

“Wisdom Seeking Together”: Circling around Research Ethics

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Résumé de l'article

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“Wisdom Seeking Together”: Circling around Research Ethics

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“Wisdom Seeking Together”: Circling around Research Ethics

Abstract

Before Indigenous scholars engage in decolonial research with human participants, Canadian universities must grant them ethics approval. Grounded by the experiences of the nehiyaw researcher and the Chair of the research ethics board who reviewed the research, we explore the experience of REB review with research exploring self-determination and sovereignty with nehiyaw iskwewak (Cree females) as Knowledge Holders. In accordance with iyiniwak (Indigenous Peoples) beliefs, the co-creators and authors positioned themselves in the centre of a circle with Natural Law teachings of kindness, honesty, caring, strength, and determination. In this shared space, we brought together dialogues connected to thematics grounded in ceremony, Natural Law (iyiniwak teachings), and cyclical process. Through four directions, we examine colonial processes and identify REB accountabilities.

Keywords

Research Ethics Boards, Wisdom Seeking, Indigenous research methodology, invasion of sexual boundaries, self-determination, international research policy, sovereignty

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“Wisdom Seeking Together”: Circling around Research Ethics

Just days prior to the declaration of a global pandemic that dramatically separated so many of us, we—Josie Auger, Carolyn Greene, and Nisha Nath—came together, bumping elbows in a coffee shop. Our convergence was initiated by Auger, who noted the multiple ways our work on research ethics intersected. In 2019, Auger’s qualitative research examining the relationship between the invasion of Indigenous women’s sexual boundaries and their views of government, their past, their way of life, and their relationship to the earth and environment, had gone through Athabasca University’s Research Ethics Board (REB) approval process, of which Greene sat as chair. At another juncture, Greene and Nath were part of a working group revising a graduate research methodologies course, of which Nath was drafting a course unit for students on research ethics. Amidst this, Auger and Nath’s institutional paths crossed during conversations about anti-racist and decolonial work while working briefly on a university equity committee.

In this paper, we came together in a series of conversations alongside three of Auger’s *nehiyaw iskwewak*¹ co-creators—Sharon, Lorraine, and Angela. These discussions centered on Auger’s experience moving through the research ethics application process, Greene’s experience on the other end of that process as chair of the institutional REB, and the co-creators’ experiences and thoughts on research ethics and the concerns animating the REB. In what emerged from our discussions, we found a disjuncture between the concerns of the REB in terms of risk and harm to the co-creators, and the deep and existing relational accountability between Auger and the co-creators, and amongst the co-creators themselves. Here, Cora Weber-Pillwax describes relational accountability as a researcher maintaining “respect, reciprocity, and responsibility” to the community, which in this case are the *nehiyaw iskwewak* (Wilson, 2008, p. 77). This relational accountability did not appear legible to the REB.

This paper represents an amalgamation of our conversations reflecting on the institutionalization of Western research ethics, decolonization, and how research ethics boards are oriented to the research of an Indigenous scholar using Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM). Is research treated as a question of neoliberal, bureaucratic, and colonial procedure, or is research conceptualized as invoking ethical relationalities? Moreover, what accountabilities do REBs themselves have in the work of decolonization? Reflecting our distinct social locations in coming together, we take Auger’s guidance and map our

¹ When using Roman Orthography, Cree words are not capitalized as it is not an English language (Okimasis & Wolvengrey, 2008). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2019) and The Canadian Encyclopedia (2018), the word “Cree” originally was a French word “*Kiristinon*,” and the word was shortened by the English to Cree. It is not the original word used by Cree to describe themselves as four-dimensional people with a mind, body, spirit, and feelings. The words we introduce below are ordered as they appear in the paper, as follows: *nehiyaw* (a Cree person); *nehiyaw iskwewak* (Cree females); *iyiniwak* (Indigenous Peoples); *nehiyaw iskwew* (Cree female); *nehiyawak* (Cree people); *iyiniw* (Indigenous person). As per *nēhiyawēwin* (Cree language) conventions, we do not use capital letters for *nēhiyawēwin* words.

discussions onto the Natural Law teachings of the four directions (east, south, west, and north), following the order of kindness, honesty, caring, and strength/determination.

We argue that relational accountability between REBs and iyiniwak should abide by a treaty relationship, raising important questions and implications with respect to the scale and scope of renewed treaty discussions, what settler accountabilities to this relationship are within post-secondary contexts, and how parallel pathways provide a generative space to engage in ongoing policy discussions. We close by locating these considerations within an international policy context, considering research ethics policy and treaty contexts in Aotearoa—New Zealand—and Australia. Situating our work internationally, we conclude with a discussion of treaties within Turtle Island and Aotearoa, as well as the national guidelines in Australia pertaining to research involving Indigenous Peoples, to reflect on possible decolonial learnings for Canadian research ethics boards when they embrace Indigenous legal traditions like other “multi-juridical countries” with settler colonial origins (Borrows, 2010, p. 23).

Background

While the specificities of Auger’s original research have been elaborated elsewhere (see Auger et al., 2020),² in this context we note that bringing Auger and Greene into conversation was distinctive given Auger’s use of Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) to explore self-determination and sovereignty with nehiyaw iskwewak as Knowledge Holders. Conducted within Treaty 8, the Canadian part of Turtle Island that also includes the United States and Mexico, Auger’s project needed to be assessed by a Canadian university REB because her research involved Indigenous people. In the Canadian context, the Tri-Council refers to the three major Canadian government research funding agencies: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). All researchers at Canadian post-secondary institutions are bound to the Tri-Council Policy Statement on “Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans,” also known as the TCPS2. Notably, Chapter 9 of the TCPS2 pertains specifically to “Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada” [hereafter Chapter 9].

Before submitting her ethics application to the REB, Auger had already presented protocol at a sweatlodge, and asked for blessings for this research according to Indigenous sacred and Natural Law teachings. Moreover, Auger’s use of IRM also included plans for: an initial meeting (to determine if all eleven co-creators would participate in group meetings and individual interviews), a sweatlodge ceremony, the co-creator review of transcripts, a fire ceremony, and ongoing participation in public presentations with those co-creators who chose not to remain anonymous.

² The purpose of the research was to identify how rape or unconsented sex impacted Indigenous women’s understanding of themselves as self-determining and sovereign people and affected their historical political, social, cultural, psychological, and environmental relationships and wellbeing.

However, in seeking ethics approval, the REB did not understand the roles of co-creators as per IRM, nor did they understand the meaning of ceremony, protocol, vis-à-vis honorarium. The importance and meaning of each of these had to be explained and justified to the REB members, moreover, Auger had to resolve questions surrounding the roles of co-creators and the REB’s perception of heightened risk. Without ethics approval to do the research initially, Auger was “detained” at the online research portal. This was despite Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement which states that it is *not* “intended to override or replace ethical guidance offered by Indigenous Peoples themselves” (Tri-Council Policy Statement 2, 2018, ch.9). Indeed, scholars have noted racial, gender, and cultural inequities, within and outside of research ethics boards, create a gatekeeping effect in research (see Jonker et al., 2021).

There are at least three things to note about the context in which Auger moved through these research ethics processes. First, Auger’s research required a complex negotiation of the demands of a REB grounded in Western ethical norms—norms that in many ways stand in contradistinction to the relational accountabilities informing IRM. In this, Auger explained to her co-creators the requirements of the University’s ethics approach for informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and honorarium. As a nehiyaw iskwew (Cree female), Auger worked and acted within an epistemic space in between Western and Indigenous research as she reconciled IRM with the REB recommendations, concerns and presumptions. Put differently, while the project was partially developed by Indigenous co-creators and Auger (who is Indigenous to the Traditional Territory where the research occurred), the research was also shaped by the REB’s perception of the risk of discussing sexual violence, the REB’s perception of undue influence through gifts/honorarium, and through their presumption about the risks for participants in identifying themselves. Traversing these two spaces, Auger brought the informed consent letter to the first foundational meeting with each co-creator and they collectively decided on the use of fake names, individual interviews, recording, group meetings, and the recognition of co-creators on documents.

