Teun van Dijk, a discourse analyst, articulates our reflections about plurality. He states, "Discourse structures are deployed in the reproduction of social dominance, whether they are part of a conversation or a news report or other genres and contexts" (2001, p. 354). Van Dijk's view of social dominance² is helpful as we explore the following research-based discourse. We preface, here, that we use the term in two different senses; first, as a post-structural philosophical concept when introducing our case and our resulting analytical awareness, and second, more narrowly, in its everyday sense as synonymous with "speech."

I don't like what they [an Aboriginal community agency] are doing. If I'm going to donate my time or my staff's time in grant-writing [funding proposals], I want it done my way.

From our introductory section of the paper, Elder Rose's words of wisdom have, indeed, guided us to learn about discourse so we can *find the right words to speak up, to say what and why some things are not acceptable, and to speak about what we believe in*. We first speak briefly about the above claim and then offer greater detail in our contextual background section about Indigenous worldviews. To us, the example highlights contextual layers of power, control, hegemony, and dominance. We interpret the comment, "I don't like what they are doing" as suggestive that its speaker may deem Western practices of knowledge creation superior to Aboriginal ways. The text, "If I am going to donate ... I want it done my way," is indexical of re/produced Eurocentric generalizations that Aboriginal knowledges and practices can be less effective than Western ones. We also construe the above comment as suggestive that academic knowledge, methods, and cost-effectiveness carry more value than Aboriginal ways outside of academe.

By exploring contextual racist underpinnings, our aim is to challenge some of the sporadic, colonial-based ideologies imbedded in contemporary discourses. Gill (2003) argues:

As long as the DOMINANT conversations and the DOMINANT curriculum MAINtains the absence, of those in the margins, the void, the invisibility, the lack, as long as HIStories are read – misread, misinterpreted... many [minorities] will live imprisoned in pain. ([font variations in original], 2003, p. 38).

In agreement with Gill, we, too, suggest that, unfortunately, some non-Aboriginal researchers still *misinterpret* power and control which, in turn, may transform into racism. From within our collective experience, the guidance we offer at Aboriginal health meetings has occasionally been dismissed as interesting alternative perspectives (i.e. , "Thank you, we will consider that," or "Let's table that idea for another meeting, shall we?"). And so, the purposes and speculative values of our attendance at Aboriginal research roundtable discussions continue. Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us of what Indigenous research-contributors could potentially offer: "Research is an important part of the colonization process because it is concerned with defining legitimate knowledge" (1999, p. 173). Similarly, in her *Knowledge Exchange Workshop: Successful Approaches for the Prevention of Aboriginal Family Violence* report, Madeleine Dion Stout elaborates:

Discussion amongst [conference] participants underlined the need to adopt holistic First Nations, Inuit and Métis lenses when examining knowledge exchange about family violence prevention. Knowers like Elders figured prominently in discussions. Participants talked about the different types of knowledge and many stressed the importance of knowledge which stems from sacred teachings, oral traditions and shared philosophies. It was generally agreed that "knowing" perspectives include balance, non-violence and an ongoing quest for knowledge. (2009, p. i)

Presently, Aboriginal health research, inclusive of family violence, for instance, surges in Canada by First Nation peoples and in New Zealand by Maori peoples. Our argument in this paper seeks to invoke a motivational readiness to challenge *pathologizing* (Chrisjohn & Peters, 1986; Chrisjohn, Young, & Marun, 2006) colonial discourses commonly found in governmental health decision-making, and more specifically, in institutional rhetoric upon on which we have based the need for this paper. Most apparent, of course, are our tensions with some non-Aboriginal researchers actively engaged in Aboriginal health research who invite First Nation community leaders/consultants to their projects for either implicit or explicit purposes of ethical, relational validity—all the while continuing to silence them. Our embedded goal, then, becomes an ongoing effort to *minorize* the dominant ideology (O'Riley, 2003), particularly among mainstream discourses about Aboriginal familial violence.

Commitments to ending violence among some Aboriginal families include work by BC's *Warriors Against Violence Society*; Alberta Justice's *Impact of Violence on Community Wellness* project; Ontario's Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)'s project, *Youth Violence Prevention Toolkit*;

Quebec's *Promoting Non-Violence*; and lastly, Nunavut's *National Strategy to Prevent Abuse in Inuit Communities* (Dion Stout, 2009). Numerous Aboriginal communities have developed ethical protocols beneficial to their peoples and require rigorous levels of permission-and-protocol-processes for outside academic/community researchers to work in their communities. As one relational ethics model, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's (2008) *CIHR Guidelines for Research Involving Aboriginal People* states, "A researcher should understand and respect Aboriginal world views, including responsibilities to the people and culture that flow from being granted access to traditional or sacred knowledge. These should be incorporated into research agreements, to the extent possible" (p. 3).

More specifically, the policy encourages ethical principles be applied when projects involve: (1) a focus on participants who are Aboriginal; (2) research analysis inclusive of Aboriginal community members; and when (3) interpretations of results refer to Aboriginal people, language, and history or culture (p. 13).

With ethical standards quite transparently outlined, we are faced with tensions between policy and practice. Somehow, the two have not yet been fused together as well as some Indigenous researchers and community members might have hoped. With this supposition in mind, we briefly return to *Example One*, about academe-based control over community-based grant-writing procedures. Further contextualization of its disconcerting evidence of power and control intermittently exemplifies many of the roundtable meetings we, as authors, attend. Indigenous peoples can, and do, accept opportunities to share with non-Aboriginal project leaders, a basic understanding of Indigenous philosophies, worldviews, and relational protocols integral to many First Nation peoples.

Indigenous Worldviews

Indigenous worldviews are synonymous with philosophical frameworks that encompass the perspectives and ideas from the Indigenous communities they serve, thus promoting ancestral and present knowledges as vital to Aboriginal peoples' health and well-being (Archibald, Jovel, McCormick, Vedan, & Thira, 2006; Brown, 2004; Castellano, 2000; Graveline, 2002; Marsden, 2006; Mehl-Madrona, 2005). Worldviews are traditionally relevant in many Aboriginal communities because they honour the diversities, propensities, and suggestions from a myriad of Aboriginal peoples, even the most silenced and marginalized of voices. Although diversity exists between tribes, clans, bands, and nations of First Nation peoples in Canada, a common worldview tends to include the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wholism that symbolically provides for our fluid personal/ecological connections to nature and to our healing and wellness (Dei, 2000; Durie, 2004; Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffrey, 2004; Graham, 1999; Holmes, 2000; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). The

essence of Indigenous worldviews, through which we, and other First Nation peoples, seek meaning of our world, is not only a commonality between diverse Indigenous peoples: it is also of timeless value (Castellano, 2000). *Example Two* speaks to the multi-layered values of Indigenous experiences and knowledges.

Example Two

About the *timeless value* of Indigenous spiritual connectedness, we perceive the following comment as indexical to our unease with ideologies of power, control, and racism. Our second key example is a response to a suggestion that each scholar's forthcoming research papers about the study's Aboriginal participants could perhaps become chapters for a book rather than individual article publications:

Great idea! Yes, let's do a book. I can see it now. It won't be about the [Aboriginal] participants, but about what we have learned from them.

We believe that, at the most rudimentary level, the *true* authors of this hypothetical book are being racially marginalized. We worry about the logic of this kind of displacement and ask ourselves: Who are the stakeholders, the beneficiaries of this particular research project? Our Ancestral collectiveness, in other words, our intuitive knowledges, suggests that the Aboriginal participants are the beneficiaries. First, the study was originally conceived and carried forth with participants' health concerns in mind, and second, any publications arising from the study would, logically, be inextricably based on the participants' living stories. We worry that aspects of mindfulness have been lost along the journey. Sentiments of control and power in *Example Two* have shifted from the participants to the researchers and what the study leaders might *learn from* the contributors. Discourses that displace already-marginalized peoples from the centre of health studies that most impact them propel us towards unease. The lack of Couture's *full-mindedness* in some research-based roundtable discussions becomes more apparent to us. Eurocentric ideologies (i.e., a book *not about them*, but instead, *what we have learned from them*) can be damaging to Indigenous peoples' collective spirit. George Dei (2000) suggests the colonial concept of ownership is foreign to Indigenous knowledge. Elders teach us that "The honour of one is the honour of all" (frame hung in the Elders' Lounge, First Nation House of Learning, UBC), and we would add, *the wounds of one are the wounds of all*. Put simply, implicit racialized considerations with which we struggle to re/present and to respectfully challenge seem paradoxical to many First Nation peoples' ancestral inter-relational ways of being.