Second, one inclination in discussions of institutional reform is the presumption that greater inclusivity—in this case on REBs—will be transformative. Our discussion of REBs is both local and contextual, grounded in our own institutional location. As academics our role is “shaping the discourse around ethics through discussion and practice,” (Patterson, 2008, p. 24). Critically, however, our discussion is also systemic and structural. In that, while this iteration of the REB *did* have Indigenous representation amidst its representation across faculties (e.g., business, Science and Technology, humanities, and social sciences),³ we gesture towards the structural and systemic to consider the REBs’ location and implication within post-secondary institutions in which the colonial and neoliberal are

³ Our institutional REB also has one volunteer spot for an external public member. There are no specific criteria with respect to social location or Indigeneity for this member.

intrinsically entwined. Even in the face of institutional commitments to decolonization and indigenization, transformation has tended to reside within inclusion frameworks (Gaudry & Lorenz 2018, p. 219). Here, the mere addition of Indigenous people into already existing structures relies on the assumption that the inclusion of Indigenous people evades the “need to rethink the university's underlying structure” (Gaudry and Lorenz, 2018, p. 219). In considering parallel pathways, our conversation pushes towards what Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) describe as decolonial indigenization. This kind of radical revisioning of the institution involves a treaty-based model of university governance, and ongoing support for Indigenous resurgence (Gaudry & Lorenz 2018, p. 223). As Whetung and Wakefield (2018) noted in their brilliant dialogue on decolonizing research ethics, research ethics processes are continually reproducing their own embeddedness in “colonial understandings of relationship, respect, and responsibility,” and these understandings establish and normalize “the university as the arbiter of what is ethical in creating knowledge” (pp. 149-150).

Third, research ethics processes pertaining to research with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Canada vary across provincial contexts, and also across institutional contexts given the composition of institutional REBs, and the processes adopted by institutional REBs, which can also include professional development and training, or the lack thereof. For example, in the province of Ontario, the Jane Finch Community Research Partnership was created in 2016, bringing together York University faculty and librarians and members of the Jane Finch community in the Greater Toronto Area. The group has a threefold focus on: 1) creating a community procedure for reviewing and approving research; 2) establishing a process and open-access database to make research easily accessible to members of the community; and 3) developing resources for researchers looking to conduct research in the Jane Finch community, including principles for conducting research within the community (Jane Finch Community Research Partnership, n.d). More recently, York University developed an Indigenous Research Ethics Board, “the first for a post-secondary institution in Canada,” (York University, 2023). Or, within the province of Manitoba, Kishaadigeh (the Manitoba Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research) is funded by the CIHR and promotes “Indigenous self-determination in research through the development of community-based research lodges in partnership with five Manitoba Indigenous organizations” (Manitoba Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research, n.d.)⁴ Reflecting these accountabilities, the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba has adopted a comprehensive “Framework for Research Engagement with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples” (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Health Research Strategic Planning Committee, n.d.). Specific parallels do not exist at our institution, nor in our home province of Alberta which is covered by Treaties 6, 7, and 8.

⁴ These include the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba (FNHSSM), the Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres (MAC), the Manitoba Inuit Association (MIA), Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre (AHWC), and Fearless R2W.

However, reflecting the multiple colonial provincial and federal jurisdictions, and the distinctive Nation-to-Nation constitutional status of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples, as noted earlier, research with Indigenous people across all Canadian universities must comply with Chapter 9 of the TCPS2. While drafted as a response to the ongoing concerns of Indigenous people regarding unethical research practices by non-Indigenous scholars within Indigenous communities, criticisms remain of Chapter 9, arguing that it is bureaucratic, reinforces the university’s power over research, and relies on colonially determined standards, nature, or evidence for what constitutes harm in research with Indigenous Peoples (Whetung and Wakefield, 2018 p. 146). Alongside this, researchers at Canadian post-secondary institutions are meant to be accountable to the First Nations principles of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession) in their research. The OCAP principles are meant to entrench “strong information governance on the path to First Nations data sovereignty.”⁵ Finally, researchers—Indigenous or settler—are also accountable to the Indigenous communities with whom they are undertaking research. These communities or nations will have their own protocols rooted in their own legal and governance systems, which can also intersect and bump up against colonially imposed governance models such as the band council system. Moreover, in some jurisdictions, research accountabilities may be shaped by treaty accountabilities, which can be complex given purposeful exclusions by white settlers of some Indigenous Peoples from treaties, and in other jurisdictions, the reality of vast swaths of untreated lands. Not only do Indigenous researchers navigate these multiple and oftentimes conflicting spaces of jurisdiction, but Indigenous researchers engaged in IRM with their own nations are assessed by REB members who often have little to no knowledge of any of these complexities and accountabilities.

Methods

This paper departs from traditional academic discussions of policy by intentionally writing a dialogue piece. In offering this dialogue as a way to bring forward our own social location and relationality, this format follows from a lineage of published discussions and roundtables between and amongst Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour (BIPOC) on complex and fraught issues of intersecting social locations and structures of power, and of complicity and accountability (see for example Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Patel, Moussa & Upadhyay, 2015; Patel & Nath 2022; Snelgrove et al., 2014; Whetung & Wakefield, 2018). Our coming together here is not only cross-cultural, but also reflects our different institutional and disciplinary positions, and our distinctive social locations as faculty members within a Canadian settler colonial context—Auger, a nehiyaw mother and grandmother from Treaty 8, a tenured Associate Professor, cultural practitioner, elected First Nation leader (2014-2018), senior administrator of a non-profit organization and First Nations government (2008-2013), and first-generation survivor of the Indian residential schools in Canada; Greene a white, privileged settler woman and criminologist;

⁵ See <https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>.

and, Nath, an Assistant Professor of Equity Studies, a political scientist, and a woman of colour and racialized settler whose parents immigrated from India with the “liberalization” of Canadian immigration policy.

Second, in the initial conversations grounding the written dialogue that follows, the co-creators of Auger’s original research were integral. Drawing from Nader’s (1972) call to study up (see also Armenta, 2016, p. 3; Marker, 2003, p. 369; Tallbear, 2014, p. 4), Auger, Greene, and Nath posed two questions to the co-creators: 1) How did you feel about being offered the choice to use a fake name or a real name?; and 2) How did you feel about the offer of an honorarium?⁶ While the co-creators did not want to formally co-author this piece, they did invite Auger, Greene, and Nath to take up their interventions and insights in the context of this dialogue. This is reflected in the paper’s structure and the incorporation of their words. Auger, Greene, and Nath were mindful of the relational accountabilities to those impacted most by the processes of the REB. Hence, in engaging in this written dialogue, the authors of this paper worked to be accountable to the learnings from the co-creators, drawing from and centring their words, analysis, and experiences, as is evident below. Part of this process also included sending a final copy of this paper to all the co-creators involved in the discussion for their input and revisions.

Third, this paper represents the outcome of a series of deeply iterative discussions that were recorded, where Auger, Greene, and Nath grappled with two issues that were central to the REB’s concerns about Auger’s project, specifically the value of the research incentive/honorarium, and the potential risk to participants in discussing experiences of sexual violence. Returning to those transcripts sparked further conversation, and Auger mapped the nehiyaw Natural Law teachings (to be discussed below) onto the four sections of the paper that were emerging through our discussions. With this framework in place, Auger, Greene, and Nath began again, this time engaging in a written dialogue, of which this paper was the outcome. Through multiple discussions that invited a continuous circling back, we experienced how these discussions occurred in this epistemic space in between Western and Indigenous research.

Finally, the framing of this paper considers the following four thematics which Auger intentionally grounded in the context of Natural Law teachings (Figure 1): a) How do social locations and positionalities shape how we enter into this conversation; b) What do ethical conversations look like within the context of unethical spaces; c) How does colonial power circulate through the REB’s risk designation; and d) How does the relational accountability within IRM disrupt western ethical frames? The teachings, known and practiced by iyiniwak and grounded in Creation stories, move through the four directions (east, south, west and north), and follow the order of kindness, honesty, caring, and strength/determination.⁷ The Creation stories identify the elements, and the teachings

⁶ While these questions were posed to the co-creators, the conversation proceeded organically.

⁷ Borrows (2010) explains that Natural Law from an Indigenous perspective is “an intimate knowledge of how to read the world.” It is not “the natural law theories within Western jurisprudence” (p. 29). The teachings of kindness, honesty, caring, and strength/determination were applied in the Indigenous Iterative Web analysis of another research project conducted by Auger (Auger, 2014).

provide spiritual guidance. This grounding in sacred and Natural Law teachings was intentional by Auger, given that constructing and conducting Indigenous research in accordance with Indigenous worldviews reflects the values and beliefs of Indigenous Peoples (Kenny, 2000). These teachings as told by Elders are practiced daily and through ceremony. In this conversation, we position ourselves and the co-creators in the centre. Examining ethics within the context of how nehiyawak live their lives as well as conducting research as ceremony, as described by Wilson (2008), is relational and "at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous" (p. 80). This was disruptive to the colonial order of REB ethical reviews.

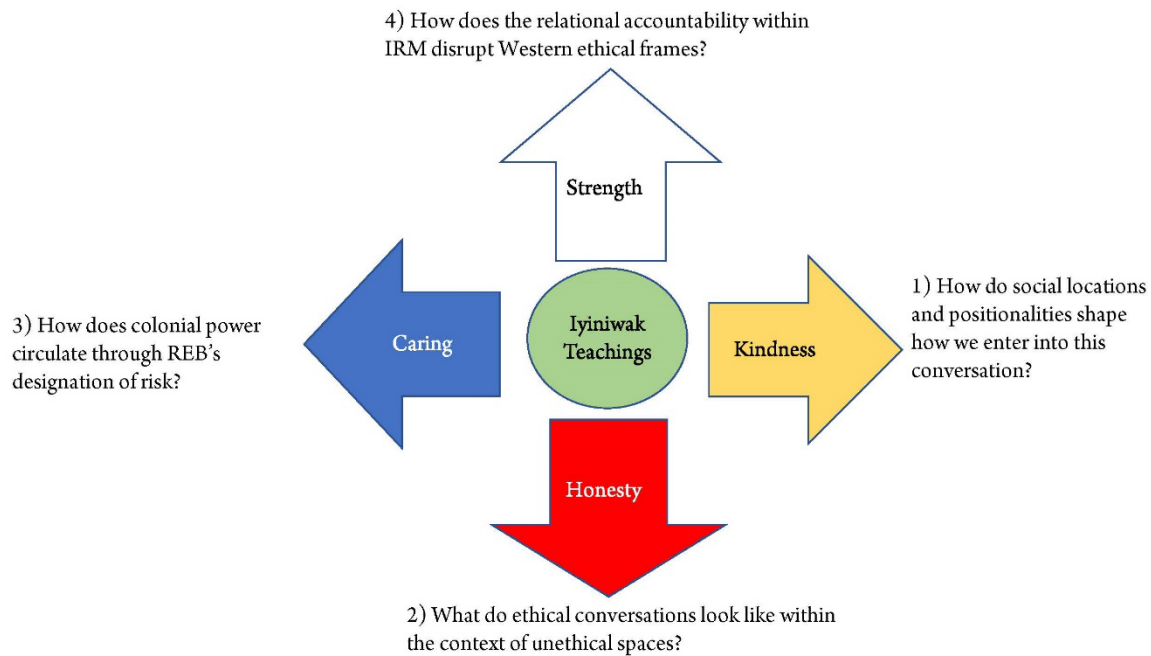


Figure 1. Circling Around Research Ethics

Natural Law Findings

The Eastern Door and the Teaching of Kindness

How do social locations and positionalities shape conversation entry?

First, we must note we are situated in a social and institutional context where academic credentials are valued, while Indigenous women are not. Consequently, the presentation of the co-creator's academic credentials is not simply reactive, it also acknowledges their experience working within Western institutions. Critically, these Western credentials do not capture the full breadth of their knowledge. They are Knowledge Keepers who practice their spirituality and beliefs. In that light, Sharon (B.Ed.), Lorraine (B.Ed. and Social Work Diploma), and Angela (M.Ed., and B.Ed.) participated in the dialogue. They co-created the original research on the Invasion of Sexual Boundaries at the first foundational meeting to determine whether group meetings would be held so they could speak together about self-determination and sovereignty from their perspective as educated, culturally grounded, nehiyaw iskwewak. They were not helpless, nor without agency in their work, and helped answer the research question of inquiry: As Indigenous people, can we have healthy sovereignty if we have not self-determined our sexual experiences? Eleven knowledge holders were asked to participate in the study to discuss the issue of and/or experience of rape as one of the worst crimes. They were asked to give their input into the development of all phases of the research, including content, process, and design. They were asked to discuss how the invasion of sexual boundaries affects political, historical, cultural, psychological, sociological, and environmental views.

Writing up the research was less about the “settler colonial gaze” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 232) and “settler futurity” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1) but more about perspectives of how educated, culturally grounded nehiyaw iskwewak,⁸ offer a unique collective difference expressed through Cree culture, language, and connection to Mother Earth. This research aligns with Tuck and Yang’s (2012) question: What is it decolonization wants? Collectively, as researchers examining the impact of institutional policies and practices, we centred Indigenous voices and discussed how ethical approval for research occurs. This work was not a study of vulnerability. Angela, Lorraine, and Sharon helped to open-up space and discuss their perspective on research ethics.

Nath: Josie, thank you for opening space for us to come together, but also for us to critically reflect on *how* coming together can constitute an ethical encounter. One practice with a long lineage amongst critical race feminists and Indigenous people is to start with self-location. While Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel (2014), amongst others, have cautioned against the sometimes performative nature of self-location exercises, they also describe this as “a political practice,” a way to “anchor our power

⁸ Patrick Macklem (2001) states sovereignty permits the legal collective difference (p. 111).

differentials," and a way to name how we enter this conversation in different ways (p. 4). In the spirit of modelling ethical praxis within these different traditions, how do you locate yourself socially and culturally, and why does this matter for entering a discussion of research ethics?

Auger: My hope is we work in solidarity, and I refer to Tuck and Yang because we do not know how this paper concludes nor where this work will take us: "Solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3). It is unsettling because we are talking about research ethics boards as power structures. Indigenous scholars have advanced Indigenous legal traditions, but the power of authority is not recognized by the state, yet Indigenous people practice it, and why should universities be any different? Having said that, I recognize this is a discussion of power struggles that we as Indigenous people live as sovereign nations not only within Western academic institutions but the nation state itself.

When we had the conversation to introduce ourselves Carolyn introduced herself as a privileged white settler woman. At first these words created a barrier in relating to Carolyn. At the time, I was an untenured Assistant Professor seeking ethics approval. I wondered what I was up against. Afterwards, I started to see this as a first step towards decolonization, and a powerful gesture. Carolyn, how did you come to choose those words to introduce yourself to the readership?

Greene: Truthfully, the possibility of producing a barrier had not occurred to me. Instead, my description was meant to communicate that I understand my position within this system of white supremacy and to acknowledge the history of violence and cultural genocide my people have and continue to inflict on Indigenous Peoples. My experiences have given me a profound sense of the privilege I am afforded because of my skin colour which is an unearned privilege. This acknowledgement is important for developing new relationships and maintaining older relationships with the people I have grown up with and love. I feel profoundly responsible for this. Rather than alienating, my intention was to make room for dialogue. Can I ask if you both felt similar about this? And what about this description felt like a barrier?

Nath: In the full breadth of my work, I have adopted the praxis of socially locating myself as both a woman of colour and a South Asian settler of colour. I do this to acknowledge that how we enter these spaces is structured in and through relationships of power. I am simply not targeted in the same way as Indigenous and Black colleagues. Moreover, the Canadian settler colonial state is always inviting me in to be complicit in settler colonialism and anti-Blackness, all under the weight of whiteness. Not naming this is too risky, hence it must shape how I conduct research, enter a classroom, or enter this project with you both.

There is more to name—I am a political scientist, I am non-tenured, I am a cis-woman, I own property, I have secure citizenship status, I have a full-time job, my partner is a cis-white male, I present as able-

bodied. This shapes how I circulate in the world, but also maps out my accountabilities. For me, the social location of others shapes how I step into collaboration with them. Carolyn, if you were not able to recognize white supremacy and reflect on your complicity, I would have been cautious travelling this road with you.

But I have other kinds of accountabilities and relationships too. I act through these relationalities even when unnamed. I am a daughter, mother, and sister. I also locate myself as a woman of colour to acknowledge the expertise and knowledge derived from a lineage of embodied experiences of radical communities of colour. This knowledge is often institutionally dismissed as partial, biased, or parochial. This lineage is important to me given the fracturing of relationships that often accompanies migration histories like those of my family's.

With that said, as you both are signalling, identifying these social locations is partial, contingent, and contested. Even my identification as a South Asian settler of colour risks profound evasions regarding caste—this is something that I have learned from Muslim feminist scholar, Shaista Patel, and something I am still trying to understand with respect to my own location (Patel & Nath, 2022). Moreover, despite some “discomfort,” there can be an ease in focusing on the declarative politics of social location, particularly if the “concern over complicity directs theorizing of one's place and placemaking,” ultimately eclipsing “the tangible dynamics of land and labour in reproducing settler colonial property” (Chatterjee & Das Gupta, 2020, p. 260).

Our interpellation—or how we are “hailed” as subjects into these structured positions—is never what makes us fully whole. In our work together, we are carving out other ways of relating to and caring for each other, particularly as we make new and personal disclosures to each other in this process. I appreciate your mention of solidarity, Josie, because it reminds me of the “constellations of co-resistance” that Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes of (see 2016, p. 30).

This positioning work is inextricable from a discussion of research ethics in more complex ways than settler REBs address.