The Paradox is the Personal

Our *paradox of awareness* throughout this paper—racism in plain sight behind closed doors—for us, cannot go unchallenged. Iseke-Barnes (2003)

makes clear the importance of working together in ways that respect and responsibly support our minds and spirits. Our Indigenous knowledges, time honoured awareness, wholism, spiritual connectedness, and struggles inside and outside of academe are primarily based on our Knowledge Keepers' teachings. Smith (1999) reminds us that Western views of the world are intricately embedded in colonial-based racial discourses.

Eurocentric philosophies of colonizing Canada's First Nation peoples can best be understood in the historical context of government-mandated residential schooling for most Aboriginal children between the 1840s and the 1990s. These institutions, funded by the state of Canada and administered by four churches, were empowered by *The Indian Act* of 1876, which sanctioned government personnel (the Ministry of Indian Affairs) to remove Aboriginal children from their homes and be placed in residential schools (Battiste, 2000; Bishop, 1998; Chrisjohn, Young, & Marun, 2006; Cole, 2006; Fourney & Crey, 1997; Haig-Brown, 1988; Vedan, 2002). Shawn Wilson describes the 1876 Act as "a form of dysfunction that's been institutionalized for Aboriginal people" (2008, p. 103).

Residential schools have impacted a multitude of social health determinants facing Aboriginal peoples today, such as self-determinism, familial love and safety, languages, spirituality, and traditional ways of knowing and being. Durie (2004) asserts "The results of colonization were consistently cataclysmic. A common pattern emerged: loss of culture, loss of land, loss of voice, loss of population, loss of dignity, loss of health, and wellbeing" (p. 1138). Multiple negative legacies affecting many Aboriginal peoples in Canada have been painstakingly revealed throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

Our small part in this greater picture of historical mistreatment of Aboriginal children, and thus, their families, involves complex candidness in thought and in practice. We believe that Aboriginal ways of healing from institutional decolonization³ both confront, and seek harmony with, Western attitudes and practices. Elders teach us the values of learning Western ways so that when we also know Indigenous ways, we can be stronger in both. To move forward with this goal, we propose a contemporary fusion of the two worldviews. Affirming this notion, Joseph Couture (1998) informs us that:

In the early 70's ... Elder Louis Crier stated: 'We would like to say that in order to survive in the 20th century we must really come to grips with the White man's culture and with White ways. We must stop lamenting the past. The White man has many good things. Borrow. Master and use his technology. Discover and define the harmonies between the two general Cultures, between the basic values of the Indian way and those of Western civilization—and thereby forge a new and stronger sense of identity. For, to be fully Indian today, we must become bilingual and bicultural. We have never had to do this before. In so doing we will survive as Indians, true to our past. We have always survived. Our history tells us so' (p. ix)

Numerous scholars also hold to *what our history tells us* about the potential hybridity between Indigenous and Western worldviews that many univer-

sity/community leaders value (Archibald, 2008; Cole, 2004; Haig-Brown & Archibald, 1996; Young, 2006) although we believe that any synergy between the two philosophies cannot begin to take shape until discomforting matters are brought to the forefront of awareness, acknowledgement, and then as approaches to research in need of transformation.

Recommendations

By no means are we able to penetrate, beneath the surface here, the vastness of intersectional health matters and some of their resulting impacts to First Nation peoples. Nevertheless, we have, so far, reinforced our theme—plausible reasons we and other Aboriginal peoples might want to consider attendance during health studies pertaining to Aboriginal peoples' well-being. In this section, we offer ideas that may contribute to some of the disconnect felt between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal health-research leaders who also contribute to this important field. We offer twelve proactive suggestions for decreasing racism and increasing health, healing, and wholism for First Nation peoples in Canada:

1. Critical examination of Eurocentric dominant ideologies and practices be continued by both Aboriginal community members and institutional research members;
2. Any recommendations be culturally safe, relevant, and useful to Aboriginal peoples and their communities;
3. Capacity-building efforts between Aboriginal peoples and educational institutions be continued and be recognized as a legitimate, viable, and valuable partnership for the benefit of Aboriginal peoples;
4. Non-Indigenous research leaders provide responsibility by maintaining appropriate conduct and protocol with Aboriginal cultural sensitivities;⁴
5. Relational ethics of *respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility* be kept in the foreground of all Aboriginal research decisions (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991);
6. Supportive ways towards Aboriginal peoples' health be continued to affirm the liberation, transformation, and facilitate healing of Aboriginal peoples;
7. Aboriginal and Western collaborative partners be continued to assist and to learn, to understand, and to restore Indigenous peoples' health and wholeness;
8. Theoretical and methodological approaches to Aboriginal health research predominantly be built upon Aboriginal worldviews in addition to Western ways: a fusion of both would be helpful to many Indigenous/non-Indigenous health-research practices;
9. Aboriginal preferences for contextual, concrete, relational, and tangible knowledges be continuously centered as Eurocentric assumptions become de-centered;