Auger: In this context, I think about what decolonization wants, and it reminds me of parallel pathways (Hill, 2008, p. 30). When Treaties were made, iyiniwak used their Natural Laws. Treaties are parallel pathways, and I use kindness, honesty, caring, and strength/determination as ethical teachings along with respect, reciprocity and responsibility for future generations. Declaring self-determination and restoring our civilization is in accordance with the (1996) Saskatoon Declaration of Indigenous Cultural Restoration and Policy Recommendations on Cultural Restoration Developed at the Saskatoon Summer Institute (Battiste, 2000). By using Indigenous Research Methodology as “a distinct body of knowledge, research practice, and wisdom-seeking with its own truth and meanings” we are restoring our ways (Makokis et al., 2020, p. 14). I will use the term Wisdom Seeking to be clear about the research hereafter. Wisdom Seeking involves protocol, ceremony, and teachings to develop ways of knowing, and

the colonizing act of subsuming it under Western research must be avoided. The significance of what REBs can address is different from how it should be addressed. Makokis et al., note the "ceremonial process could be thought of as parallel, in some ways, to the western process of seeking ethics approval from a review board" (2020, p. 24).

The REB was concerned I might cause harm to the nehiyaw iskwewak by asking my research questions, but I did not intend harm, nor did I cause harm to the co-creators; instead, the research prompted healing within the context of Wisdom Seeking. At the beginning I asked each person how they would like to proceed and if they felt a need to talk to someone; they identified their choices. The focus of this paper is to provide a unique opportunity to discuss the power REBs have where Wisdom Seeking is applied. My academic research allowed nehiyaw iskwewak the opportunity to discuss their experiences and give voice to self-determination and sovereignty, since patriarchy and colonialism oppressed the sacred positions they held.

When Carolyn asked if being a white settler was a barrier, did you consider how Indigenous people seldom have authority and power to be self-governing?

Greene: Our stories and positions matter. Reflecting on this and what has brought us together, I wonder about the extent to which REBs, as colonial institutions, perpetuate structural racism and inequality. To be sure, REBs have a key role in guiding ethical research practices, such as on issues of anonymity and confidentiality. As Angela recounts the choice of using real and fictitious names in the project: "if they're [participants are] willing to share but they're not comfortable enough to . . . use their real name, having the opportunity to use a fictitious name, created that space that was needed." Angela's statement reminds us that this choice is important, and that REBs must ensure researchers respect the needs of participants in creating these spaces. Yet, REBs must also understand their positions within this larger colonial system of white supremacy; this understanding is critical for decolonizing REB work. In this way, the stories, and social locations of REB members matter. Only by acknowledging these can REBs themselves create the ethical space needed to decolonize REB processes.

The Southern Door and the Teaching of Honesty

What do Ethical Conversations Look Like within the Context of Unethical Spaces?

Nath: The same institution making ethical demands of researchers is also one structured and sustained by profound inequity. Consider the organizing logic of whiteness structuring the academe, where the knowledge and expertise of Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour [BIPOC] are devalued, where whiteness is reinscribed through hiring practices and governance, where funding and grant applications require a "recoding of insurgent, insurrectionary, and decolonial work," where the financial security of the institution relies on imperialism, occupation, and racial capitalism, and ultimately where "risk

management” manifests in multiple ways to surveil and target BIPOC (Patel & Nath, forthcoming). REBs are not immune to these intersecting structured power relations.

Normalized skepticism of the work of BIPOC researchers manifests particularly when research challenges dominant Western frameworks, and when the research itself is grounded in community. Lorraine spoke to narrow research ethics frameworks in her assertion that “research from a Western perspective . . . separates people,” in this case, researcher from participants, and that Western research frameworks “want to find solutions to *their* question” (emphasis added). Lorraine clearly distinguished between research as ceremony, and the extractive work of non-Indigenous researchers who “come in, they get what they want, and they don’t care how they leave you or where you’re at emotionally, mentally, spiritually or physically when they walk away from you.” Sabati (2019) describes these enmeshed circuits of power by evoking the concept of “colonial unknowing” to ask “how the REB and its connected discourses of research ethics are sites through which the racial-colonial entanglements of universities are actively reproduced and erased” (p. 1060).

Given this context, who and what is being disciplined and/or nurtured by these REB processes of normalization and regulation? Are researchers engaged in critical work with marginalized communities susceptible to a particular kind of REB policing?

Josie, from your experience, do you think REB process places qualitatively and quantitatively different labour demands on BIPOC researchers, particularly as researchers try to be institutionally legible? Carolyn, were these kinds of questions explored in assessing Josie’s application?

Auger: Surveillance is contrary to the academic goal of producing critically reflexive work. The surveillance of Indigenous people has a distinctive history in Canada. Historically, the ancestors experienced broken Treaty promises, and their parallel pathways disrespected, such as how reserves were carved out of the numbered treaty areas, and we were corralled onto reserves while our land was taken away. My research with Indigenous people on self-determination and sovereignty explored the political, historical, cultural, social, psychological, and environmental impacts of this history. The research was exploratory and did not directly involve “repatriation of Indigenous land and life,” instead it began discussion about the connections between the experience of rape on Indigenous women’s bodies and the rape of Mother Earth (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 36). The historical actions of Church and State in Canada resulted in intergenerational trauma: Why would this type of research be under surveillance if there has been a national apology and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission⁹ report? It took three

⁹ Sovereignty is separate from reconciliation. If we consider the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 46th Call to Action whereby the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaty of Niagara of 1764 would be used to re-affirm the Nation-to-Nation relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown, this would mean that Euro-Canadian sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples would be repudiated and Treaty relationships would be renewed based on principles of mutual recognition, respect, and shared responsibility (4-5). The TRC point is highlighted to recognize sovereignty and to remember that only sovereign nations make Treaties.

ethics submissions to the REB before approval was granted. The co-creators who signed up were on a healing journey prior to this research. Their healing path was the criteria for participant inclusion.

The REB has the authority to decide what and when research can proceed. The REB was in a situation where they did not fully understand cultural teachings and protocols nor Indigenous Research Methodology. Wisdom Seeking is a ceremony and follows cultural protocols with respect to relationality (Wilson, 2008). Honorarium was based on my experience as a senior administrator working with Elders and in ceremonies spanning thirty-five years. I chose this research topic because Indigenous people must express how historic and intergenerational trauma shapes their lives and how they are self-determining and sovereign. This was not an easy topic nor is this discussion of power imbalance. The work was stressful and required trust, courage, respect, understanding, and caring from the start. Plus, I had to be extremely accountable for every dollar and avoid every stereotype of financial mismanagement because I had a "cop in the head" (Boal & Epstein, 1990, p. 35). Augusto Boal built on the work of Paulo Freire in reference to internalized colonialism where, in this case, the "oppressors" scrutinizing labels of financial mismanagement is in my mind, hence the term. The protocol included an honorarium of two hundred fifty dollars. This was distributed fairly. So, to answer your question Nisha, yes, there is a tremendous burden in addition to the regular workload of course coordination and marking assignments while doing sensitive yet empowering research.

Here, I turn to the co-creators' words, who share a more complex articulation of honorarium than that which is recognized by the REB. Angela describes her view and experience of receiving an honorarium:

I took it [honorarium] as a gift. But I did not want to take it if it was from her personally because my concern was for her well-being and her family, but I also realized that . . . it was coming from a good place and it was equal for everybody. To be given that gift to be honoured for my time and my experience throughout the sessions that we had, I ended up giving it back to the community to help somebody else out . . . And I do not think it is too much. I do not think it is too little. It is hard to gauge what is too much and too little. All people can do is give what they can and that is a gift in itself. There is no measurement.

For Lorraine, sometimes when Western institutions are giving honorarium as per protocol this creates conflict:

It has always been a conflict, this honorarium. When I went to seek out knowledge from the Elders, even if I had nothing, I took whatever I could . . . you do it because it is out of the goodness of your heart, so, my advice is, if this honorarium is not coming as a gift from the heart, then don't bother giving it because you are wasting the Creator's time, you are wasting the Elder's time. And I rarely think that an Elder would take an honorarium because they feel obligated because of hard times at home . . . When tobacco or an honorarium is presented to an

Elder, they will tell you whether they can or cannot help you. They do not have to pretend to know everything. So, if there is hesitation as to, should they or shouldn't they take the honorarium, then it is probably more of a spiritual struggle because, you know, they want to help, they could help a little bit, or they could help a lot. And it is very rare that an Elder will say no, because sitting with each other conversing with each other is an education in itself.

In addition to explaining cultural protocol to obtaining a culturally relevant education from an Elder, Lorraine highlights trust and the significance of tobacco.

The honorarium that is discussed from organizations is basically to save themselves some money. So, they make this a conflictual thing, and it should not be. If you want information from an Elder, then do it appropriately. Do it first of all with tobacco and then always take a gift, you are not giving a gift to that Elder, you are giving a gift to the Creator and to the spirit world in hopes that what you give is enough so that the answers will come to the Elder.

Wisdom Seeking requires a minimum understanding of cultural protocols, but this was not a requirement of the REB. Using the example of healing addictions, Lorraine considered the resilience of Elders who have endured throughout colonialism and stated she would rather go to them for advice than a person with a PhD.

So, for me, I always give honorarium whether it is in the form of finance or money . . . I have seen . . . A long time ago, when you relied on the Elders [for healing] . . . people bring up their tipi to an Elder asking for help. And I have seen miracles happen. Today, what does a tipi cost? \$1500? And people complain that they have to give 100 or 200 dollars to Elders! Just because they do not get paid that much for the education they have.

Lorraine's example of offering a tipi clarifies the relevancy of cultural protocols and Wisdom Seeking. The tipi is also a metaphor of a skirt where education happens (Anderson, 2000). When a tipi leans too far in one direction it is off balance. Reciprocity, respect, and responsibility are foundational principles when conducting Indigenous research (Weber-Pillwax, 2001) and maintaining balance. As we question protocol and gift giving, the tipi is off balance. Sharon identifies her discomfort with the honorarium, she responded:

I agreed with it [honorarium], but I was not comfortable with it at the same time. And the reason was because of the subject matter, and . . . ceremonial aspects of it, because when someone gives you tobacco to participate in something, and you take that tobacco, and you say you are going to participate, you participate. And traditionally if you were going to participate, then you get yourself there, with whatever means you must get yourself there, but I understand why it would be a part of the research because the financial situation for the individuals that were participating were not all equal.

Sharon highlights the internal conflict she felt between her cultural teachings and its application in this research. She recognized her own responsibility to Josie and the project upon acceptance of the tobacco offering, and after having read and signed the informed consent that outlined the honorarium which was approved by the review board. Sharon said that the money enabled the women to attend the meetings by travelling from one community to the other.

At that point in our conversation, Nisha pressed further and raised a question to Carolyn: "I am wondering Carolyn . . . when the REB was talking about honorarium, were similar kinds of conversations happening, or did they look quite different?" In response, Carolyn highlights the general focus of REB questions on incentives: "It typically comes down to . . . how much money is being offered and asking is this creating undue influence? . . . the Board does not want a researcher to offer 'a lot' of money... [because there is belief that participants will consent] only because they need that money." Carolyn further explained: "The issue of undue influence is central which is sometimes problematic as it leaves . . . privileged persons sitting on a Board determining amounts they believe introduce undue influence, [thereby] taking away the agency of those deemed to be in 'need.'" Conducting Indigenous Research within a Western setting often leaves Indigenous cultural protocols, such as gifting, to be debated among privileged people sitting on REBs. Sharon explained her reason for taking part and clarified her reason for participating: "For me, it was not about the honorarium. It was about sharing what I was asked to share. The honorarium was like a gift . . . because for me, it was the purpose of her [Auger's] research that brought me there."

After reflecting on these issues, Nisha asked Sharon if there were any issues she wanted to discuss. Sharon responded: "Yes, why is the topic and subject of ethics and the purpose of honorarium important?"

Greene: Josie, when you spoke of nehiyaw cultural protocols as they relate to honorarium, I realized I know very little about these. This reflection makes me wonder how much REB members—specifically non-Indigenous members—understand about diverse Indigenous cultures and practices, and further, how this lack of understanding impacts ethical review of Indigenous research. Returning to Sharon's question, a discussion of honorarium is important because it highlights, as Lorraine alludes to, the "conflict" that arises in determining "appropriate" honorariums (financial value balanced between undue influence and voluntary participation in research). These central REB concerns may create conflict with nehiyaw cultural protocols when honourarium is narrowly understood. For example, at the beginning of this process, my view of honourarium held that ethical research must provide sufficient compensation for participants' time and knowledge. Yet, I have learned my understanding—limited by colonial influence—prevented me from seeing honorarium beyond fair exchange between researchers and participants at *one point in time*. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the work of REBs typically reflects the individualistic nature of Western research practices which typically do not account for the "Collective" (Kovach, 2005, p. 30), leaving the collective and spiritual significance of honourariums

unacknowledged. Lorraine's critical point drew my attention to something deeper that is exemplified by the conflict surrounding REB determinations of the "appropriate" value of honourarium. Josie, Lorraine, Angela, and Sharon taught me *honourarium transcends a single event or point in time*. It is something larger, an intrinsic part of personal and collective relationships, grounded in reciprocity and accountability to one another. In this context, REBs must begin to understand honourarium as ethically imperative.

Auger: The top-down approach of decision making is not in alignment with what Indigenous people have been saying for decades. By giving and sharing these teachings, the aspect of protocol is missing. If we were to think back to the days when people rode horses, imagine that the REB was sitting on a horse while examining this situation, the right thing to do after learning these teachings would be to give that horse to the people teaching them. It might hurt a little to give something so valuable, but it is respectful protocol. After having gone through the research ethics portal three times, the proposal and budget were approved, and the research followed an ethical process. At the time, I thought I was being treated the same as other researchers. What is the review board's approach now to Indigenous researchers?

Greene: While the work conducted by REBs is well intended—as is the 2018 Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS-2) guiding their decisions¹⁰—Josie's experience is common for researchers doing similar work. As research design moves away from traditional, experimental, and quantitative forms, the more complex, and burdensome, the ethics review process typically becomes. The TCPS-2 is meant to reduce harms and provide greater power to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples in deciding what research they need and prevent the types of research Lorraine described. Obviously, preventing such unethical work is important. Yet, this Policy seems to have had the unintended consequence of creating heavier workloads for researchers and resulted in increased policing of Indigenous focussed research by institutions often dominated by settler researchers. Indeed, scholars have noted that qualitative researchers are most prone to having their research designs questioned by REBs (Ells, 2011), and while the Wisdom Seeking work of Josie is different from Western qualitative methodologies, the nature of both challenges traditional approaches.

The Western Door and the Teaching of Caring

How does colonial power circulate through REB's designation of risk?

Greene: Arguably, REBs operate as colonial institutions, expanding their reach over time. This expansion—termed "Ethics Creep"—is "a dual process whereby the regulatory structure of the ethics bureaucracy is expanding outward, colonizing new groups, practices, and institutions, while at the same time intensifying the regulation of practices deemed to fall within its official ambit (Haggerty, 2004, p.

¹⁰ In Canada, REBs are guided by and follow the 2018 Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research on Humans (TCPS-2). Adherence to this policy is required of all institutions in order to hold external funding from the Tri-Council agencies. It is through this policy that REBs assess potential harms and benefits of proposed research.

394). This expansion is, in part, propelled by REBs' power in assessing research risks. National policy instructs us that risk levels are a "function of the magnitude or seriousness of the harm, and the probability that it [harm] will occur, whether to participants or to third parties (Tri-Council Policy Statement 2, 2018, p. 21). Further, "A proper ethical analysis of research should consider both the foreseeable risk and the available methods of eliminating or mitigating the risk" (Tri-Council Policy Statement 2, 2018, ch. 2). While few would disagree REBs should prevent harm, perceptions of what constitutes harm and how those harms might be prevented within the context of social science research varies, leaving space for multiple, at times conflicting, interpretations of risk constitution. For REB members "interpretive questions arise as to what denotes serious harm and the real likelihood of such harm ever materializing" (Haggerty, 2004, p. 399). In this way, assessments of potential risk in qualitative social science research are shaped by *who* reviews the application, and how they are interpreting risk. The inherent subjectivity associated with defining risk creates a space for researchers engaged with qualitative work that is difficult to navigate and requires more work of applicants (Haggerty, in press). As such, REBs' work must be interrogated: Do you think such risk prevention reinforces structural inequalities and racism through the replication of existing power imbalances?