10. Inquiry into alternative, less Eurocentric approaches be continued to identify and sustain Aboriginal heritage, health, and well-being;
11. Aboriginal peoples' decision-making roles be encouraged and continued in all matters that relate to theirs and the lives of their family and community members;
12. More culturally safe and respectful spaces (i.e., both physical settings and ideologies) in Western paradigms be continued to create, expand, and make readily available for the health benefits of Aboriginal peoples.

As we have shown throughout our recommendations, advocating for greater control and decision-making by Aboriginal peoples is not only a viable option, but a worthy method of collaboration, equalizing, and capacity-building. The consultation process, inclusive of Aboriginal voices being heard, is but one important step for gaining greater involvement but it should not be the only step, as our culturally-based considerations reflect.

Closing Considerations

Personal, communal, national, and global racism needs to be challenged. The micro level, space, and place seem culturally relevant starting grounds. Roberta and I have witnessed numerous past and present signifiers within non-Aboriginal-led health studies roundtable discussions, some of which have included racial discourses that continue to challenge First Nation peoples' spiritual connectedness. Thus, we have sought to exemplar the *ripple effect* throughout our socio-personal, day-to-day lives. If we can positively influence one person, one project, one analytical-roundtable conversation at a time, in ways that are culturally safe, relevant, and "reverent" (Archibald, 2008) to Aboriginal peoples and to their/our traditional customs, then we continue to offer our energy, encouragement, and time.

Our paramount standpoint about First Nation peoples is that our spiritual connectedness to wholistic health and well-being not be—ill-intended or otherwise—misrepresented by some non-Aboriginal-led researchers. To do so might miss the sharing of spirituality that we and others, as Indigenous peoples, have with our/their past, present, and future Knowledge Keepers, and requested guidance within academe-based health studies.

Acknowledgements

In honour of many First Nation peoples, we continue to insightfully inhale some of the *bad medicine* in our communities, and respectfully exhale our concerns as hopeful *good medicine*. While doing so, we remain grateful to the *Musqueam* Ancestral lands on which we are welcome as visitors. We also wish to thank the Native Education College funding bodies and the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council awards that help to sustain our work. Lastly, as co-author, I raise my hands in honour of my friend and Knowledge Keeper, Roberta Price. With gentle firmness, she guides me to quietly gather within myself a clear picture of all that I witness and experience outside of myself.

Notes

¹In the context of this particular event, Aboriginal protocol is about the social and the personal: inviting (with up to a month's notice) Elders for opening and closing prayers, blessings, at meetings and ceremonies, and ensuring their travel to and from events. Protocol is also about respect and the appropriate amount of honorarium gifted to them for their time and wisdom. We offer this example of protocol: before submitting this paper to CJNE, I (Donna) telephoned Elder Rose to confirm with her whether she would prefer we leave mention of her name in our introductory story, or would she rather we remove it for the sake of anonymity? She gave consent that, "it would be fine" to leave her name in our paper (Elder Rose, personal communication, January 29, 2009).

²We acknowledge that to portray a discourse as part of a social process, a social practice, we must also show how it is determined by social structures, and what reproductive effects discourses can cumulatively have on those structures, sustaining them or changing them. However, due to page restraints, we are unable to fully engage in this debate. For more information about systemic and structural violence, see: Farmer, P. (2003). *Pathologies of power*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

³We believe the process of decolonization not only re/presents an Indigenous research methodology, but a greater important reclamation of decolonizing Indigenous peoples' lives, each of which requires critical and ethical consideration. "We must [centre] our concerns and world views and then come to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (Smith, 1999, p. 39).

⁴Here, we offer a specific example of Aboriginal Elder protocol: Often, Elders such as Rose Point and Roberta Price are requested to lead socio-cultural events and research roundtable meetings with opening and closing prayers. Respectful protocol dictates that Elders be paid above the current rate of study participants (i.e., \$20 to \$30, as we understand). Because Elders' attendance at such functions may often be supportive income for their families, protocol suggests that Elder honorariums be at current standard rates, such as \$100.

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