Nath: Thinking of our conversations about honorariums and the question, "When does an honorarium become a risk?," let's pause on this word "risk." "Risk" is powerful because in the context of a neoliberal university, risk and liability are constantly being managed through an array of surveillance technologies. Even when applied universally, we know that technologies of surveillance are not neutral—they are inflected with dominance and have a disproportionate impact on marginalized folks. As part of the infrastructure of universities, REBs are embedded in this. Balfour and Martel (2018) have noted there is a good deal of scholarship exploring how REBs are "more aligned with institutional risk management concerns than as advocates for academic freedom" (p. 231). But, of course, that binary does not capture the complexities here given academic freedom has often been mobilized *against* queer, BIPOC scholars, and/or scholars doing transgressive or insurrectionary political work (Chatterjee & Sunaina, 2014).¹¹

In that sense, I think a binary between ethics creep and academic freedom is partial in accounting for these complexities. Put differently, is there a temporal presumption of "ethics creep" that there was a time when these kinds of assertions of power were *not* implicated? For me, what is interesting is *how* risk is deployed and the role REBs play in interpolating participants (or in this case co-creators) *and* researchers as "risky rather than at-risk subjects" (Balfour & Martel, 2018, p. 236). Exercising this kind of

¹¹ The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) recognizes this intimate tie between inequity and systemic discrimination and the scope of academic freedom in their policy statement on equity. See: <https://www.caut.ca/about-us/caut-policy/lists/caut-policy-statements/policy-statement-on-equity>

interpretative authority, REBs have the power to reframe—researchers, participants, methodologies, and even projects themselves (Balfour & Martel, 2018, p. 236).

Angela described not wanting to take an honorarium directly from Josie because her “concern was for [Josie’s] well-being and [Josie’s] family,” but that she also realized that “it was coming from a good place . . . and it was for everybody.” Angela describes honoraria as a gift honouring time and experience, and how the honoraria received was ultimately returned back to the community. Lorraine spoke of giving gifts to Elders and how in bringing tobacco, “you’re not giving a gift to that Elder, you’re giving a gift to the Creator and to the spirit world in hopes that what you give is enough so that the answers will come to the Elder. No book will ever give you the answer that you need.”

The REB’s approach in discussing the honorarium was not just different, but also not benign. What forms of settler violence, oftentimes enacted through REBs themselves, are *not* considered to be a source of risk or harm?

We must also explore REB presumptions around consent, confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity. The question about colonial power circulating through REBs is important, as presumptions around consent and confidentiality may pathologize some subjects as risky and reinscribe damage-centred research. For example, Tuck (2009) has described how, “Damage-centered researchers may operate, even benevolently, within a theory of change in which harm must be recorded or proven in order to convince an outside adjudicator that reparations are deserved” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 227). Further, hooks (1990) argued that marginalized and oppressed people are only invited to “speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain” (p. 52).

This leads me to reflect on Josie’s thoughts on how important it was in her research to come from a positive and empowering place, and how this orientation emerged from a “shared sacred place.” Josie’s question of inquiry was not a study of vulnerability, rather it was: As Indigenous Peoples, can we have healthy sovereignty if we do not really self-determine our sexuality? Angela’s comments are also integral in terms of whether and how REBs can recognize when participants/co-creators are going to be speaking from a space of strength and experience. Angela challenges a static understanding of risk, by choosing to disclose her name *after* being empowered by other women in the group: “I also am kind of curious . . . if it’s too strict, or if it’s not fluid enough . . . I’m just kind of curious . . . at the same time, is it part of the problem at some points, you know, or upholding the patriarchy? Reinforcing . . . these systems that we work in. You know . . . they’re designed to uphold people in power to uphold that hierarchy, to uphold the patriarchy.”

Josie describes her research as being “almost like treaty making . . . we have to go back to the spirit and intent of what the research was intended to do. And it was to illuminate . . . to talk about having . . . self-determination over our bodies to be sovereign people.” In this context, the research does not begin and end in harm. How do REBs recognize this? Would the conversations amongst REB members look

different if the REBs began their assessment in that context? Does it matter if Josie is centring self-determination in her research, but the REB is centring harm?

Here, we might note that BIPOC researchers are often "at-risk" subjects vis-à-vis harm perpetuated *by* REBs. This raises fundamental questions about the accountability frameworks guiding REBs.

Greene: In general, REBs are individualistically focused on direct risks to participants. However, REBs reach has expanded, risk has increasingly become a matter of interpretation (Haggerty, 2004, in press) and potentially found in the most innocuous research situations. So, unless broader contextual factors are perceived as potentially causing harm to participants, this is unlikely to be the focus of a review. The starting points of an REB versus Josie's are fundamentally different. Josie describes coming from a deeply ethical place, with work broadly focused on self-determination and sovereignty, while REBs central function is policing researcher ethicality. In this way, Josie's experience of coming from a place of positivity and good intent, and feeling these intentions were displaced by REB scrutiny of the risk her research might pose to participants reflects these different starting points. There is troubling irony in requiring that Indigenous researchers, engaged in decolonial work, secure approval from a colonial institution.

Auger: Regrettably, I agree. To clarify the research question was: As Indigenous Peoples, can we have healthy sovereignty if we have not self-determined our sexual experiences? Not having the power to make our decisions affects us in multiple ways. Colonial power circulates when colonizers make decisions over the lives of sovereign peoples; colonialism is perpetuated through the Indian Act and that mentality is ongoing within institutions and Indigenous communities.

In the Western direction we apply caring to colonial power for iyiniwak researchers engaged in Wisdom Seeking. It is not enough to cast blame; if I point one finger, three point back at me. I have known Elders who showed through their examples multiple approaches of self-determination and that includes being sovereign; they work around and within systems. So, I consider multiple approaches to empowering iyiniwak in their Wisdom Seeking.

The REBs considered this research potentially victimizing nehiyaw iskwewak which was never the intent. REBs must be assured of minimal risk and prevent harm, but only after extensive explanation. I provided explanations across three submissions. I informed them of my reasons, and I asked no more of them than I would respond to. It was then, the REB granted approval for Wisdom Seeking. As a nehiyaw iskwew researcher engaging in decolonizing work, I answered a litany of questions. I faced myself. I faced unknown REB members who remained anonymous apart from Carolyn. My research proposal was on trial. I suffered bouts of insomnia starting and completing this research; these were the experiences I faced. Wisdom Seeking should be a spiritual, healing research movement that educates people about

why this type of research is important in the era of truth and reconciliation and Nation-to-Nation Treaty talks.

When there is harmony, a positive intention has a positive outcome. A positive intention must not have a negative consequence. Achieving harmony is complicated in the colonized world. One of the findings from my research was the avoidance and unwillingness of elected leadership to respond to my request to present the proposed research. When a colonial system of elected Indian Act leaders denies or refuses to listen to their own people, it replicates Western power structures and upholds patriarchy. To complete this research, I applied my Treaty right to livelihood, and my work was spiritually blessed in ceremony. This is sovereignty in action. It was not intended to be disrespectful to the elected leadership. For this reason, *iyiniwak* laws and legal traditions must inform educational research relationships and action must be taken in accordance with their treaties, worldviews, languages, traditions, ceremonies, customs, heritage, and knowledges (Battiste, 2000).

While “the last residential school in Canada closed its doors in 1996” (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012, p. 111), individuals, families, communities, and Nations are still unravelling the well-documented intergenerational traumas caused by Canada’s ‘education’ system. My research offered a caring space for Indigenous women to use their language and culture to discuss how rape and unconsented sex impacted self-determination and sovereignty, and resulted in the development of an Indigenous Trauma Informed Model. This paper on ethics empowers me to support Treaty talks using Indigenous laws to guide the process (Regan, 2018).

The REB created layers of questions and procedures to add to the scrutiny of future research applications by me and other Indigenous researchers at the university. My research revealed disharmony when following cultural protocols that do not align with Western values. Decolonizing research using Wisdom Seeking and honorarium as part of the cultural protocols face scrutiny. REBs must decolonize themselves. Indigenous people have the right to effective participation in decision making in order to sustain their freedom of spiritual practices and sacred worldview (Battiste, 2000). A reciprocal educational relationship based on treaty making principles and practices includes kinship, responsibility, reciprocity, and gift-exchange (Regan, 2018).

The Elders are who we go to for advice; this is the way it has and always will be. The Indian Act leadership may not have a research ethics body to review proposals. Their roles and responsibilities are extensive, and they may not have the time or desire to listen to researchers explain their research or read their proposals, so an idea based on parallel pathways that respects the researcher, leadership, and *iyiniwak* laws and legal traditions is offered. We must demonstrate caring to all.

The Northern Door and the Teaching of Strength and Determination

How does the relational accountability within IRM disrupt Western ethical frames?

Auger: We face the Northern direction with strength/determination to discuss relational accountability of Wisdom Seeking. There are many educated people within Indigenous communities, and we are healing and trustworthy.

Relational accountability of researchers to their research builds trust in multiple ways, between researcher and co-creators, amongst co-creators, and between researcher and REB. From a nehiyaw worldview, relational accountability is about our relationships to ourselves, to one another, to the lakes, rivers, oceans, earth, and cosmos. Within our worldview, we relate holistically using our mind, body, spirit, and emotions to these beings. We are accountable not only to human beings but to all living beings because we are guided by spirit. We are accountable to all living beings out of respect, and we carry our responsibilities carefully, because we know the universe is reciprocal; we share an understanding of Natural Law with humility.

Ceremonies help connect people to their ancestral identity. Indigenous teachings specific to each tribe exist, and are culturally inherent, guiding one to be ethical and lawful. Traditional tribal laws exist. Positive thinking and doing are required to overcome the damaging effects of colonialism. As Lorraine shared, helping one another heal is necessary so people feel good. It is by practicing relational accountability with others that trust, safety, and acceptance, allow people whose boundaries have been sexually invaded to have cultural safety. In this way, Wisdom Seeking is culturally appropriate for nehiyawak engaged in research with their people. Nisha and Carolyn, from a place of strength and determination, what Western ethical frames stand in the way of relational accountability?

Nath: In the time that we have been in conversation with each other, I've agreed to sit on a student research ethics committee. In the orientation, I received the messaging that the ethics process was to support research participants, students' learning, and my own learning as a committee member. As a member, my responsibility was not to put up barriers, but to support and cultivate good, ethical work. While I appreciated this framing, I am mindful of what we have talked about, specifically, that good intentions have historically been carriers of deep forms of oppression. For example, Rose (1996) has described deep colonizing as a process in which "conquest [is] embedded within institutions and practices which are aimed towards reversing the effects of colonization" (cited in Veracini 2011, p. 179). In what ways does colonial harm continue, even amidst the good intentions of individual REB members?

How you have framed this question as being about Western ethical frames and relational accountability is critical because these are ways of seeing and being that do *not* simply reside in the individual.

You have already named one of those Western frames in your response—objectivity and distance between researcher and participants. I have learned a good deal from how you, Angela, Lorraine, and Sharon talked about your relationship as one of co-creation. In describing settler researchers who approached her grandmother to do research, Angela recounted: “And they asked her . . . what’s the best way we could . . . learn? And she said, ‘Well, you come here, you learn here. You learn from the land, you learn from us, you learn with us.’” From the outset, Angela offers a framing of research that completely disrupts a whole range of normative commitments. She offers an understanding of the researcher as not just someone who creates and disseminates knowledge, but someone who learns. She offers an understanding of the process where expertise and knowledge travel on a horizontal plane—where “you learn from us and you learn with us.” And she shares an understanding of the process as one that is active and grounded in space— “you learn off the land.” In this one sentence, through her grandmother’s words, Angela disrupts extractive research and invokes relationality from the outset.

I also wonder what to make of the correspondence between relationality and relationships. Does the former reference a way of being in relationship and the latter focus more on individuals vis-a-vis each other?

Moreton-Robinson (2017) identifies relationality as “the core presupposition of the Indigenous social research paradigm” (p. 71), describing it as socially interconnected, and as premised on culturally embodied knowledges connected to land. Of importance here, she writes that relationality informs an Indigenous “epistemological and ethical premise that social research should begin with an awareness of our proper relationships with the world we inhabit, and is conducted with respect, responsibility, generosity, obligation, and reciprocity” (Moreton-Robinson, 2017, p. 71). Donald (2012) offers an understanding of ethical relationality, as “an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (p. 535). The ethical imperative here is that we “acknowledge and honour” how our “histories and experiences position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people in the world are tied together” (Donald, 2012, p. 536). Wilson (2008) further explains relational accountability is grounded in respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (p. 77). Outside of this framing by Indigenous scholars, Dhamoon (2019) offers a critical intervention that speaks to power; she describes relational Othering as “the interactive processes of re/making, re/organizing, and managing subjugating formations of difference which operate not only in contexts of dominance but in relation to one another as well” (p. 2).

I bring together these commentaries on relationality as an invitation for *us* to consider why *relational* accountability is ethically distinctive and why this should matter to REBs. The starting point for the REB seems to be one in which *relationships* are framed as sites of potential conflict of interest, risk, and bias. As you noted, Carolyn, naming co-creators in REB review invoked some difficulty of understanding amongst members because the de facto starting point was to presume an “inherent sort of power imbalance . . . between researchers and participants . . . to try and ensure participants are not adversely

impacted by researchers." To my mind, this is not an unimportant consideration, but it does raise questions about whether it matters if REBs shifted to consider relationality more broadly, but relational accountability more specifically.

Lorraine spoke about research as ceremony, stating that in:

using the prayer, we became equal and that's the biggest thing about Indigenous people is equality . . . we were always taught that nobody is better than you and you're no better than anyone. So, when we look at people, and going back to what I said about education, it does not matter how much education you have. I am not going to put anybody on a pedestal because spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically, they are no better than me and I am not better than them. So, when Josie opened up the research using the circle perspective it put us all on an equal playing field

Moreover, Lorraine cemented relationality and accountability together, noting co-creators had accountability to each other rooted in care. Angela reinforced this when she spoke about personal accountability and accountability to family and community. Here she described relationality and kinship as working together. I think there is a learning here for non-Indigenous scholars and researchers for broadening ethical frames to consider these other dimensions of accountability.

Given all of this, what becomes the intervention or the relational accountabilities of REB members? Returning to the assertion that "relationality is an inextricable part of [Indigenous] sovereign knowledges" (Moreton-Robinson, 2017, p. 71), is it helpful to think through REBs' accountabilities as part of a treaty relationship?

Greene: Currently, Chapter 9 of the TCPS-2 provides the foundation for the ethical review of research with Indigenous Persons in Canada. However, we must remain vigilant to ensure this framework does not unintentionally result in expansion of colonial power over Indigenous researchers working within Indigenous communities. With this preface, I do see space to begin considering how REBs do their work and the role of relational accountabilities.

Typically, REBs regard researcher-participant relationships with some level of distrust, in part, because of Western emphasis on objectivity. Here I do not mean *total* objectivity—few things, if any, are purely objective. In our work, Josie voiced concern about the value Western ethics places on objectivity and how this results in a devaluation of Wisdom Seeking and dealignment with relational accountability. As current practices go, I tend to agree with Josie's assessment. However, practices can change and there is room for relational accountability in REB work. I would suggest emphasis on some level of objectivity is both important for research and consistent with Wisdom Seeking. For example, when Josie conducted her research, she did not go into interviews having pre-determined what would be shared. Josie provided

opportunities for women to speak and share their experiences without judgement, letting them shape the trajectory of the research findings. This is the objectivity I refer to and believe is critical for ethical research. Josie demonstrates ethical research can be both “objective” and relationally accountable. The REBs’ challenge is in recognizing: 1) researcher-participant relationships do not preclude ethical (and “objective”) work; and 2) positive, trusting relationships are intrinsically connected to conducting ethical research.

The importance of research-participant relationships is reflected in the profoundly ethical, relational space created by Josie in her work and is captured by Lorraine: “she [Josie] was able to hear us, hear out our concerns. And she deeply and genuinely listened to our concerns and that’s where the relationship came in. She took the time to do that.” Lorraine highlights the importance of trusting research relationships. Yet, REBs have not historically considered the importance of positive, trusting relationships nor relationality in shaping ethical research. For practice to change, REBs must *themselves* be relationally accountable.

Discussion of Indigenous Laws and Legal Traditions

Auger: Historically, Indigenous researchers “bear the weight” of research done badly (Kenny, 2000, p. 141). Despite the imposition of colonial power on Indigenous Peoples, nehiyaw iskwewak are not passive research vessels even though colonial power imposes its will on them. As Angela reminded us, colonial power never conquers: the power of healing is stronger and moves us toward self-determination and sovereignty. Resurgence and reconciliation research on the Invasion of Sexual Boundaries research identified the need for balance in society. Resurgence and transformative forms of reconciliation are theoretical and practical processes of “intergenerational trial and error apprenticeship,” (Borrows & Tully, 2018, p. 9). To find balance requires understanding the Treaty relationship and relational accountability between partners.

Resurgence is to regenerate and renew: “The Treaty relationship needs to be recollected, re-proclaimed, and renewed” (Borrows & Tully, 2018, p. 15; Nichols, 2017). Within Western systems, “Indigenous philosophies of relationality are increasingly being sought to inform strategies of resurgence and reconciliation with one another and the environment,” (Borrows & Tully, 2018, p. 17). Yet, Canadian research ethics policy and REB practices governing Indigenous research are not based on a treaty partnership.

Taken as a whole, tri-council ethics policy situates ethical review and decision making within a Western colonial frame that, despite good intentions and the inclusion of chapter 9, may interfere with decolonizing research, and, importantly, the decolonization of research itself. In this way, Canadian ethics policy, specifically as it relates to the social sciences, must address the specific policy mechanisms (e.g., determinations of risk) that continue to reinforce and perpetuate colonial power over Indigenous lives and research. While this research focussed on two REB concerns (risk and honourarium), there are other areas of policy which must be considered. For example, while we acknowledge the importance of

informed consent, we also recognize that this process is critical to research; however, one cannot ignore the relationship between requiring signed consent and colonial power as it can “evoke colonial histories . . . or may be a culturally inappropriate way of documenting and constructing a relationship” (Wynn and Israel, 2018, p. 800).

In comparison the Treaty of Waitangi and Research Ethics in Aotearoa, identifies “respect for . . . indigenous rights, control over research processes and reciprocity within research relationships to ensure that equitable benefits are realised within indigenous groups,” (Hudson & Russell, 2009, p. 61). Māori Treaty rights were breached. The Treaty of Waitangi is recognised as an integral part of New Zealand’s ethical research framework in response to Māori Treaty rights. Like the Māori, Indigenous people in Canada must renew the Treaty relationship to provide a current interpretation “to reflect the ethical understandings of both parties” in research (Hudson & Russell, 2009, p. 62). Research, and the policies that guide it, can address inequalities, which is why Māori express the need for REB representation to review research proposals according to principles embedded in their Treaty. Yet, ethics goes beyond REB inclusion because justice and social and cultural responsibility needs remain unmet; the roles of both Treaty partners must be understood (European and Māori) (Hudson & Russell, 2009). Since research funding can benefit communities, it was suggested the principle of “beneficence” be included (Hudson & Russell, 2020, p. 62). A treaty-based framework for engaging with Māori in research identifies their “sovereignty” respectfully (Hudson & Russell, 2009, p. 66). The Māori position to ethical research is based on signing the Treaty of Waitangi.

However, treaties have not been signed by all Indigenous Peoples. Research involving Australian and Torres Strait Islanders is guided by a national framework informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP] which means they “have the right to be fully engaged in any processes, projects, and activities that may impact them” (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, 2020, p. 2). Developing a new code positions Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders from research subjects to research partners (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, 2020, p. 4). The UNDRIP articulates the right to self-determination (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, 2020, p. 12). Researchers are required to engage not consult. Research must protect and recognize individual, group, and collective rights “where the current law falls short” (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, 2020, p. 12). UNDRIP (2007) promotes equality for collective and individual human rights and recognizes, promotes, and protects the rights and freedoms of Indigenous Peoples worldwide.

The UNDRIP (2007) recognizes Treaty affirmed rights as “in some situations, matters of international concern,” and that Treaty is the basis for “strengthened partnership” (p. 14). The Treaty relationship in Canada involves two treaty partners, where “conversations” typically occur in courts as a result of government(s)’ failures to abide by Treaty commitments. Research ethics in Canada currently follow national guidelines and are not reflective of a Treaty relationship. The Natural Law teachings, and four

directions teachings of kindness, honesty, caring, and strength/determination, are integral to Treaty teachings. The iyiniw laws and legal traditions were integrated in this paper to show how they help frame negotiation and implementation of renewed ethical discussions. These iyiniw laws must continue to shape legal traditions.

While it can be discomfoting to emerge from our discussion without a singular set of policy recommendations, this is in part a reflection of the ethos of decolonization animating our discussion, and by implication the conception of relational accountability embedded therein. The significance of what REBs can address is different from how they should be addressed. Mindful of both of these dimensions, we centre the idea of parallel pathways as a grounds for kikapiskwewin or future conversation. This minimally includes a sharing circle and ceremony; they work together. iyiniwak have laws and legal traditions requiring cultural protocols be followed with Elders for Wisdom Seeking. Recognizing Traditional Knowledge informs wise practices and creates cultural safety.¹² A sharing circle would allow the researcher to explain what they are Wisdom Seeking to co-creators; and the researcher could use national guidelines to raise their own questions and ask for guidance from the Elders. The Elders would inform their decisions after a sweatlodge or other ceremony based on iyiniwak laws and legal traditions. Communication with the university via letter would ensure wise practices were followed. Power should not rest with patriarchal forms of governance on Indigenous protocols and ceremonies as per the TCPS-2. Co-existence is necessary, and this would give freedom of choice to Indigenous Peoples to take this parallel path.

We also acknowledge that invoking conceptions of treaty and parallel pathways raises many critical questions. What are the precise implications for REBs? What would parallel pathways or treaties have to delineate for REBs to be effective and accountable in supporting ethical research with Indigenous communities and nations? What would Indigenous representation look like on an institutional REB? Or, would there be Indigenous-specific REBs, and, if so, how would members be accountable to the territories on which they reside if they are Indigenous to other parts of Turtle Island? What forms of knowledge do REB members need to enact relational accountabilities, and how might those processes of learning and exchange be non-extractive? All of these questions, and more, constitute a generative space for kikapiskwewin, particularly given that treaty-based frameworks for parallel pathways represent “diplomatic processes for negotiating relations of non-violent and generative co-existence between living beings in shared geographies” (Starblanket, 2019, p. 444). Critically, these relationship agreements are “living” because they are relational, and hence subject to ongoing updating and renegotiation.

In this, while the distinctive focus on parallel pathways in the context of post-secondary REBs is meant to centre Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty, settler and non-Indigenous accountabilities, and relational accountabilities, our scope is necessary delimited in that future conversations are needed.

¹² Cultural safety in this context refers to REB policy practices that meet the needs and expectations of culturally diverse, Indigenous scholars.

Moreover, this paper is limited as it represents one experience at one location and time, and is therefore not representative of all Canadian REB operations. However, our work does suggest current tri-council policy guiding REBs in Canada leaves room for colonial power over how research is conducted, and shows the need to release this colonial power and control. We argue that iyiniwak should not be interfered with by a Western body when Wisdom Seeking. Indeed, our research has shown that Wisdom Seeking is decolonizing.

Conclusion

When we first met in 2020, our hearts warmed to the idea of working together. It took one year to complete this work. The timing was unintentional, but by allowing the cycle of four seasons to change, we reflected deeply on how decolonization can take place. It happened that way. It took this long to write about ethics concerning the Invasion of Sexual Boundaries, anonymity, and whether co-creators were unduly influenced into participating. It took this long to acknowledge the powerful healing effect stemming from the research and writing about colonial power structures standing in the way of needed institutional changes.

Parallel pathways respect tribal protocols espoused by the Elders and iyiniwak scholars. Constructive agreements must be culturally safe for the Indigenous researcher and Indigenous people involved in research so that they may be free to practice cultural protocols and ceremony in research. Indigenous women who have been on a cultural path and who have used their culture to support their recovery from trauma feel supported in ceremony. Tri-Council guidelines pertaining to researchers conducting research with First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Peoples *were intended for researchers researching Indigenous Peoples*. This policy is supposed to be "offered in a spirit of respect. It is not intended to override or replace ethical guidance offered by Indigenous Peoples themselves" (Tri-Council Policy Statement 2, 2018, ch. 9). As such, a sharing circle hosted by the Indigenous researcher with co-creators and Elders would enable a discussion and understanding of Wisdom Seeking followed by a ceremony. Creating a collaborative network empowers educated iyiniwak to listen to changes wanted by their co-creators through Wisdom Seeking, thereby undoing the damage of patriarchal colonial systems.

Whether such fundamental changes to Western REBs will occur is yet unknown. However, the insights offered here suggest a first step toward decolonizing university REB review processes is recognizing they cannot be entirely separated from the colonial system enveloping them, but this acknowledgement may serve as the starting point for changing harmful practices. REBs must bring together greater knowledge and work alongside First Nations, Metis, and Inuit persons to ensure REB processes do not result in harm, nor undermine or supplant the ethical guidance offered by Indigenous communities themselves. One way to achieve this may be requiring Indigenous people who are learning about their indigeneity and non-Indigenous REB members to complete courses focussed on Indigenous cultures, practices, and research methodologies *as Indigenization*. As we have noted in this paper, the university is a settler-

colonial institution, meaning that decolonizing work is fraught. Even the principles of OCAP—Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession of research data within Indigenous communities (see First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2021)—which gesture towards self-determination and sovereignty, give elected band leaders authority over any research in their Nations. This, in turn, reinforces colonial administrative structures set out by the *Indian Act*. It is not a completely ideal situation because it can marginalize and prevent researchers from wisdom seeking. Decolonial change *within* the parameters of settler colonial and Western frameworks cannot be the pathway forward. While relational accountabilities can bring us together for deep meaningful discussions about where we have been with research to determine where we are going, that coming-together may signal separation for Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty with respect for parallel pathways.

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